British Journal of Applied Linguistics
ISSN: 2754-5253
DOI: 10.32996/bjal
Journal Homepage: www.al-kindipublisher.com/index.php/bjal

BJAL
AL-KINDI CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

| RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Beware of Him—He's a Scammer Selling Fake Tickets": A Pragmatic Study of Saudi Ticket Scam Warnings on X

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| ABSTRACT

Little research has examined the pragmatic structure of Arabic digital warning discourse. The present study aims to address this gap by investigating how Saudi users on X (formerly Twitter) construct public warning acts against ticket scams during Riyadh Season. It explores how these warnings are linguistically and culturally shaped and what politeness strategies users employ to intensify or mitigate face-threatening acts. The dataset comprises authentic Saudi digital discourse, including tweets, replies, and quoted posts related to ticket-scam incidents. Each warning message was qualitatively analysed for its explicit or implicit fulfilment of felicity conditions and its politeness strategy. The findings show that bald-on-record strategies overwhelmingly dominate Saudi digital warning discourse, indicating that users prioritize urgency and clarity over face-saving considerations when alerting the public. The highly explicit realisation of the Propositional Content, Sincerity, and Essential conditions suggests that Saudi users treat warning acts as high-stakes, socially consequential speech events where explicitness strengthens illocutionary force and minimizes the risk of misinterpretation. The study highlights that Saudi digital warnings are intentional and effective in high-risk contexts for community protection. The study contributes to the underexplored area of Arabic digital warnings about online fraud, offering new insights into how warning acts are pragmatically constructed in rapid, high-risk digital contexts.

| KEYWORDS

Speech Acts, Warning, Politeness, Pragmatics, Riyadh Season, Saudi users, Ticket Scam, High-risk contexts, X

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 01 December 2024 **PUBLISHED:** 15 December 2025 **DOI:** 10.32996/bjal.2025.5.4.3

1. Introduction

Fraud targeting individuals has become a pressing global concern (Waters, 2003; Ali & Mohd, 2024), especially as social media platforms increasingly facilitate online scams (Button et al., 2014b; Fletcher, 2022). Among the most common forms is concert and event ticket fraud (Kamelia & Gunawan, 2024), where scammers impersonate trusted platforms, employ unofficial accounts, and engage directly with potential victims to appear credible (Whitty & Buchanan, 2012; Button et al., 2014b). Scammers typically target many individuals for relatively small amounts of money, benefiting from victims' reluctance to report losses and the limited investigation of low-value cases.

Fraud also has psychological and social consequences. Previous studies (Button, Lewis, & Tapley, 2014a; Button & Cross, 2017) show that victims frequently experience shame, mistrust, and emotional distress. These feelings contribute to underreporting (Meikle & Cross, 2024; Koning, Junger, & Veldkamp, 2025). Public warnings by victims are rare; for example, only 2.7% of participants in Mouncey and Ciobotaru's (2025) study warned others about the phishing scam they experienced.

Against this backdrop, Riyadh Season has become a major target for online ticket scammers (Alweeam, 2024). As one of Saudi Arabia's largest winter entertainment festivals, the event hosts concerts, performances, exhibitions, and other attractions that draw millions of visitors annually (General Entertainment Authority, 2021; Riyadh Season, 2024). Despite official cautionary messages from institutions such as Webook (WEK Resell, 2025), some individuals continue to purchase counterfeit tickets from unofficial accounts. X (formerly Twitter) plays a central role in this dynamic, functioning both as a marketplace where scammers advertise tickets and as a public space where victims share warnings, screenshots, and names of fraudulent accounts.

Yet, despite the visibility of such warnings, the linguistic and pragmatic construction of Arabic digital warnings remains underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by examining how Saudi users employ X to warn the public about ticket scams during Riyadh Season. Drawing on Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, it analyses how warnings are constructed, how face-threatening acts (FTAs) are managed, and how pragmatic strategies operate in a high-risk environment. The study contributes to Arabic digital pragmatics and the broader literature on online fraud communication, where naturalistic, victim-generated warning discourse remains overlooked.

This research is significant for three reasons. First, it examines warning discourse in a real-time digital environment where interactions carry high personal and financial stakes. Second, it contributes to the pragmatic description of Arabic, particularly with regard to how users construct politeness and manage face online. Third, the findings provide pedagogical insights into Arabic pragmatics by illustrating culturally embedded forms of warning construction.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the theoretical background, Section 3 reviews relevant literature, Section 4 describes the methodology, Section 5 presents the findings, Section 6 discusses the results, and Section 7 concludes the study.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Warning as a Speech Act

Warnings are crucial in digital contexts where information circulates rapidly and publicly. Speech Act Theory (SAT), introduced by Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1969, 1979), provides a foundation for analysing warnings as social actions. A speech act consists of a locutionary act (literal meaning), an illocutionary act (speaker intention), and a perlocutionary act (effect on the hearer). Warnings focus on the illocutionary act: the intention to alert the hearer to potential harm.

Warnings typically concern future events and often take conditional form, such as *If you don't do X, Y will happen* (Searle, 1969). Their perlocutionary force lies in encouraging precaution. Warnings may be protective, advisory, or cautionary depending on the context (Goddard, 1998). In Austin's taxonomy, warnings fall under exercitives; in Searle's (1976) classification, they are directives because they aim to influence the hearer's future behaviour. Searle (1969) also proposed felicity conditions that underpin successful warnings: they must concern a future harmful event (propositional content), the speaker must believe the event is possible and harmful (preparatory), the speaker must sincerely hold this belief (sincerity), and the utterance must count as an attempt to alert the hearer (essential).

Warnings may also display assertive force when they describe a situation that implies caution (Searle, 1979; Leech, 1983). The multifunctionality of warnings makes it necessary to distinguish them from threats.

2.1.1. Distinguishing Warning from Threat

The boundary between warnings and threats is often blurred (Fraser, 1998; Song, 1995). Threats involve the speaker's intention to impose harm or negative consequences, frequently using explicit conditional structures (e.g., *If you do X, I will do Y*). In contrast, warnings highlight potential harm arising from an external situation rather than from the speaker. Statements such as *The roads are flooded* or *The supervisor is coming* illustrate warnings where the danger is situational. The pragmatic difference lies in intention: warnings aim to protect, while threats aim to coerce.

2.1.2. Politeness and Face-Threatening Acts

Warnings are inherently face-threatening because they may imply that the hearer is uninformed or at risk and because they limit the hearer's autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson's politeness model, based on Goffman's (1967) concept of

face, distinguishes between positive face (the desire to be liked) and negative face (the desire for autonomy). Warnings may threaten both, prompting speakers to mitigate through politeness strategies.

The model outlines five strategies: (1) bald-on-record, (2) positive politeness, (3) negative politeness, (4) off-record indirectness, and (5) withholding the act. While scholars have criticised the model for insufficient cultural sensitivity (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Culpeper & Terkourafi, 2017), its systematic classification and cross-cultural applicability make it a useful framework for analysing Arabic digital warnings (Bataineh & Aljamal, 2014; Ninomiya, Ono, & Umarova, 2023).

3. Literature Review

Warning is less studied than other speech acts such as requests (Taguchi, 2006), apologies (Yu, Raymond, & Wu, 2025), or complaints (El-Dakhs, Ahmed, & Mardini, 2025). Existing studies offer insights into how warnings are realised across languages and contexts.

3.1. Studies Across Languages

Delbene (2006) examined Uruguayan physicians' warnings in HIV/AIDS consultations and found that euphemistic expressions weakened the illocutionary force of warnings. Song (1995) analysed threats and warnings in English conversations, showing that threats rely on explicit conditionals while warnings more often employ imperatives or caution markers. Ayodele (2017) used Searle's felicity conditions to analyse Nigerian tobacco warnings, finding that governmental involvement in tobacco weakened the sincerity condition. Qadir (2022) found that Kurdish EFL learners used both explicit and implicit warnings depending on the situation, employing verbal and non-verbal strategies. Bataineh and Aljamal (2014) found cross-cultural similarities in warning strategies among Jordanian EFL learners and American undergraduates.

3.2. Studies in Arabic Contexts

Research on Arabic warnings is limited. Alhabuobi (2021) analysed COVID-19 awareness messages issued by the Saudi Ministry of Health and found that Twitter messages used strong illocutionary force through imperatives. Dishar and Qassim (2022) examined Arabic health proverbs and found that warnings were conveyed indirectly through declaratives, reflecting cultural norms favouring subtlety.

Three gaps emerge from the reviewed literature. First, most studies focus on institutional or educational contexts rather than naturally occurring digital warnings. Second, despite some cross-linguistic and Arabic-focused studies, no research has systematically investigated warning strategies produced by Arabic speakers in urgent, high-risk digital contexts. Third, little attention has been paid to the pragmatic structure of victim-generated warnings on social media.

To address these gaps, the present study investigates how Saudi users employ X to warn the public about ticket scams during Riyadh Season. Drawing on Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the study answers the following research questions:

1. How do Saudi warnings relate to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face and the use of politeness strategies in managing face-threatening acts?
2. To what extent do these warning messages satisfy Searle's (1969) felicity conditions for the speech act of warning, and are these conditions realised explicitly or implicitly in digital discourse?

The study contributes to the growing field of Arabic digital pragmatics and enriches broader research on online fraud communication.

3. Methodology

The present research forms part of a broader project that investigates warning messages issued by victims to alert the public about phishing accounts during Riyadh Season, as well as the linguistic strategies employed by fraudulent accounts to deceive individuals through the sale of fake tickets. This study focuses specifically on the former aspect.

This study adopts a pragmatic, qualitative approach to provide an in-depth exploration of digital warning discourse within a specific sociocultural context. Focusing on a national event such as Riyadh Season is particularly meaningful, as this occasion generates intensive digital interaction and offers a rich arena for high-stakes public warning exchanges. These warning messages are directed at a public that shares common linguistic and cultural norms, making this context especially suitable for examining how pragmatic strategies—such as constructing urgency and establishing credibility—are employed in real-time digital discourse.

3.1. Data Source and Corpus Construction

To access Saudi users' warning discourse, data collection was essential. The primary data source for this research is X (formerly known as Twitter). As a widely used platform, Twitter provides real-time data and valuable insights into online social behaviours and public responses to various events and trends, making it a key resource for analyzing public discourse and social interaction (Alayyash & Althobaiti, 2023). The selection of Twitter for this study is based on two main factors: first, its widespread popularity among the Saudi speech community (Global Media Insight, 2024); and second, its recognized use as a virtual research platform in academic studies (Ismail et al., 2025).

Data were obtained from a commercially available service called *Trackmyhashtag* (2023). *Trackmyhashtag* utilises the Application Programming Interface (API) of X to retrieve historical data associated with any hashtag or search term. The data collection was initiated in October 2023, focusing on hashtags and keywords **(see Table 1**) originating from Saudi Arabia and posted between October 2022 and March 2023. These dates were selected for two main reasons: (1) they coincide with the beginning and end of Riyadh Season, thereby capturing all festivals and events associated with this national celebration; and (2) they typically generate a wide range of online public interactions, particularly those that may reveal suspicious activities related to fake accounts during this period.

Table 1: List of hashtags used to collect the dataset

Hashtag	English translation
#موسم_الرياض	#Riyadh Season
#بوليفارد_وورلد	#Boulevard World
#بوليفارد_رياض _ستي	#Boulevard Riyadh City
# موسم الرياض_ 2022	#Riyadh season 2022
#عيشها	#Enjoy

A total of 9,590 Arabic posts were retrieved (see **Table 2**)

Table 2. Total Number of Extracted Arabic Posts

Distribution of data			
Images	**Videos**	**Texts (tweets, Retweets, Quotes)**	**Total**
2638	1492	5460	9590

3.2. Sampling and Filtering

The second phase involved manually filtering the entire dataset. Upon close examination, it became evident that the initially extracted data were insufficient. As a result, an additional round of data collection was carried out in November 2023, using the same date range as before. To enrich the dataset, more specific keywords and hashtags related to Riyadh Season tickets and ticket scams were incorporated (see **Table 3**). These refined keywords and trending hashtags were instrumental in identifying fraudulent accounts, as they frequently appeared in victims' negative experiences. This phase laid the groundwork for the second part of the research (in progress), facilitating the linguistic analysis of the various deceptive strategies employed by scammers

Table 3. Hashtags used in the Second Phase of Data Collection

Hashtag	English translation
# تذاكر موسم _الرياض	#Riyadh Season Tickets
#تذاكر_بوليفارد	#Boulevard Tickets
#تذاكر_وهمية	#Fake tickets
#نصابين _التذاكر	#Ticket_scammers

A total of 305 texts (i.e. tweets,replies, and quotes) documenting Saudi victims' negative experiences with fraudulent accounts were collected (see **Table 4**).

Table 4. List of Tweets and Replies Obtained in the Third Phase of Data Collection

Distribution of data			
Images	**Videos**	**Texts (tweets, replies and quotes)**	**Total**
35	2	268	305

After exporting the dataset to Excel, the data were then manually filtered. The filtering process involved removing non-Arabic content, duplicate tweets, retweets, emojis, sensitive language, and any data originating from outside Saudi Arabia. The data retained for analysis was then organised into a Word table with three columns. The first column included the Arabic warning text itself, while the second column contained all the metadata related to each text, including the time of posting on X, the URL, the type of data (e.g., tweet, reply, or quote), and its corresponding number from the Excel sheet. If a fake account was mentioned, all relevant details about that account were recorded in the third column, such as its status (active, verified, or suspended) and a link to the account.

It is important to note that some warning texts also included images of fake accounts or videos of text conversations between victims and fraudulent accounts. These multimodal elements are particularly significant for the second part of the ongoing research (currently in progress), as they aid in identifying and analysing the strategies commonly employed by fraudsters when targeting their victims.

Therefore, after filtering the data, only 50 texts were included in the analysis, as shown in **Table 5** below.

Table 5. Data included in the analysis

Types of data			**Location**			
Tweets	Replies	Quotes	Saudi Arabia	Riyadh	Jeddah	Taif
17	25	8	25	20	3	2

Therefore, the current dataset constitutes a purposive sample (Sibona, Walczak, & White Baker, 2020) for two main reasons. First, the warnings were purposively collected from Saudi X users specifically discussing ticket fraud during Riyadh Season and were matched with pre-defined hashtags and keywords. Second, such small-scale purposive sampling is common and appropriate in digital discourse research (Olajimbiti, 2022), where the primary analytical focus is on naturally occurring contextualised language and how meaning is pragmatically constructed.

3.3. Analytical Frameworks

The present study adopts Searle's (1969, 1976) felicity conditions as an analytical framework for identifying and classifying 'warning' speech acts in the dataset, alongside Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model. Searle's felicity conditions are employed for several reasons. First, as a core component of Searle's Speech Act Theory, they specify the necessary elements for a pragmatically successful warning, including the propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential rules (see 2.1). Second, Searle's theoretical paradigm enables a systematic distinction between direct and indirect warnings by determining whether each condition fulfils the illocutionary criteria of a warning explicitly or implicitly, thereby strengthening the reliability and transparency of the classification. Third, it allows for the consistent analysis of borderline cases, such as those in which a warning is embedded within another speech act (e.g., accusation, advice). Fourth, applying this framework to the analysis of Arabic digital discourse offers a systematic method for evaluating the pragmatic effectiveness of warnings, while also contributing a novel methodological approach to the limited body of research on Arabic social media discourse.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model is also adopted for two main reasons. First, its systematic and comprehensive classification of politeness strategies provides a clear and well-established analytical framework. Second, its demonstrated

applicability across languages and cultures (Bataineh & Aljamal, 2014; Ninomiya, Ono, & Umarova, 2023) makes it a valuable tool for examining how politeness operates in Arabic digital discourse.

As part of the analytical process, each text was assigned a unique identifier (e.g., T4) representing its position in the dataset, which is used for reference in the results section.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Twitter data are publicly accessible (Zimmer & Proferes, 2014) and may therefore be reproduced as originally written. Accordingly, the dataset in this study was quoted verbatim, as paraphrasing could distort or weaken the pragmatic analysis—particularly in relation to how directness and urgency are conveyed in the warning messages. In parallel, users' anonymity and confidentiality were protected by removing usernames and any identifiable profile details (Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Klassen & Fiesler, 2022). In certain instances, however, fake or fraudulent accounts were referenced in order to support users' accusations, especially when those accounts had already been suspended or deleted. In the second phase of the study—which examines the deceptive strategies of fraudulent accounts impersonating official ticket vendors—account information was retained to support the analysis. It is important to note that most of these accounts had already been deactivated or removed due to their involvement in fraudulent activity.

5. Results

The results section is organised into two subsections aligned with the research questions.

5.1. How do Saudi warnings relate to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face and the use of politeness strategies in managing face-threatening acts?

Table 6 summarises the distribution of politeness strategies used by Saudi X users when issuing warnings about ticket scammers. Bald-on-record strategies, as shown in Table 6, are the most recurrent pattern, appearing in 68% (n = 34) of all warnings. Such direct and unmitigated forms reflect Saudi X users' preference for urgency and clarity over politeness, indicating a collective orientation toward public safety. A smaller number of warnings combine bald-on-record with positive or negative politeness, while off-record and other mixed strategies appear only infrequently.

Table 6. Distribution of politeness strategies used by Saudi X users

Politeness Strategy	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Bald-on-record	34	68%
Bald-on-record + Positive politeness	7	14%
Bald-on-record + Negative politeness	3	6%
Positive + Negative politeness	1	2%
Positive + Off-record	1	2%
Off-record	4	8%
Total	50	100%

5.1.1. Bald-on-record

Bald-on-record dominates the dataset (68%, n= 34), reflecting a preference for clarity and urgency over mitigation in high-risk contexts. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion that efficiency is prioritised over politeness, whereby speakers perform FTAs without mitigation or redressive action in order to ensure that the warning is interpreted as urgent. For example:

لا أحد يشتري منه، ترى يبيع تذاكر مزورة@Alsoor124

laā aḥad yashtariī minhu, taraā yibīʿ tadhaākir muzawar a[2]
No one should buy from him. He sells fake tickets. (T4)

5.1.1.1. Bald-on-record with positive politeness

A limited number of cases (n = 7, 14%) combine **directness and clarity** with **positive politeness** by employing in-group identity markers, involving both the speaker and the hearer in the warning, and by noticing and attending to the hearers' needs. These strategies promote vigilance, encourage collective responsibility, and foster protective action for the safety of the wider community. The following example illustrates the simultaneous use of three positive politeness strategies within a single warning message.

يا اخوان هذي الحسابين اضافة مع نصابين التذاكر اتمنى تحذرون الناس اللي تعرفوهم @aroatyy @frzan112
yaā ikhwaān hādhiī alḥisaābayn iḍaāfa[2] maʿ naṣṣaābaīn aa-tadhākir
atamannaā tuḥadhdhiruūn aa-naās illiī taʿrifuūhum @aroatyy @frzan112
O brothers, these two accounts @aroatyy @frzan112 are also among the ticket scammers.I hope you warn the people you know. (T. 37)

5.1.1.2. Bald-on-record with negative politeness

Negative politeness, accompanied by a bald-on-record strategy, represents only 6% of the dataset (n = 3). This combination conveys an urgent public concern while maintaining a degree of indirectness to reduce the potential face-threatening act (FTA). In these cases, the user issues a direct warning but frames the fraudulent behaviour in generalized terms, thereby softening the accusation and displaying caution. This reflects the use of negative politeness**,** which mitigates imposition and avoids explicitly blaming a specific individual, as illustrated in the example below:

انتبهو من نصابين التذاكر، مزوره ولا مبيوعة على كذا شخص
intabihuū min naṣṣābiīn aa-tadhaākir, muzawura wa-lā mabīʿah ʿala kadhaā shakhṣ
Watch out for ticket scammers. The tickets are either fake or sold to multiple people. (T. 8)

5.1.2. Off-record

Off-record strategies occur in a small proportion of the dataset (4 cases, 8%), indicating that while warnings are sometimes expressed in an indirect, implicit, or ambiguous manner to protect the hearer's face, such instances are relatively rare. This strategy allows the interpretation of the message to remain open, giving the hearer the opportunity to infer the speaker's intent without experiencing direct imposition. For example:

وانا أشوف نصابين التذاكر وهم يغيرون أفتاراتهم وهم مفضوحين مفضوحين لو ايش يسوون
wanaā ashuūf naṣṣābīn at-tadhaākir wa hum yughayyiruūn afataāraāthum wa hum mafḍuūḥīn mafḍuūḥīn law ish yisawwuūn

I keep seeing ticket scammers changing their profile pictures—they are exposed, exposed no matter what they do. (T. 39)

Overall, Saudi X users show a clear preference for bald-on-record warnings (88%, n = 44), highlighting urgency over mitigation, and the next section examines whether these warnings conform to Searle's (1969) felicity conditions.

5.2. To what extent do Saudi X users' warning messages satisfy Searle's (1969) felicity conditions for the speech act of warning, and are these conditions realised explicitly or implicitly in digital discourse?

Searle's (1969) felicity condition framework holds that a warning is pragmatically valid only if it satisfies four core requirements: (1) propositional content (the utterance refers to a future event that is potentially harmful to the hearer); (2) Preparatory (the speaker believes the event is likely to occur and that the hearer would wish to avoid it); (3) Sincerity (the speaker genuinely believes the event will negatively affect the hearer); and (4) essential (the act constitutes an assertion that the event is not in the hearer's best interests).

By applying this framework, the present analysis examines the extent to which each warning text fulfils the pragmatic criteria for a successful and valid warning, and whether these conditions are realised explicitly or implicitly. **Table 7** presents the distribution of felicity conditions in Saudi digital warnings on X.

Table 7. Distribution of felicity conditions in Saudi digital warnings

Felicity Condition	Explicitly Met(n)	Implicitly Met (n)	Explicit %	Implicit %
Propositional Content	49	1	98%	2%
Preparatory	25	25	50%	50%
Sincerity	49	1	98%	2%
Essential	49	1	98%	2%

5.2.1. Propositional Content

The analysis showed that Propositional Content condition was explicitly realised in 98% (n = 49) of warnings; the harmful future event was directly stated. For example:

لا أحد يشتري منه، ترى يبيع تذاكر مزورة@Alsoor124

laā aḥad yishtariī minhu, taraā yibiīʿ tadhaākir mazwara[2] @Alsoor124

No one should buy from him; he sells fake tickets. (T. 3)

Only 2% (n = 1) were implicit, in which the harmful event was hinted at rather than directly expressed, often through sarcasm as clearly depicted in the example below;

نصابين التذاكر كيف ينامون ببال مرتاح
naṣṣaābīn a-ttadhaākir kayf yinaāmuūn bibaāl martaāḥ?
How do ticket scammers sleep with a clear conscience? (T.50)

5.2.2. Preparatory Condition

The Preparatory Condition displayed the most notable variation, with explicit and implicit forms occurring equally (50% each). For explicit forms, 50% of X users explicitly stated the reason of the harm as seen in the following example:

احذرك دائما ماتتعامل مع نصابين التذاكر، فيه عصابات نصابه هنا لذلك أحذر ولا تشتري من شخص مجهول

aḥaḏḏirk daāʾiman maā tataʿaāmal maʿa naṣṣaābīn a-ttadhaākir, fīih ʿiṣaābāt naṣṣaāba hinaā lidhaālik iḥdhar wa laā tashtariī min shakhs majhuūl

I always warn you never deal with ticket scammers. There are scam gangs here, so beware and do not buy from an unknown person. (T. 20).

By contrast, implicit warnings indirectly conveyed the warning through contextual hints as shown in the example below:

هذا الحساب نصاب @__Em_Aa_

haādhāa al-ḥisaāb naṣṣaāb @Em_Aa

This account is a scammer. @Em_Aa (T. 29)

5.2.3. The Sincerity Condition

The Sincerity Condition was explicitly fulfilled in 98% of cases (n = 49), where most X users' warnings conveyed the likelihood of future harm and were reinforced through oath formulas or first-hand experience. These elements strengthened the credibility of the warning, as illustrated in the following example:

اقسم بالله انه نصاب حولت له الفلوس والتذاكر مضروبه
uqsim billāh innahu naṣṣāb ḥawwalt lahu al-fulūs wa-al-tadhākir maḍrūba
I swear to God he is a scammer; I transferred him the money and the tickets were fake. (T. 45)

Only 2% of the data (n = 1) were implicit, where sincerity was inferred rather than explicitly stated.

5.2.4. The Essential Condition

Likewise, the **Essential Condition** was fulfilled explicitly in nearly all cases (98%, n = 49). Here, users explicitly framed the warning against scammers in order to protect the addressees from harm. This is clearly illustrated in the following example:

هذا الحساب يبيع تذاكر مزورة انتبهوا منه حسبي الله ونعم الوكيل فيه وصاحب الحساب ولد مو بنت

haādhaā al-ḥisaāb yabīʿ tadhaākir mozwurah intabihuū minh ḥasbīī allah waniʿma al-wakiīl fih wa ṣaāḥib al-ḥisaāb walad mu bint

This account sells fake tickets. Beware of it. May God hold him accountable; and the account's owner is a boy, not a girl. (T. 11)

In summary, the findings of the current study indicate that the majority of the warnings in the dataset explicitly fulfil Searle's (1969) felicity conditions. However, the variation in the preparatory condition may reflect a reliance on shared community knowledge within a collectivist cultural context, such as Saudi digital discourse, where in-group awareness reduces the need to overtly state preparatory reasoning.

6. Discussion

The present study undertook a pragmatic investigation of Saudi warning discourse on X regarding ticket scams during Riyadh Season. Two research questions guided the study, and this section presents the findings organised according to these questions.

6.1. How do Saudi warnings relate to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of face and the use of politeness strategies in managing face-threatening acts?

The findings revealed that bald-on-record strategies overwhelmingly dominated Saudi warning discourse (see Table 6), occurring in 44 instances (88%) either as stand-alone strategies (n = 34, 68%) or in combination with other politeness forms (n =10, 20%). The prevalence of direct, explicit, and unmitigated forms indicates that Saudi users prioritize urgency and clarity over face-saving considerations when delivering warnings about ticket scams to the wider Saudi community.

These results support previous findings (Qadir, 2022), which showed that bald-on-record strategies dominate among Kurdish EFL learners and are typically realised through declarative or imperative statements. However, they differ from Aljamal (2021), who found that positive politeness was the most frequent strategy (38.3%), followed by bald-on-record (23.4%) in informal, face-to-face Jordanian Arabic (JA) conversations. This variation can be explained by the nature of the data: the JA dataset involved intimate, naturally occurring conversations between interlocutors who shared close relationships, whereas the Saudi warnings were produced on X—a public platform—during high-risk contexts such as ticket scams. In such contexts, ambiguity could diminish the effectiveness of the warning, motivating users to issue direct, explicit, and urgent messages. Although both Saudi and Jordanian Arabic are collectivist cultures valuing solidarity, the medium and situational context crucially shape the choice of politeness strategy. In the JA data, solidarity was expressed through positive politeness; in contrast, in the Saudi data, directness itself functions as a caring and protective strategy.

Within this protective strategy, bald-on-record warnings can also serve as advice-giving acts, particularly when the speaker aims to protect the hearer from harm or loss. Advice-giving is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and constitutes an integral element of Islamic cultural norms. Qur'anic teachings emphasize the moral duty to promote good and prevent harm: *"And let there be among you a group inviting to virtue, commanding the good and forbidding evil – those indeed are the successful ones"* (Āl ʿImrān, 3:104). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad stated, *"Religion is sincere advice"* (Bukhari, 1993, vol. 1, p. 31). Consequently, directness in advice-giving or warning is widely accepted in Islamic and Arab societies (Alqarni, 2024), as it fulfills religious and communal responsibilities.

Saudi Arabia, as a collectivist society, prioritizes group harmony, mutual responsibility, and the protection of in-group members. In this context, bald-on-record warnings are often perceived as expressions of care and solidarity, aimed at safeguarding the community's welfare (Hosni, 2020). Such warnings may thus function as face-enhancing acts (FEAs**)** rather than face-threatening acts (FTAs**)** (Al-Shboul et al., 2012), reflecting both religious and collective obligations to protect others. This cultural and religious value placed on advice-giving helps explain the frequent use of bald-on-record strategies in the dataset.

While Brown and Levinson (1987) associate bald-on-record acts with power and imposition, in this dataset, the users' authority derived from technological evidence—such as screenshots, receipts, and call recordings—rather than institutional status. These multimodal features, though beyond the primary focus of this study, establish what Inwood and Zappavigna (2024) term "technological authority," which strengthens the warning's credibility and persuasive impact.

Nearly all bald-on-record warnings in the dataset were accompanied by such multimodal elements—images of fake accounts, counterfeit tickets, or proof of transactions. These features enhanced the illocutionary force of the warnings by providing verifiable proof. Hence, although Brown and Levinson (1987) viewed bald-on-record acts as maximally face-threatening, in the Saudi context they serve a face-protective function, reflecting religious duty, moral responsibility, and digital solidarity in safeguarding others.

6.2. To what extent do Saudi X users' warning messages satisfy Searle's (1969) felicity conditions for the speech act of warning, and are these conditions realised explicitly or implicitly in digital discourse?

The findings showed that Saudi X users overwhelmingly construct warning messages that satisfy Searle's (1969) felicity conditions for a valid warning act (see Table 7). The high explicit realisation of the Propositional Content, Sincerity, and Essential conditions (98%) suggests that Saudi users treat ticket-scamming warnings as high-stakes, socially consequential acts in which explicitness, directness, and clarity are vital. Such explicit realisation functions as a protective strategy, strengthening the illocutionary force and minimizing misinterpretation. This aligns with previous studies (Song, 1995; Alhabuobi, 2021), which found that explicitness enhances the credibility and pragmatic effectiveness of warnings.

The equal distribution of explicit and implicit realisations in the Preparatory Condition (50% each) indicates that Saudi users rely heavily on shared community knowledge. The risk of fraud is already familiar to users, making explicit elaboration unnecessary. In collectivist digital cultures, repeated exposure to similar scams creates a shared commonsense understanding of danger. These findings therefore support Searle's (1969) claim that felicity conditions may be inferred when background knowledge is mutually shared. Likewise, Bataineh and Aljamal (2014) found that Jordanian speakers often depend on shared cultural knowledge when performing face-threatening acts, especially in familiar risk situations.

Overall, these results demonstrate that Searle's framework is applicable to Arabic digital discourse. Explicitness in warnings is not merely a linguistic preference but a context-bound pragmatic tool that ensures efficient communication on rapid, public, and time-sensitive platforms like X (Alayyash & Althobaiti, 2023).

Taken together, the findings reveal that politeness strategies, and felicity conditions function as interconnected pragmatic mechanisms. Imperative structures strengthen illocutionary force, bald-on-record strategies prioritize clarity and urgency, and felicity conditions ensure credibility and pragmatic validity. Collectively, these elements demonstrate that Saudi digital warnings represent intentional, context-sensitive acts designed for communal protection rather than random stylistic variation.

7. Conclusion

The study has some limitations that open avenues for future research. First, the sample size was relatively small (50 Arabic texts) and was drawn exclusively from X. Consequently, this limits the generalizability of the findings, as the warning discourse produced by Saudi citizens in the dataset may not represent the broader population of Saudi users on X. It is also important to note that the relatively small number of warning texts may align with what was discussed in the literature review—namely, that individuals who have experienced fraud are often reluctant to report such incidents due to feelings of self-blame and shame (Meikle & Cross, 2024; Koning, Junger, & Veldkamp, 2025). Nonetheless, the qualitative analysis and contextual depth of the data offer valuable insights into how Saudi X users pragmatically construct digital warnings under high-risk, time-sensitive conditions. Therefore, future research could expand the dataset to include different platforms, languages, and user groups to yield more comprehensive or contrasting results.

Second, the present study is limited to Arabic written texts, which lack multimodal features typically present in spoken discourse—such as intonation, facial expressions, and body language—that often enhance or shape the delivery of warnings. Future research could explore naturally occurring spoken interactions, where both verbal and non-verbal cues contribute to the pragmatic realisation of warning speech acts.

The findings also have several practical implications. First, the analysis of Saudi users' warning discourse—especially when accompanied by screenshots and other evidence—complements the efforts of official anti-fraud initiatives. Such user-generated

warnings can assist authorities in developing more responsive and targeted interventions to combat online scams. Second, the linguistic and pragmatic warning strategies identified here can enhance digital literacy campaigns by promoting effective fraud awareness communication and encouraging civic engagement in fraud detection and prevention. Third, these findings hold relevance for the General Entertainment Authority, which could adopt user-inspired discourse strategies to strengthen risk communication and counter fraudulent ticket sales on social media platforms.

Finally, this study highlights the dual role of social media: as a space of risk—where scammers exploit trust and impersonate legitimate entities—and as a space of protection, where victims and users collaboratively issue warnings, share information, and cultivate a collective defense against fraud.

Funding: This research received no external funding.
Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.
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Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of her affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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