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The Speech Act of Congratulation and Positive Politeness Strategies: A Study of Comments on Facebook Posts by Palestinians

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Abstract

This linguistic study attempts to investigate the realization patterns of the speech act of congratulation, a relatively understudied speech act, as used by Palestinian Facebook users. To this end, naturally occurring data were gathered from two authentic situations that were posted by the researcher's friends on their Facebook accounts. The study aims at eliciting the way Palestinians offer congratulations on two occasions related to marriage and birth of a baby. Data were encoded and analyzed based on the taxonomy of congratulation strategy proposed by Elwood (2004). Furthermore, data were analyzed based on a modified version of positive politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Findings showed that the most frequently used strategies of congratulation were illocutionary force indicating devise (IFID), offer of good wishes, and expression of happiness. Findings revealed that the most frequently used strategies by the participants were giving gift to listener, exaggeration, and in-group identity marker.

Keywords: congratulation; politeness; pragmatics; speech act.

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فعل القول الخاص بالتهنئة واستراتيجيات التأدب الإيجابية:
دراسة حول تعليقات الفلسطينيين على منشورات الفيسبوك

محمود خليل اشريتح

ملخص

تحاول هذه الدراسة اللغوية إلى التعرف على أنماط تحقيق فعل القول الخاص بالتهنئة، وهو فعل تمت دراسته بشكل قليل نسبياً، كما يستخدمه مستخدمو الفيسبوك الفلسطينيون. ولهذه الغاية، تم جمع البيانات التي تحدث بشكل طبيعي من حالتين ضمن سياقاتها الأصلية التي نشرت عن طريق أصدقاء الباحث على حسابات الفيسبوك الخاصة بهم. تهدف الدراسة إلى كشف الطريقة التي يقدم بها الفلسطينيون التهاني في مناسبتين تتعلقان بالزواج وولادة الطفل. تم تصنيف البيانات وتحليلها بناء على تصنيف إستراتيجيات التهاني التي اقترحها إلود (2004). بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم تحليل البيانات على أساس نسخة معدلة من استراتيجيات التأدب الإيجابية التي اقترحها براون وليفنسون (1987). وأظهرت النتائج أن الاستراتيجيات الأكثر استخداماً في التهنئة كانت التهاني المباشرة (IFID)، عرض التمنيات الطيبة، والتعبير عن السعادة. كشفت النتائج أن الاستراتيجيات الأكثر استخداماً من قبل المشاركين كانت تقديم هدية للمستمع والمبالغة ومؤشر الهوية داخل المجموعة.

الكلمات الدالة: التهنئة، التأدب، المقامية، فعل القول

Introduction:

Facebook is a very popular social networking website. It has been a dominant presence in our lives in recent years. Palestine is also not far behind in the Facebook race with the rest of the world. According to Matheson (2005), social media is interactive in the sense of giving people power to choose what they do, what information they want to communicate and how they would do it. Language and its dynamics on the internet is an area of great interest to many scholars from the field of linguistics, media sciences, psychology and sociology. Crystal (2001) states that as the focus shifts from technology to people and purpose, the role of language becomes central.

The debate about Facebook has only just begun in academic context as a topic of discussion and exchange of arguments. Moreover, there are many issues about Facebook use and users that need to be understood before we embrace it as a tool that can be utilized for activities other than leisure and social interaction in a digital space. Congratulations are also common on online social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Since the focus of most studies conducted so far have been on face-to-face congratulations and neglected relatively new communicative contexts such as social networks, this study examines and evaluates different congratulations that users leave on the walls.

People interact with each other in different ways; say an utterance, body language or even a glance. Congratulation is one of these speech acts. It is an expression of joy in the success or good fortune of another. Congratulation topics might be marriage, having a baby, progress, birthday, and others. Sometimes, it is considered an indication of jealousy if the other person who hears the good news doesn't express his/her pleasure on what has happened to the addressee. In a situation of happy news speakers mostly try to show their happiness by saying congratulations; however, According to Elwood (2004), the patterns and expressions they use to express congratulations may vary in different situations. To put it simply, congratulation indicates that the participants' linguistic choices and their socio-cultural norms are inextricably intertwined.

Marki-Tsilipakon (2001) has mentioned that congratulation is the expression of speaker's joy and praise on a pleasurable event. Triantafyllides (1941, cited in Marki-Tsilipako, 2001) states that congratulation is an exclamatory expression which functions as a wish.

Searle (1969, p.67) laid out the preparatory conditions for the speech act of congratulations:

- 1) There is some event that is related to the hearer.
- 2) The event is in the hearer's interest and the speaker believes the event is in the hearer's interest.
- 3) The speaker is pleased at event.
- 4) It counts as an expression of pleasure at the event.

Congratulation is a speech act which relates to Austin's behabitives and Searle's expressives. The politeness maxims of Leech (1983) can be viewed in relation to congratulation. Congratulation is associated with the approbation and modesty maxims proposed by Leech (1983, p. 132). According to the approbation maxim, the speaker should minimize dispraise of the addressee and maximize the praise of the addressee while the modesty maxim requires that the speaker minimize the praise of himself and maximize the dispraise of himself. Thus by congratulating the speaker maximizes the praise of the addressee. By congratulating someone, the speaker adheres to the hearer's positive face (Leech, 1983, pp. 104-5).

Issac and Clark (1990) have pointed to the possibility of "ostensible congratulations". For example, in some situations serious or friendly rivals compete in a game or a race and the loser congratulates the winner. In this case, it is important to point out that the loser is not wholly pleased at the other's good fortune or luck but conveys respect and a lack of resentment through the congratulations and the recipient also has a social requirement to collude in the ostensible congratulations.

Brown and Levinson (1978) have referred to the speech act of congratulation as one of the positive politeness strategies. Therefore, the illocutionary force behind congratulations is intrinsically polite and positive; hence, congratulations are termed 'convivial' by Leech (1983). In fact, the speech act of congratulation can be associated with the notion of face and politeness. Orecchioni (2004, 2005, cited in Barthes, 2006) argues that congratulation as an expressive speech act is directly linked to positive politeness and is a face-saving act since it aims at enhancing the addressee's positive face.

The present study is an attempt at a detailed analysis of the patterns and linguistic forms that Palestinians use to offer congratulation on Facebook in two different situations. It further investigates the types of positive politeness which are mostly used by people in those situations.

Material and Method:

This section reports on the research design of the study: material, participants, research questions and data collection procedures.

Material:

The data for the present study were gleaned through the researcher's Facebook account in which 2 natural situations were presented by two different Facebook friends of the researcher. The two situations have to do with getting married and having a baby. The respondents (who are Facebook commentators) responded to them without being asked to do so. It is worthy of mentioning that the researcher has adopted this method in an attempt to gather naturally occurring data that might be representative of the congratulating strategies used by Facebook users in Palestinian society.

Participants:

Two Facebook posts by two different Facebook friends of the researcher on two different situations were considered. 214 subjects participated in this study. All participants were Palestinians. The contributions of 3 non-Palestinians were not considered. The participants were 122 females and 92 males between 17 and 72 years of age.

Purpose of the Study:

The current research will explore the use of language in a context, which in this case is congratulation on the social networking website Facebook. The researcher aims at studying the communicative functions that emerge from analysis of Facebook. The study attempts to highlight the basic strategies and sub-strategies used by Palestinians to offer congratulation by commentators on Facebook. Samples of congratulation expressions were encoded and analyzed based on the taxonomy of congratulation strategy proposed by Elwood (2004) and further they were analyzed according to the classification of positive politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987, pp. 102-131). However, there is a minor modification to capture salient strategies used in the present study.

A semantic formula refers to “a word, phrase, or sentence that meets a particular semantic criterion or strategy, any one or more of these can be used to perform the act in question” (Cohen 1996, p. 265). For example, in the situation where respondents had to offer congratulation to a friend getting married, congratulation responses such as *Mabruk ja sadiqi alaziz. Said d3ıdan lisama; I hatha. Ahla alomnijat* ‘Congratulation my dear friend, I am so glad to hear that and wish you the best of luck in your new life,’ were analyzed as consisting of three units, each of which falls into a corresponding semantic formula (as shown in the brackets):

- Congratulation my dear friend [IFID].
- I am so glad to hear that [Expression of happiness].
- Wish you the best of luck in your new life. [An offer of good wishes].

After the initial analysis was run by the researcher of this study, and in order to achieve the reliability of data analysis, the researchers invited two independent raters in order to make sure that the strategies matched the data in light of the classification established by Elwood (2004) and Brown and Levinson (1987). Both of the independent raters were professors of linguistics and were well-trained in the analysis of speech acts coding schema. Some differences were revealed in the coding schema, therefore a discussion was held and adjustments were made, based on consensus. It is important to indicate that there was some minor modification on the classification of positive politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. This modification was made in order to capture salient strategies used in the present study.

Since, up to the knowledge of the researcher, there is not any previous research on the congratulation speech act in the Palestinian context, this study can provide researchers with the motive and yardstick for further research on congratulation speech act.

Research Questions:

The research questions which are touched upon in this investigation are:

- 1) What are the basic strategies and sub-strategies used by Palestinians to offer congratulation by commentators on Facebook?

- 2) What types of positive politeness strategies are more prevalent in the congratulations of the participants?

Literature Review:

Through reviewing previous research on speech act studies, a good deal of research has been conducted on congratulation but many aspects of this particular speech act have remained unveiled. For instance, some studies have moved toward distinguishing types of congratulations (Quirk et al., 1985). Other studies have tried to target the general meaning of the act (Leech, 1983). Still some researchers have explored congratulation to reveal different types of formulae in different societies (Nasri, Vahid Dastjerdy, and Ghadiri, 2013; Aryani, 2011; and Allami and Nekouzadeh, 2011).

Nasri et al. (2013) conducted a cross-cultural study in an attempt to shed lights on the cross-cultural similarities and disparities with regards to the speech act of congratulations. They compared three cultures; English, American, and Persian speakers. Forty native speakers of each group participated in the study. As a result, they found some similarities and differences between three cultures.

Politeness was also the focus of some research on congratulations. Trujillo (2011) studied politeness, age and gender differences when offering congratulations in Colombian Spanish. Her study had a large sample of different educational levels. The result of study showed that “the Colombians in this sample have positive politeness when giving congratulations and manifest it with such solidarity strategies as pride and approval, expressions of gratitude and support, and they also give the congratulation in an explicit manner.” (Trujillo, P. 3) Furthermore, the data analysis showed a 95% certainty in the differences found between men and women.

Mahzari (2017) conducted a sociopragmatic study in an attempts to identify the verbal and nonverbal types of responses used by Saudi Facebook users in the comments of congratulations on the events of happy news status updates on Facebook. A total of 1,721 comments of congratulation were collected from 61 different occasions and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively by using the frame-based approach to understand the construction of politeness of congratulation on Facebook. The results showed 23 verbal types of responses used by the users; however, the use of "congratulations," "offer of good wishes," "praise," and

"statements indicating the situation was warranted" were the most frequently used strategies. The results also showed 100 patterns of verbal compound strategies, but the use of "congratulations" with "offer of good wishes" was the most frequently used compound strategy. In addition, 42 types of emojis were found in the comments and categorized into seven different functions. Therefore, users employed nonverbal strategies to express happiness and intensify their congratulations because of the absence of prosodic strategies and facial expression to convey positive feelings.

Jahangard et al. (2016) investigate the possible effects of being an Iranian or an American typical Facebook user upon the kind of the category which is drawn upon to send an addressee a birthday congratulation note on Facebook. The data collected are 120 birthday congratulation notes issued by 60 Iranians and 60 Americans on Facebook. Seven dominant categories emerged from the study namely 'Illocutionary Force Indicating Device' (IFID), 'Blessing Wishes', 'Divine Statements', 'Poem and Pieces of Literature', 'Endearments', 'Felling Expressions' and 'Compliments'. Moreover, the possible significant differences between the two groups within these categories were explored. The paper concluded that, in five categories, the differences between the two groups proved significant where the two categories 'IFID' and 'Blessing Wishes' did not show any significant differences.

Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) worked on congratulation and positive politeness strategies in Iranian context. Fifty males and females with the age range of 17 -75 with different socio-economic backgrounds took part in this study. They were asked to fill in a Discourse Completion Test consisting of nine situations dealing with happy news. The findings of the study revealed different types of congratulation strategies. Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), Expression of happiness, Offer of good wishes, Request for information and Expression of validation were the five major types of strategies utilized by the people.

Emery (2000) investigated the way old and young Arab speakers of Omani Arabic express congratulations on somebody's wedding, the birth of a baby, and religious Eves. The findings showed some differences between the way old and young people offer congratulations on the wedding occasions. Further analysis of the results revealed the differences between men and women's expressions. As an illustration, the female participants

wished the couple to have a son as their first child. They also wished them a long life and fertility. But younger people did not follow the wishing custom. On the occasion of childbirth, women congratulated the mother by giving her money as a present and while visiting the baby, they use sympathetic expressions such as *ahwan anshaallaah* 'get better soon God willing'.

Akram (2008) has investigated speech acts in Urdu and English. The findings of this cross-cultural revealed that, on special occasions such as Christmas, English speakers use the expression Happy Christmas and Urdu speakers say *ko/ tumheir nya saal mubarak ho*. In New Year, English speakers say Happy New Year, while Urdu speakers use the term Mubarak. Moreover, for birthday, English speakers say happy birthday, whereas Urdu speakers use the expression *Raat Mubara*. Furthermore, the expressions that are used in religious holidays in Urdu are as follow: *Mahe Ramezan Mubarak* (congratulation on Ramezan) and *Eide-Milad-u-Nabi Mubarak* (congratulations on birth of the Imam). Besides, Akram pointed out that all these English expressions are used by native speakers, while the three last expressions in Urdu are mostly used by young girls and women and are not as common as other expressions. Furthermore, it is concluded that all the stated expressions in English and Urdu can be used both formally and informally except for the last expression that is *Eide-Milad-u-Nabi Mubarak* which is used in formal situations.

Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) have studied the basic verbal congratulation strategies used by Persian speakers of Iran in 9 situations. The researchers further explored the positive politeness strategies in this speech act. Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), offer of good wishes, as well as expression of happiness were found to be the most frequent strategies utilized by the Persian participants.

Dastejrudi and Nasri (2013) have investigated the cross-cultural differences with regards to the production congratulations. To this end, 48 American native speakers were asked to fill out a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) that consists of 4 situations on each of which the participants were asked to extend congratulations. Moreover, the translated versions of the DCT were used to elicit data from 50 Persian native speakers as well as 44 native speakers of Syrian Arabic language. The data were explored and analyzed to determine the congratulation strategies used and the frequencies of their occurrence. The content of semantic formulas as well as their shifts

according to the status of the hearer was also investigated. Analysis of the data revealed several similarities and differences among the three groups, which will have implications for researchers as well as language teachers.

Ghaemi & Ebrahimi (2014) have sought to scrutinize congratulation responses among Persian speakers. To do so, 50 participants (26 men and 24 women) took part in the study. The participants completed a DCT (Discourse Completion Test) that contained two sections. The study focused on gender differences and attempted to reveal the politeness strategies used by Iranians. The results revealed that Iranians mostly used illocutionary force indicating device, expression of happiness, and best wishes to offer congratulations. Moreover, there was not any difference between men and women in applying formal or informal codes when expressing congratulation response.

Quirk et al. (1985) have studied a new type of congratulation distinguished as constitutive congratulation formulae which is used for stereotyped communication situations. Examples of this stereotypical use of congratulations are Congratulation!, Well done! and Right on. Quirk et al. (1985) believed that such formulaic utterances can be seasonal greetings as well. Using Merry Christmas or Happy New Year are two examples in this case.

Some other researchers made an attempt to compare congratulation with other speech acts. Tomaszczyk (1989) mentioned that compliments in certain contexts have the same function as congratulation. Praise is another lexical item used to equate with congratulation. Although there are slight differences between them, both are synonymous in that they express approval or being proud of as the following example shows:

1. Congratulation! Your speech was excellent.

Can (2011) adopted the Natural Semantic Metalanguage Approach (NSM) as a framework to find out the culturally different conceptualizations of congratulation in British culture and *tebrik* and *kutlama* in Turkish culture. To do so 47 dictionaries are looked up and 442 contexts of congratulation, 339 contexts of *tebrik* and 348 contexts of *kutlama* are collected from the newspaper and blog genres in the three corpora.

Elwood's (2004) study, which is going to be adopted as theoretical framework of analysis in the current research, compared the strategies Americans use for offering congratulations in 7 situations with the ones Japanese speakers utilize. Analyzing the results, she found that Japanese speakers were much less likely to use an expression of happiness and make requests for information whereas Americans used less offers of good wishes.

In general, studies on congratulations fall under three categories; (a) those that deal with a cross-cultural analysis (Akram, 2008), (b) studies that investigate the speech act within a particular context or speech event/situation (e.g., Al-Khatib, 1997, congratulation messages in newspapers), and (c) those that deal with differences and similarities in the meaning and use of the congratulation expressions in a specific culture (e.g., Allami and Nekouzadeh, 2011). Among the studies which are related to congratulation, some focus entirely on the speech act of congratulation (e.g., Tsilipakou, 2001) and others compare it with other speech acts (e.g., Tomaszczyk, 1989), comparing congratulating with compliments).

To sum up, it can be seen that the speech act of congratulation may vary from culture to culture. Reviewing previous literature reveals that this speech act has not been studied adequately in Arabic culture. Specifically, to the researcher's best knowledge, there has been no investigation of the speech act of congratulation as conducted in Palestinian society. Therefore, it would be useful to examine how the speech act of congratulation is performed on Facebook posts by Palestinians so as to contribute in cross-cultural comparisons. This will be the gap where the contribution will be made by this study. A culturally inappropriate way of congratulating may conversely suggest resentment or lack of respect, failing to fulfill the act's convivial function. Therefore, analysis of the strategies used to realize congratulations is vital.

2. Data Analysis

The analysis was based on the assumption that the collected responses might be representative to what the participants would say in real similar situations. One of the crucial aims of those who conduct research on speech acts is, as Cohen (1996) proposed, to arrive at a set of strategies which are typically used by native speakers of a particular language.

Table 1 below shows that all written congratulation responses obtained from the 214 participants resulted in 335 Arabic congratulation strategies. Having a look at table 1, one can discern that the most frequent formula was that of IFID with the offer of good wishes coming next. IFID (e.g., “Congratulations.”) was the most frequent strategy used by the participants in approximately 31% of the strategies (n=106). An offer of good wishes (e.g., “Wish you the best of luck in your new life”) was the second most frequent strategy mentioned by the participants in approximately 24% of the strategies (n=78).

The findings are in line with Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) who found that among Iranian people “the mostly used types of congratulation strategies were “Illocutionary Force Indicating Devise (IFID)” and “Offer of good wishes” (p. 1607). It was found that Palestinian speakers mostly used IFID and expressed utterances with best wishes.

Moreover, as witnessed in the results of this study, the most frequent semantic formula in the two situations was the IFID. However, participants used intensifications on the IFIDs. They would say *alf mabruk* which means ‘a thousand congratulations’. Other intensifiers are adjectives, as in *at-jab althæni* “my sweet congratulations”. IFIDS are also strengthened by various intensifying modifiers, as in *mabruk kØir* “Many congratulations”.

Sometimes, the participants tend to double, replicate or repeat the vowel sounds in *Mabruk*. They might produce it as *mabruuuuuuuuuuuk*. Word elongation or the lengthening or extending the length of vowels in spoken Arabic is a phonological feature that aims at intensifying or reinforcing the force of certain utterances in an attempt to maximize praise of the other in face to face confrontations. However, in written Facebook congratulations, Palestinians simply repeat the vowels when spelling their IFIDS as an expression of joy. The interesting point is that their use of intensifications did not vary according to the hearer’s status.

Still, to look more and more polite, and to intensify the force of congratulations, some Palestinian participants resort to using certain theo-pragmatic expressions and making certain religious intertextual allusions. Such religious allusions are linguistic elements that are predominantly used in every day oral conversations. Therefore, participants would write *almæl wæ ælbanun zinatu elhajatu eddunja* “money and children are ornaments of life”. This kind of Qur’anic intertextuality aims at enhancing praise of the

other and strengthening the force congratulations. Moreover, some Palestinian users of Facebook resort to swearing by God which is a very common practice in Palestinian society. Some would Wa allah mī firht li farahak “By God, I am pleased that you got married” and barak allah zawædʒokom “God bless your marriage”.

It should be mentioned here that using such theo-pragmatic expressions in the context of congratulating may reflect the impact of Islamic culture on Palestinian people when they perform the act of congratulating. The study revealed that religious allusions can be considered as discourse markers that are analyzed as having distinct pragmatic meaning. Such religious expressions create an impression that the message flows from heart to heart. The above examples show that religious allusions in Palestinian society constitute face respecting acts.

Because of their religious believes, Palestinians used religious sentences like in biðn allah “God’s will” or kæn allah fi çonak “God helps you”.

Swearing is one of the well-known social customs in any society. People would use different expressions and terms in order to express this social custom. In Palestine, people use different terms and expressions in their everyday use of Arabic to confirm their promises, speeches, ideas and attitudes. By swearing to God, A assures B that he/she is sincere in offering congratulation. The most prominent religious swearing word that was found in the data is the use of the attribute of God (i.e. the word Allah). Terms as Wallah “by God”, qasaman billah “I swear by God”, allah ilwakeel “I swear by God whom I depend on”, allah wakeelak “by God whom you depend on” were also used by the participants. People would use such swearing expressions to show that the extended congratulation is not an ostensible one. According to Morrow (2006: 45), the Arabic language is “saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly”. As a result, a Palestinian could scarcely conceive a conversation where the name of God would not appear.

Data analysis revealed that Palestinian users of Facebook have their own culturally specific expressions for offers of good wishes. For example, when congratulating a person on his/her marriage a Palestinian might say:

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- *infaallah eqbal alzorriyat alssalehah* ‘If God wishes, I hope you would have good children.’
 - *infaallah eqbala ebnok* ‘If God wishes, I hope you would have good sons.’

Since among Palestinians it is believed that giving birth to a son is preferable and better than a daughter (partly because of the conditions of the traditional lives in which the sons of family helped their fathers- a source of income), therefore, they wished that a newly married couple had a son. Another expression which was specifically used by the Palestinian users of Facebook was the quote below which was used for the situation of “having a new baby”:

- *jitrabbai fi izzaka wa dalaalak* ‘May s/he be brought up with your tender greatness’
- *jajala allah min zorriaah asalehah* ‘May God put him/her among the pious.’

When the semantic formula an offer of good wishes is concerned, the participants were more sensitive to the status level of the hearer. They used more good wishes for the lower status hearer. This is also in accordance with Dastjerdi and Nasri (2013) who found that Syrian Arabic used more good wishes for the lower status hearer.

Concerning the third most frequently used strategy, the participants used request for information (e.g., “Is your new baby a boy or a girl?”) in approximately 12% of the strategies (n=38). Ask for sweets (e.g., “You must bring me some sweet”) was the fourth most frequent strategy mentioned by the participants in approximately 10% of the strategies (n=35).

In Palestinian culture, when something good happens to a person it is customary to buy some sweets and distribute it among one’s relatives or friends. Hence, when a person hears another one’s good news such as marriage he/she asks the hearer for sweets by using questions such as:

- *Tinsæf elhalawæn?* ‘Don’t forget the sweets?’

Unlike Elwood’s (2004) study, the participants of the present study had asked their interlocutors to give them some sweets. This particular semantic formula reflects a deeply rooted cultural value. This is in accordance with

Dastjerdi and Nasri (2013) who found that both groups of Arab and Persian participants had asked the hearer to give him/her some sweets. The researchers attributed that to their culture in that when something good happens, such as marriage or birth of a child, etc., they distribute some sweets among their friends, neighbors or relatives.

Expression of happiness (e.g., ana mabsuT kØir ‘I am so glad to hear that’.) and self-related comments (e.g., alla jaʔtina zajkum ‘‘May God give me a cute baby as yours’’.) were the fifth most frequent strategies mentioned by the participants in approximately 8% of the strategies (n=28) for each. Self- related comments refer to expressions of envy and longing. For instance, one of the participants used the following statement for the first situation:

- Oqbæl ʔindi ja allah ‘I wish God would give me a wife too’.
- Using Joke or producing humorous statements (e.g., ahsan lak ma titzawadʒiʃ ‘You better if you didn’t get married’.) was seen as the least frequent strategy among others, at 7% of the responses (n=22).

Table (1) Frequency of semantic formulas used in Facebook situations

situation	IFID	Expression of happiness	an offer of good wish	request for information	Sweets	self-related comments	joke	Total
	No %	No %	No %	No %	No %	No %	No %	No %
Having ababy	58 34	12 7	34 20	22 13	14 8	18 10	14 8	172 51
Getting married	48 29	16 10	44 27	16 10	21 13	10 6	8 5	163 49
Total	106 31	28 8	78 24	38 12	35 10	28 8	22 7	335 100

On the other hand, data analysis revealed a very important culture-specific tendency that is rooted in religion due to gender differences. It is not appropriate for the men to congratulate the mother unless they are closely related. They only congratulate the father using the expressions such as: Yatrabba fi’izzak wa jkuun walad saalih ‘may you raise him up to be a fine boy’. Younger men use the expression mabruuk ‘congratulations’.

It is worth mentioning that congratulating and other speech acts including inviting, offering, parsing, thanking, greeting, etc, whose illocutionary force coincides with social goals are intrinsically polite and take the form of positive politeness. Such speech acts as are termed (Leech;1983: 104) "convivial". Convivials relate to Austin's class of behabitives and Searle's expressives. Behabitives are firstly recognized by Austin (1962:159) who believes that behabitives focus on attitudes and social behavior. They include the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct.

In another classification by Searle (1979:15), the term "expressive" was employed to express feelings and attitudes. Expressive has the function of expressing the speaker's psychological attitude specified in the sincerity condition (i.e. the speaker/writer believes that the future state of affairs will indeed be described) about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content which the illocutionary presupposes. Examples of expressive are: congratulating, thanking, apologizing, blaming, condoling, welcoming, and greeting. These speech acts reveal the inner state of the speaker and say nothing about the world (Mey,1993:165).

In fact, utterances with the expressive illocutionary force have the null direction of fit (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985:54). They are just intended to express the speaker's mental state about a presented fact. Therefore, in expressive speech acts, addressees do not attempt to establish a correspondence between words and things. They just want to manifest their feelings about the ways in which objects are in the world (Venderveken, 1999:12).

Accordingly, in an attempt to save the positive face needs of the addressees, certain positive politeness strategies were also used by the participants. This is in accordance with Brown and Levinson (1987) who stated that the speech act of congratulation is oriented towards the positive face needs of the addressee and therefore can be perceived as a positive politeness strategy.

Table (2) Frequency of positive politeness strategies by Palestinian Facebook users

situation	Exaggerate		In-group identity marker		Seek agreement		Joke		Give or ask for a reason		Give gifts to the listener		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Having a baby	37	25.8	15	10.4	4	2.7	7	4.8	8	5.5	72	50.3	143	58.3
Getting married	24	23.5	9	8.8	4	3.9	4	3.9	2	1.9	59	57.8	102	41.6
Total	61	24.4	24	9.7	8	3.2	11	4.4	10	4.08	131	53.4	245	99.9

Concerning the used positive politeness strategies, the participants used semantic formulas that can be categorized as positive politeness strategies. In other words, the participants used 245 semantic formulas that can be considered as positive politeness strategies (see Table 2). Give gift to the listener (e.g., mabruk ‘Congratulations.’) was the most frequent strategy used by the participants in approximately 53.4% of the strategies (n=131). The second most frequent positive politeness strategy was Exaggerate (e.g., waw. ʔaDim ‘Wow, that’s great’). It was mentioned by the participants in approximately 24.4% of the strategies (n=61). Use of in-group identity marker (e.g., ja sadiqi ‘My dear friend’) was the third most frequent strategy mentioned by the participants in approximately 9.7% of the strategies (n=24). Moreover, regarding the fourth most frequently used strategy, the participants used joke (e.g., itzawadʒ wahdī Өænji ‘You should have a second wife soon’) in approximately 4.4% of the strategies (n=11). The fifth most frequent positive politeness strategy mentioned by the participants was Give or ask for reason (e.g., leʃ maʔazamtı ‘Why you didn’t invite me for your wedding!?’). It was used by the participants in approximately 4.08% of the strategies (n=10). Seek agreement (e.g., mabruk, lækm nadım alxilfi ‘Congratulations, but don’t have a big family’) was seen as the least frequent strategy among others, at 3.2% of the responses (n=8).

To sum up, congratulation, as an expressive speech act, could be extended to any person or in any occasion to express happiness for the occurrence of a certain event. By performing the act of congratulation we constitute the social signal that we care about others.

2. Conclusion

This study sought to discover the congratulation strategies used most often by Palestinian commentators on Facebook and the types of positive politeness strategies they use to realize congratulation speech act. Generally speaking, five types of congratulation strategies, namely “Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)”, “Expression of happiness”, “Offer of good wishes”, “Request for information” and “Expression of validation” were the major types of strategies utilized by the participants. “IFID” and “Offer of good wishes” were used in both situations. “Expression of happiness” was also seen in both situations. “Thanking God”, “A suggestion to celebrate” and “Offer of help” were the least utilized congratulation strategies in both situations. What is more, the greatest number of utilized strategies was used in situation 2 (getting married).

Concerning the positive politeness strategies within the congratulation speech act, the analysis of the data revealed that the most highly utilized positive politeness strategies was “Giving gift to listener” which was used with the highest frequency in both situations. “Exaggeration” and “In-group identity marker” were also applied by Palestinian participants in both situations. “Joking”, and “Giving or asking for reason” were the least types of utilized politeness strategies applied by Palestinian participants to realize the act of congratulation.

To sum up, speech acts reflect the cultural norms and values that are possessed by the speakers of different language backgrounds. Different cultures have different ways to realize speech acts. Differences might cause misunderstanding, breakdown and pragmatic failure when people from different cultures need to interact with each other. If the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic differences are neglected in second language learning and teaching, the learners may encounter misunderstandings and conflicts of interaction in real-life situations.

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Appendix (a) Transliteration Key

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

1. Consonants

Phonetic Symbol	Arabic Sound
ʔ	ء
b	ب
t	ت
θ	ث
j	ج
ħ	ح
x	خ
d	د
ð	ذ
r	ر
z	ز
s	س
š	ش
ʂ	ص
Ď	ض
T	ط
ž	ظ

Phonetic Symbol	Arabic Sound
ɤ	ع
ɣ	غ
f	ف
Q	ق
K	ك
L	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	هـ
w	و (Semi Vowel)
y	ي (Semi Vowel)

2. Vowels

a	َ (Short Vowel)
ǎ	ا (Long Vowel)
u	ُ (Short Vowel)
ū	و (Long Vowel)
i	ِ (Short Vowel)
ū	ي (Long Vowel)