# Chapter 2
# Intercultural Communicative Styles in Qatar: Greek and Qataris

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## 2.1 Introduction

I have been working in the Department of English Literature and Linguistics at Qatar University since September 2010. It was the first time that I ever stepped foot in any of the Gulf countries and it felt immediately like home, contrary to the UK where I spent five years having a rewarding academic life and fascinating social life but never felt at home. At first, I thought that the openness I was treated with by all Arabs, both inside and outside the university, was part of the traditional and widely known Arabic hospitality, and that every Westerner is treated like this. However, as I started learning Arabic and interacting with diverse speakers of Arabic dialects, I came to realize that between my native language and culture, Greek, and Arabic dialects and cultures there are many similarities, not only in terms of food and traditions but also and perhaps most importantly in terms of shared values, a factor that contributes to this communicative intimacy and easiness.

In exactly the same way that some of the most basic cultural values associated with the Arab world include collectivism, hospitality, honor, and modesty (Feghali 1997; Ayish 1998; Marsh 2010), Greeks also embrace these principles, albeit from a different perspective and through different forms. For example, modesty in the Greek world is realized through widows and nuns often wearing head scarves, as opposed to Gulf countries where many Muslim women veil their heads in public (though of course some women choose other semiotic means, e.g., through the wearing of elegant but not provocative clothing). Collectivism is common in the Greek world as well, especially nowadays with the financial crisis that the country is going through; a lot of young people return to their parents' home and they either support them financially or they are being supported by their parents. The family has always been seen as a core notion and a value in the context of Greek society, as in the Arab world, in the sense that one's immediate family members are seen

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as the omnipresent saviors of the person; they are expected to support each other economically, emotionally, psychologically, socially, and professionally. Along the same lines, the notion of community has been significantly enhanced during the past two years. This is evident in the number of socially oriented initiatives by various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the Greek Orthodox Church, which aim at providing poor and homeless people with food.

Hospitality has been always dealt with as a core principle in the Greek society as well; from the Homeric era onward, the guest has been always treated as a sacred person who needs to enjoy one's home as if it were their own. The offering of drinks, coffee, food, and especially gifts (cf. http://greece.greekreporter.com/2012/12/20/a-greek-gift-guide-ideas-for-christmas/) is something which is still shared between the Greek and the Arab world; however, the basic difference is that in Greece gifts tend to be more modest than the ones offered in the Arab world not only nowadays but also throughout history, because one of the dominant ideas in the Greek-speaking world is that simplicity is always better than luxury. It goes without saying, of course, that luxurious gifts can also be offered to guests and hosts, but not as frequently as in the Arab world.

Finally, in terms of honor (Campbell 1964), the idea is pretty much the same in Greece as in all over the Arab world; people's behavior needs to be tailored according to the preservation of one's personal and their family's honor.

After having spent almost three years interacting with Arabs, I have come to realize that many of them share these values, although in different degrees depending on their religion, their families, their tribes, the country they are from, and their life experiences. In addition, through my learning Arabic I keep discovering many similarities in terms of the two languages as well: not only do we share much vocabulary in terms of food (e.g., fasulia [beans], which are *fa'solia* in Greek, and *faraoula* [strawberry], which is '*fraoula* in Greek) or clothing (e.g., *qamis* [shirt], which is *pu'kamiso* in Greek) but also in terms of wishes (e.g., birthday wishes in Arabic are expressed through "*kel 'am wnty/y bikhair*," which is the equivalent of "*na ta ekato'stisis*," meaning may you live 100 years). Discovering more and more of these similarities inspired me to investigate the relationship between Arabic and Greek communicative style and to delve into how these two styles express one's identity and culture. Given the diversity of the Arab world and the space restrictions, I focus my discussion only on a comparison between Qatar and Greece. After presenting the theoretical notions that I use in my analysis, I give a brief description of the methodology and data followed by the discussion of the results of my study. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that my findings can contribute toward the creation of a nascent research strand on the similarities and differences between Arabic and Greek, which can be further used for educational and business purposes.

## 2.2  Literature Review

By communicative style, I tentatively mean the choice of linguistic, paralinguistic, and discursive resources through which we manage our everyday life, translating into negotiating our and others' social identities, achieving our goals, sharing our ideas, problems, and thoughts, and eventually constructing social meaning. Social meaning is a pertinent notion in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, two theoretical traditions in which this study is embedded, and it has to do with the ways we combine "people, practices, and linguistic varieties, in order to make sense of the society" (Coupland 2007, p. 104). Making sense of the society means that we are able to communicate with each other and, hence, to survive. In this process, language holds a dominant position, namely the specific code we are using, be it a dialect, a sociolect, a switching between different languages or dialects (code switching), the shifting in the level of formality in our speech (speech style) or even the sporadic uses of specific accents or words.

The dimensions of communicative style that can be seen as pertinent are the resources available to speakers, which can be (socio)linguistic, including specific features (lexico-grammatical and phonological systems) or whole dialects and speech varieties imbued with potential for social meaning, and communicative competence, namely linguistic awareness of social rules and norms for speaking (Coupland 2007). Speakers engage with social norms and practices based on their knowledge of what variables in their language index, a type of knowledge they have accumulated during their socialization process (Kiesling 2009) and their general exposure to social experience. This linguistic awareness manifests itself not only in speakers' ability to perceive the differences in what these linguistic features index (e.g., the greeting *assalamu alaykum* in the Gulf indexes formality, while *hala wallah* indexes informality and intimacy) but also through people's ability to comment on these differences metalinguistically (cf. perceptual dialectology studies (e.g., chapters in Preston 1999) that have tried to delve into both resources and competence).

This awareness could be seen as a type of reflexivity (Johnstone 2006), which allows speakers to design their own stylistic operations and attend creatively to the form of their linguistic products (Coupland 2007). It further suggests that awareness of the functional and indexical implications of people's utterances is a core quality of all communicative interaction, and as such, it can also lead people to question, resist, or even challenge social norms. This can be realized through the performativity of speaking or performance, which forms the third dimension of the resources in Coupland's framework. Performance, namely the "enacting of agency, its coming into being" (Duranti 2004, p. 454), can allow people to engage themselves in what Judith Butler has called "performativity of speaking" (1997), whereby they can challenge or even subvert the dominant ideologies and established social values. In this sense, people's styles can break with the social contexts in which they occur (Coupland 2007). Put differently, if performance is incorporated into a framework of how to deal with style, it can allow for realizing (and thus, capturing in the analysis) the possibility of speakers' undermining "the established, conventional meanings indexed by specific linguistic variables" (Coupland 2007, p. 101)

As a unifying thread, performance is the speech event where things are brought together and are synthesized, in order to produce the final product, namely the performed speech act, or to put it simply, the (contextualized) utterance. Through these three aspects of communicative style, namely sociolinguistic resources, communicative competence, and performativity of speaking, I argue that we not only manage our everyday life but also we at times consciously and subconsciously communicate our culture. In a course on language and culture, for instance, the metapragmatic awareness of cultural differences, namely the ability we have to reflect on them, comes at the forefront of every discussion in the same way that a discussion on the similarities and differences between various cultures makes it relevant.

Regarding the definition of "culture," I am aligning with Shaules' notion of "deep culture." He treats it as "the unconscious meanings, values, norms and hidden assumptions that allow us to interpret our experiences as we interact with other people" (2007, pp. 11–12). I consider this definitionpertinent to my data, inasmuch as it allows us to understand who we are according to how we position ourselves vis-a-vis ourselves, our interlocutors, and the society itself, something which is the gist of communication as well.

With respect to Arab communicative styles, a number of studies have focused on business communication between Arabs and Westerners (e.g., Haase 2011; Marsh 2010). These studies, however, do not delve into the nitty-gritty of the linguistics of these styles. On the other hand, Feghali (1997) has identified four features associated with communicative style in Arabic: (1) repetition, (2) indirectness, (3) elaborateness, and (4) affectiveness. All of these four are illustrated through examples from my own data in the analysis found below. These features are found in the use of the Arabic language, but it has been claimed that they also tend to be transferred to the use of Arabs' use of the English language as well. Nonetheless, the author's discussion does not include any actual data analysis, through which one could see the nuanced meanings of the aforementioned stylistic features.

Contrary to the increasing scholarly interest in Arabic communication styles, in terms of Greek communicative styles in professional contexts the literature is rather limited. Deborah Tannen (1984) has analyzed Greek speech style with a special focus on involvement, but her studies on Greek speech style focus on informal and casual interactions among friends and family members rather than people in a professional context. More specifically, Tannen has claimed that Greek speech style is characterized by high involvement, in the sense that Greek speakers participate in conversations in an enthusiastic and very talkative way (1984). From a cultural studies perspective, Broome (1996) shows that Greek communication style is a mosaic of different strategies and emotions, which are characterized by the interlocutors' tensions between saving and losing face. This study was not conducted in a professional/business context.

Aiming at filling this gap in the literature on professional Greek communicative style and drawing on this literature from the two languages, I have decided to focus on the aforementioned stylistic aspects, namely sociolinguistic resources, communicative competence, and performativity of speaking, and see how, on the basis of my ethnographic study, the communicative styles of Arabs and Greeks are similar and different from each other.

My motivation for conducting this type of research is that after working in an Arab country for 3 years, I have come to realize that doing business with Arabs in general, and Qataris in particular, entails the establishment of a solid relationship, which requires good and efficient communication targeted toward the maintenance of this relationship, contrary to the western world, where my experience in the UK has shown me that it is actions, practices, and choices associated with work rather than interpersonal relationships that need to be foregrounded and addressed via communicative styles. Using Hofstede's (1980) cultural values theory, one could argue that the communication with Arabs seems to be framed in a high-context culture, that is, it is interpersonal relationships oriented, contrary to the western communication, which despite its undeniable differences among different countries and continents seems to be overall embedded within a low-context culture, namely it is more transaction or goal oriented.

In light of this take on communicative style and culture, the two research questions which my study seeks to explore are the following: (1) What are the basic communicative styles used by the Greek instructor and her Qatari students, and how are they similar and different from each other? and (2) how do they contribute toward the construction of their perceptions of their own cultures?

## 2.3 Methodology and Data

In order to answer the guiding research questions, linguistic ethnography was used. As a method, linguistic ethnography is seen as "a method of social research, [which] seeks to capture and understand the meanings and dynamics in particular cultural settings" (Rampton et al. 2004, p. 2). Of the connected characteristics identified as relevant to ethnography in this definition, the most important, in my view, and the one that underlines my analysis is the "regard for local rationalities in an interplay between 'strangeness' and 'familiarity,' namely ethnography's effort to flesh out the meanings that participants take for granted in their everyday practices and render them construable to the audiences to which the research reports are addressed" (Rampton et al. 2004, p. 2). The reason why I foreground this feature of linguistic ethnography is because this interplay between strangeness and familiarity alludes to my personal initial strangeness toward the Arabic language, its dialects and the cultures attached to them, and my familiarity with the other, namely the Greek one.

Such a distinction resembles the distinction between what I would call hardcore ethnography, namely the type of research we engage ourselves in when we are not familiar with the culture we are about to research, and self-reflective ethnography, which we exercise when we belong to the culture under scrutiny. In the exploration of the relationship between Arab and Greek communicative styles and cultures, it is important to combine these two types of ethnography, without prioritizing the one at the expense of the other, in order to arrive at these nuanced meanings and dynamics within and across the language and the cultures.

Overall, the methodology of this study includes ethnographic participant observation (Emerson et al. 2001) and ethnographic interviews (Bucholtz 2007) . The combination of these two methods aims at "informing the analysis of language produced independently of the researcher's immediate involvement" (Tusting and Maybin 2007, p. 579).

Regarding the data collection, I relied primarily on my field notes, the interview data from my students and Arabic-speaking colleagues as well as e-mail exchanges in my sociolinguistics, language and culture, and discourse analysis courses, which I gave during the academic year 2011–2012. My data stem from 156 undergraduate female Qatari students' use of English and, in the cases of code switching, the shifting between English and Arabic, which I have termed Arabizi, namely a written variety of Arabic which uses Latin characters to represent Arabic words. Due to space restrictions, the stylistic patterns are illustrated through actual data from online interactions I have had with five students from my sample. Upon their request, all names have been pseudonymized. I consider these data representative of the patterns I analyze on the basis of their encapsulating the social meanings which the vast majority of my students convey in their interactions with me.

## Data Analysis

With a focus on four aspects of the communicative styles that my students and I use the most, i.e., with a high frequency in our daily professional communication regarding university-related issues, this section provides an analysis of e-mail exchange data sets between my students and me. The four aspects of communicative styles that are of interest here and the ones that emerged as the themes of my analysis comprise the following: repetition patterns in university discourse (English), indirectness patterns in university discourse (English), elaborateness patterns in university discourse (English), and high-involvement style in university discourse (English).

## Repetition Patterns in University Discourse (English)

Regarding repetition, it has been observed that this stylistic feature forms an important part of Arabic communicative style(Feghali 1997), particularly when it is realized through the use of pious formulae, mainly *insha'allah, alhamdullillah, masha'allah, subhan allah, baraqalahu allah*. This is definitely the case with my Qatari students' oral and written style inside and outside class, especially with the use of *insha'allah* (cf. Sussex 2012), which I have noticed they use extensively whenever they talk about the future and their future plans or whenever they make promises. Another pattern I have noticed with my Qatari colleagues is that whenever I ask them to do something that I know they will not do (e.g., to come to a party I am organizing, which does not correspond to their concept of a party given

the mixed gender invitees, the consumption of alcohol, etc.), they use *insha'allah*, which I interpret as the inability for them to come because Allah did not allow them to do it.

As a Greek, in my interactions with my Qatari colleagues and students, I tend to use not only the phrases like "hopefully" and "I hope" but also *insha'allah* with the meaning of "with the help of God." Greek language also has this, which expresses the idea that the future heavily depends on God and/or luck with the phrase *syn theo* or an *thelei o theos* (God willing); that is why the concept of *insha'allah* is familiar to me to use.

The following example illustrates the use of *insha'allah* in an online interaction between a Qatari student of mine and me[1]:

Example 1:
On Jan 4, 2012, at 2:28 PM, Sarah wrote:

> Dear Dr. Irene, assalam alaikum!
> Hope these words find you well.
> Kindly find the attachment (the extra work).
> I was waiting to set with my grandmother to ask her some questions about the family, but I won't be able to do that this weekend. I wrote what I know, I hope it is good.
> I will submit a hard copy on sunday, insha'Allah. Is that OK?
> Thank you and best regards
> Your student,
> Sarah Al Habibi
> Student id number

Example 2

> From: Eirini Theodoropoulou
> Sent: Friday, January 04, 2013 8:03 PM
> To: Student's email
> Subject: Re: Extra work
> Wa alaykum salam, ya Sarah!
> Thanks for this. No problem, you can submit the hard copy on Sunday—could you please drop it into my mailbox? Insha'allah, I'll be at QU in the afternoon to pick it up.
> Thanks,
> Dr. Irene

This e-mail exchange concerns my student Sarah's electronic submission of some extra credit work I asked her to do to make up for a missing quiz during the semester; I asked her to submit both a soft and a hard copy and, given that she knows how strict I can be unless students stick to deadlines, in her e-mail she makes a promise that she will submit her hard copy by the deadline, which is on that Sunday that she refers to in her e-mail. Her use of *insha'allah* indexes exactly the commitment she makes to the submission of her paper, which however she sees as depending on Allah. In my answer to her, I also use *insha'allah* but in my case it has the meaning that I hope to be able to go to Qatar University to pick it up on that day. The reason why in my data *insha'allah* has a slightly different meaning from Sarah's is because on that Sunday I had some professional obligations outside Qatar University and

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[1] All of the examples are original ones; they have not been edited.

I was not sure when they would be over to allow me to go to my office in Qatar University.

Overall, all of these "religious" expressions used by Qataris have been secularized or dereligionized in the sense that many Westerners including myself, who are non-Muslims, also use them in their interactions with Qataris aiming to sound more polite and more likeable. This extended use of these expressions points toward them being a very good example of routine or fixed linguistic units, which form part of the repetitive style used by both my Qatari students and their Greek instructor. They are repeated but more often than not they carry different social meanings depending on the context and not on who is using them.

## Indirectness Patterns in University Discourse (English)

By "indirectness" I align with the linguistic literature on viewing it as the conveying of unstated meaning (Tannen 2007). The basic idea behind indirectness is that you need to be able to read between the lines in order to decipher people's talk. Even though indirectness has been found as an important stylistic feature of Arabic communication style because of its association with being a high-context culture (see Feghali 1997; Nelson et al. 2002; Bassiouney 2009), from my experience I would claim that this is not always the case. While interacting in pleasant communication circumstances, such as giving compliments expressing admiration for something, my Qatari students tend to sound and seem indirect, but when it comes to requests for academic issues, such as deadline extensions, questions on which material to focus on for the purposes of final exams, and grade raising, they tend to be very direct. The following example from an e-mail exchange between a student and me illustrates this discrepancy:

Example 3
On Jan 7, 2012, at 1:42 PM, Noora wrote:

> Good afternoon Erine,
> As a student in this course, I am very keen to capitalize on my success. You have done a great deal and assisted me personally in many things, so thank you so much.
> To reach my goal of at least a B as a grade, I would like to know what are the specific things I should focus on for the final exam?
> Yours,
> Noora

Example 4
January 7, 2012 2:47:16 PM GMT+ 02:00

> Hi Noora,
> thanks for this and your kind words. I am afraid I cannot help you with this; as I said, you need to study everything that we have covered after the midterm exam. The questions I am going to ask will require your understanding of the phenomena that we have discussed in class.
> Best,
> Dr. Irene

Noora's e-mail contain indirect style in as much as it coincides with her camou-flaged and concealed true intentions in terms of her wants, needs, and goals in the discourse situation (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988) she is trying to establish with me. To be more specific, through her e-mail she is trying to elicit information on what kinds of questions I am going to ask and which topics/notions I am going to focus on in the exam of the Introduction to Language course. Instead of asking this question directly, though, she decided to frame it as some sort of help I need to provide her with, in order for her to get a B. In other words, she positions me as someone who needs to offer her some sort of a *Sadaka*, namely some kind of a good deed. A practice like this is very common among students (at our university): they try to cultivate an atmosphere of flattery, and as soon as this has been established they ask for a favor in such a way that it is presented as if it were tied to the student's professional, academic, or even personal well-being.

## *Elaborateness Patterns in University Discourse (English)*

Along the same lines of constructing flattery, elaborateness as a communicative style refers to creative, expressive, and almost poetic use of language. In the con-text of the Arabic language, this elaborateness is also seen as equivalent with the use of many words (Samovar and Porter 1991). In the literature on elaborateness in Arabic, two rhetorical strategies have been found to realize elaborated speech: exaggeration (*mubalagha*) and assertion (*tawkid*) (Badolato 1981; Rahim 2005).

Regarding exaggeration, in both our oral and written discussions with students I have found that both sides employ this stylistic feature but in different ways; while students in principle tend to construct whole discourses of exaggeration, I as the in-structor tend to take on my students' exaggeration but through the use of "extreme" verbs as opposed to whole texts. The following examples from an e-mail exchange with one of my students illustrate these patterns:

Example of exaggeration (*mubalagha*)

Example 5

On Jan 9, 2012, at 1:47 PM, Mona wrote:

> From: XXXX
> To: irene.theodoropoulou@qu.edu.qa
> Subject: …
> Date: Wed, 9 Jan 2012 13:39:50+0300
> Dear Doctor
> I promise to send my research paper in one houre
> am baging u to accept my final paper
> I cant find excuses to write for you, because I know that am not the only student who has pregnancy dificulties
> or academic pressure, even my husband said that to me in order to motivate me to finish my work
> I swear to God that I run through websits, reading some books and preparing a survey,
> I didnt even see my kids for more than two weeks!! I sent them to my mum house thinking that would help me to achieve somthing

But I miss that point, that my problem is within me. my problem that I was surrending to my negativity and like an old turtle I was racing against time
I was week and panic
Maybe am too old to be an acadamic student

## Example 6

Hi Mona,
thanks for this. There is no reason for panicking! Just try to do the best you can with your final paper and you can submit it either today or tomorrow at the latest.
Thank you,
Dr. Irene
P.S. Could you please return the language attitudes book as well? I am doing a collaborative project with Dr. X on language attitudes and we need it! Thanks!

The poetic character in Mona's e-mail is already evident via the format of the e-mail; instead of writing one continuous text, which would be expected according to the e-mail writing conventions found in e-mails written in English (cf. Crystal 2012), she leaves a blank line between different sentences and phrases, maybe in order to emphasize the ideas that she wants to express. Similarly, the whole tone of the e-mail is quite poetic and expressive, indexed through the emotional strength of words and sentences such as "begging," "I swear to God," and "I haven't seen my kids." This poetic use is further enhanced via the use of psychology-related, in the sense of self-reflectional, expressions, like "my problem is within me," "I was surrendering to my negativity and like an old turtle I was racing against time," culminating in self-deprecating expressions, like "I was weak and panic," and "maybe am too old to be an academic student." My experience in Greece, Austria, and in the UK has shown me that such emotional expressions are rarely used in e-mail interactions between faculty members and students in the western world, even when emotions run high because of disagreements having to do with grades or general academic issues. Part of this emotionality in the case of my students in Qatar is also constructed through the mechanism of personalization and the sharing of personal information, which in the western context can be seen as more than necessary.

Example of assertion (*tawkid*)

## Example 7

On Jan 7, 2012, at 4:59 PM, Alreem wrote:

>Hi dr
>How are you? I hope that you are fine
>I will graduate this semester and so afraid of my grades as you know my father died affected badly on my personality I always crying and can not focus on my exams. For seminar I did my best and if there is any method to increase my grade I will do it.
>
>Thank you for your helping
>
>Alreem

## Example 8

------Original Message------

From: Eirini Theodoropoulou

To: Alreem
Subject: Re:
Sent: 8 Jan 2012 8:20 PM
Hi Reem,
thanks very much for your email. I do understand your situation and would like to help you out here; your overall grade so far is a D+, which can become a C, if you write a 250-word essay about the history and sociolinguistic features of your tribe. Please submit this essay no later than Sunday, the 13th of January.
Thanks,
Dr. Irene

Example 9
On Jan 8, 2012, at 8:33 PM, Alreem wrote:

Thank you for helping and I will submit it before sunday inshalla but please can you clarify the topic please
Alreem

In these three excerpts by student Reem and me, the mechanism of assertion is in full swing; in Reem's first e-mail, assertion takes two shapes—one referring to the past (I did my best) and one referring to the future (I will do whatever it takes to increase my grade). Even though the assertion regarding students' performance throughout the whole semester is not very frequent in my data, it can be seen as a powerful communicative stylistic practice whereby students, and in this particular example Reem, are trying to pave the way for asserting that they will do their best to get a good grade. In other words, by constructing the persona of a hardworking student, they hope to be able to persuade their instructors to give them extra credit work to do, in order to increase their grades. From my ethnographic participant observation, I have arrived at the conclusion that for my Qatari students getting a high grade is more a matter of prestige for themselves and their families than a matter of it securing them a good job or the ability to get a scholarship and carry on doing postgraduate studies in Qatar or abroad. From my part as an instructor, I am always trying to give students opportunities to improve their performance in general and their grades in particular. Nonetheless, in order not to create false impressions, namely that all students who are given extra credit work will automatically receive better grades, I am always trying to use modal verbs, such as can, could, and would, which are also to be found in example 8. In this way, I also employ the stylistic mechanism of assertion but not as directly and as straightforwardly as my students.

In a nutshell, both the strategies of exaggeration and assertion are claimed to establish and maintain credibility during interaction, in the sense that intimacy can be constructed via them, which in turn can secure honesty and trust in our interactions.

## High-involvement Style in University Discourse (English)

Another stylistic feature which is relevant to intimacy and subsequent credibility between interlocutors is high-involvement speech. High-involvement speech style has been found to characterize Greek communication(Tannen 2005). It is realized

through a range of different stylistic features, including few or no pauses, supportive tags (e.g., hm, mm, yes, ok), overlapping questions, fast-paced latching (elaborating on a topic), and undisrupted conversation. All of these features have been argued to show interest and rapport between interlocutors, and thus to establish intimacy and mutual trust between them (cf. Jandt 2012).

From my teaching experience both inside and outside of the classroom, I can say that both my Qatari students and I tend to use supportive tags in my interactions with students, primarily the English ones ok, and yeah but also the Arabic ones *aiuwa* (yes) and *sah*? (right?), especially when the discussion topic is pertinent to the Qatari dialect and culture. Regarding my students, they use the discourse marker *yani* (roughly translated as "namely") in their oral English discourse but never in their e-mails. In the latter, they tend to use tag questions at the end of their e-mails, and it is usually if they want to take the initiative for doing something, but they do not know whether I agree with it. In their e-mail, they would usually send their ideas/initiatives and at the end of the sentence(s) containing the initiatives they would put the tag question (see, for instance, Sarah's e-mail in example 1: I will submit a hard copy on sunday, i*nsha'allah*. Is that OK?

## 2.4   Implications

The data point toward one of the basic cultural features shared between Greek and Qatari deep cultures, is affect. As an example of subjective culture, namely as a cultural aspect that we cannot see or touch, as something that functions out of awareness (Triandis 1972), affect is identified with people's tendency to appeal to their interlocutors' emotional rather than rational aspects of their character. In light of this, I would say that the foregrounding and constant use of affect can be seen as equivalent to "doing drama," namely to deal with problems, challenges, and tensions in an emotional rather than rational way. This can be seen both inside and outside class and in both face-to-face and online interactions. Even though many times I have been tempted to accommodate this affect linguistically, i.e., to converge to it, I have decided to diverge instead, namely not to follow it, because of my role as an instructor and, hence, as a role model of rationality, which is, I think, the most impartial and thus fair way to deal with students in an academic and professional context such as a university.

Along the same lines of affect, both the students and I engage in the effort to construct intimacy rather than hierarchy, another subjective cultural pattern relevant to handling human relationships. The hierarchy dimension of course is there, indexed through the use of Dr. in my students' discourse, but my ethnographic participant observation has shown me that for many of my female students I act as a live (rather than popular culture related) bridge between them and the western world, hence they are trying to establish a friendly relationship with me, in order to learn as much information about the western world from me as possible. This is done through the use of the aforementioned stylistic devices (Coupland 2007), including repetition,

indirectness, elaborateness (exaggeration and assertion), and high-involvement style (Tannen 2005), which can be argued to form wider communicative patterns of *filotimo*, a notion that has been claimed to characterize the Greek society only. Even though there is no exact translation in English or, for that matter, in Arabic, "*filotimo*" can be seen as the sense of obligation and responsibility to the in-group, including family, friends, and colleagues (Broome 1996, p. 66). This is the case because all these four stylistic mechanisms share the communicative pattern of being polite, tactful, respectful and, eventually, grateful (Triandis 1972) to one's interlocutors. It this way, *filotimo* can be seen as characterizing both my Qatari students and me, albeit from a different angle: my students' *filotimo* is constructed with a communicative emphasis on respectfulness and gratefulness, while I place an emphasis on the tactfulness aspect. At the end of the day, of course, all of us will convey *filotimo* in its multidimensionality either consciously or subconsciously in both our offline and online interaction, exactly because our communicative styles are trying to encode our respective sense of personal honor and self-esteem. Eventually, the safeguarding of *filotimo* secures equality, so no one of us interacting with each other feels inferior to the other. The latter requires courses on intercultural communication like the one I teach and also awareness with the aid of the media and the government to create not only knowledge but also tolerance. Yet, tolerance does not necessarily mean acceptance but just admitting that not everyone is like us or maybe that the so-called other is like us even if they speak a different language and come from a different country.

## Conclusion

The current study attempted to investigate the communicative styles used by a number of young female Qatari students and their instructor, a Greek woman, and to understand how these styles contribute toward the construction of culture. The respective dimensions of communicative styles used in university-related communication included the following four: repetition patterns in university discourse (English), indirectness patterns in university discourse (English), elaborateness patterns in university discourse (English), and high-involvement style in university discourse (English). With respect to repetition, it has been found that it is primarily religious expressions, such as *insha'allah*, which are used extensively by both parties with the aim to render their communication more trustworthy and valid through its framing within a pious context. Indirectness is employed by my students as a mechanism to ask me to do favors for them, such as improving their grades. This strategy verifies the fact that the Qatari culture can be seen as a high-context culture (Hofstede 1980), where subtlety and indirectness are prized. Instead of getting down to business directly, my Qatari students tend to rely first on existing relationships outside the university so that shared understandings make explicitness unnecessary. Along the same lines, elaborateness realized through exaggeration and assertion on behalf of my students has a similar target, in as much as it aims at rendering the

message more emotionally appealing and thus standing a good chance of accomplishing its mission. Finally, high-involvement style, evident through the use of few or no pauses, supportive tags (e.g., hm, mm, yes, ok), overlapping questions, fast-paced latching (elaborating on a topic), and undisrupted conversation at the level of classroom discussions and the use of supportive tags next to students' suggestions or initiatives can be seen as a prioritization of the cultivation of an interpersonal relationship with their instructor more than the accomplishment of a certain goal.

It goes without saying that the findings from this study are not generalizable, given that the analysis is qualitative and the data stem from a limited number of people and from a very specific context, which is that of an Arab university in Qatar. Nonetheless, the value of this study is that it introduces the idea of a correlation between communicative styles of people whose languages may be different, but who share a lot of cultural similarities. I hope the findings from this study will contribute toward the unlocking of the peculiarities associated with communicative styles, which sometimes prevent intercultural communication between an Arab and a non-Arab, hence they hinder the very process of learning. To this end, I would suggest the creation of an intercultural communication course attended by both students and non-Arab faculty members alike, which will focus on the understanding and interpretation of such empirical data and will seek to provide both types of target groups with the necessary tools that will help them gain cultural competence. Given the frequency and the nature of collaboration between them, cultural competence is a sine qua non for a successful student experience and faculty members' tenure at the university, respectively.

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