
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Conceptual Comparative Socio-Pragmatic Study of Congratulatory Strategies employed by University Students: Evidence from Jordan and Saudi Arabia

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| ABSTRACT

Positive emotions and good wishes are key elements in interpersonal communication in all cultures. In this regard, congratulatory speech acts have been identified as significant in building relationships and maintaining harmonious communication. However, congratulatory strategies in Arabic cultures have not been fully investigated. This study aims to provide a conceptual socio-pragmatic analysis of congratulatory strategies used by Jordanian and Saudi university students. This study attempts to revisit congratulatory speech acts in Jordanian and Saudi cultures by using Elwood's (2004) framework for a comparative analysis. This study attempts to provide a conceptual analysis of similarities and differences in congratulatory strategies used in Jordanian and Saudi cultures rather than focusing on statistical differences. This study aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of congruence and incongruence in congratulatory strategies used in Jordanian and Saudi cultures and contribute to the theoretical debate in speech act realization in culturally similar but socially different groups.

| KEYWORDS

Congratulatory strategies, Saudis, Jordanians, pragmatics, sociolinguistics

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Many researchers have studied the congratulatory speech act; still, none of them have compared Jordanian and Saudi congratulations. The purpose of this study is to examine such results that can aid both societies in fully comprehending the differences in congratulatory strategies that they utilize to promote their mutual understanding. As they have the opportunity to develop their communication, it can help them to be more satisfied in their interactions. Blum-Kulka (1991) and Kasper and Dahl (1991) highlighted that cross-cultural studies, the investigation of the similarities and differences among the speech acts of societies, gained much attention in the scope of linguistics and applied linguistics. The differences between cultures direct the interactional style of the societies in preference for a variety of speech act performances to shed light on the significance of speech appropriateness. As Vygotsky (1978) claimed, investigating sociocultural phenomena requires a precise understanding that the context is linked to that phenomenon.

Every society has its own culture that makes it different from others; thus, one society's congratulatory styles and strategies are undoubtedly distinct from those of other cultures. That being said, misunderstanding the congratulatory expressions is highly expected. As a result, the interactant has to know how to congratulate people from other cultures based on the addressee's cultural background (Liao 2000; Grossi, 2009). Moreover, interpersonal relationships can be harmonized if the addressers fail to take into consideration the cultural differences.

Although many studies examined congratulatory strategies in various cultures, the majority agreed that the forms of congratulatory strategies vary from one culture to another. It was clear that congratulatory forms seem to be used more often in one language than in another. Thus, understanding the cultural context of the addressees is vital to employing congratulatory strategies more effectively in interaction. This study seeks to elucidate the basic role of congratulatory strategies to avoid harming the addressee's face by explaining the similarities and differences between Jordanian and Saudi congratulations. This study looks at how Jordanians and Saudis use congratulatory techniques in their contacts in order to highlight the contrasts and similarities between the two cultures in their use of these strategies.

1.1 Research Problem

Although several studies have investigated congratulatory strategies in Arabic Speaking-societies, none have compared Jordanian and Saudi speech acts of congratulations. As a result, this study is conducted to highlight significant contributions by investigating this problem and highlighting the possible similarities and differences between the two groups. Although the two groups are Arab, it is expected that they employ different congratulatory strategies based on their cultural perspectives. Moreover, they speak different dialects of Arabic that definitely illustrate various expressions and phrases they use in their congratulatory strategies.

Delving into the precise meaning of the congratulatory strategies employed by Jordanians and Saudis demonstrates the preferred congratulatory strategies they desire to use in their speeches. Understanding those strategies helps both groups to have successful communication. Thus, examining this problem is necessary for them because they have continual interaction in their work and visits to each other. Several benefits are expected to be revealed by this study that guide future researchers conduct in-depth analyses of specific expressions used by both groups, focusing on their semantic meaning to classify them as synonyms or antonyms in their vernacular languages.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What congratulatory speech act strategies are used by Jordanian and Saudi university students in graduation contexts?
2. What similarities and differences are there in the use and distribution of these strategies by the two groups of students?
3. What are the possible sociocultural factors that could influence the use of these strategies?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To develop an understanding of congratulatory speech acts in terms of socio-pragmatic theory in Arabic-speaking societies.
2. To investigate the possibility of intra-Arab variation in the performance of congratulatory strategies between Jordanian and Saudi Arabian societies.
3. To critically re-evaluate the taxonomic model proposed by Elwood (2004), in consideration of pragmatic practices in culturally specific societies.
4. To contribute to the theoretical debate on speech act variation in culturally similar societies

1.4 Hypotheses of the study

This study proposes the following hypotheses to answer the research questions:

- A. The frequency of particular strategies of congratulation is expected to vary between the two groups of students: the Jordanian ones and the Saudi ones.
- B. The influence of sociocultural factors is expected on the selection of strategies of congratulation in the two groups.
- C. Variation is expected in the pragmatic realization of congratulatory speech acts in the two groups of speakers, despite the linguistic similarities between them.

1.5 Limitations

The present study has a number of limitations, which are mainly related to the broader sociocultural context. Firstly, the present study has focused only on the students of the university in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This might not represent the broader sociocultural context of other Arabic communities. Secondly, the present study has focused only on the congratulatory speech acts in the context of graduation at the university. This might have a different pragmatic implication in different sociocultural contexts. Thirdly, the present study has focused only on the students of the university, which might have a different sociocultural implication for different educational or age groups. Therefore, the present study should be interpreted in the above-mentioned broader sociocultural context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Socio-Pragmatic Past Studies on Saudi Society

Saudi society has previously been the subject of numerous socio-pragmatic studies. One study published by Alrawi (2023) examined the criticism strategies used by Saudis in their interactions. Data was gathered via the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The study revealed that indirect strategies are utilized more than direct ones in Saudi criticism. The most frequently used strategy was Preaching, and for three reasons: the socio-cultural belief that employing indirectness is a kind of treating close and non-close people politely, the religious nature, and the general tendency of Arabs to use indirect strategies are thought to be behind these results. The socio-pragmatic functions of ostensible commissives among Saudis were examined by Al-Zubeiry and Alzahrani (2025). They investigated the speech act of invitations and offers. They found that there are eight core communicative functions: expressing gratitude and appreciation, signaling welcome, softening embarrassment, demonstrating courtesy and politeness, acknowledging familiarity, easing conversation endings, alleviating social discomfort, and conveying sympathy and concern.

The speech act of request in American English and the Saudi variety of Arabic was examined by Alaboudi (2020), who also used a DCT to collect data from 30 American English and Saudi Arabian interactants. The analytical framework of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) was adopted to analyze the data according to the three levels of directness. The results found that Saudis were more direct than Americans in their requests.

Altheeby (2018) explored notable pragmatic similarities and differences in requests and refusals across English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) groups. The study examined the speech acts of requests and refusals in English among those groups in contrast with British native speakers of English (NSE). The results showed that, in terms of directness, politeness norms, and modifications, ESL and NSE groups exhibited more similarities when compared to the EFL group. The impact of socio-pragmatic thanking expressions in political speeches, based on the socio-cultural specificity of the two language communities, was investigated by Mohammed (2020). He revealed that the direct influence of social situations on creating thanking expressions in both languages plays a vital role in the participants' speeches.

Politeness in the Najdi Arabic speakers' invitation was examined by Alsmay (2022). He concentrated on the socio-pragmatic parameters of gender, social distance, and the formality/informality of the speech event affecting strategy selection and modes of delivery. The results showed that the level of formality/informality of the invitational situation identifies the way invitations are formed, either textually or digitally, notwithstanding social distance and gender. Moreover, it was noted that indirectness is not universally paralleled with politeness since Najdi Arabic speakers reveal a tendency toward directness and imposition to convey interest in and affiliation with the invitee.

The pragmatic comparison of compliments and compliment responses between Egyptians and Saudi Arabs was examined by El-Dakhs (2021). In this study, 443 Egyptian and 428 Saudi undergraduates were requested to complete discourse completion tasks. The results indicated a significant difference in politeness management between Egyptian and Saudi youth. It was clear that Egyptians produced more explicit compliment strategies, and Saudis showed a stronger preference for implicit compliment strategies and combination patterns.

2.2 Socio-Pragmatic Past Studies on Jordanian Society

The congratulatory strategies outlined in the graduation notebooks for undergraduate students at Jerash University were examined by Al-Natour et al. (2025). The study's findings showed that students used a variety of congratulatory strategies, including congratulatory statements, compliments, expressions of happiness, good wishes, and the ability to give presents. Akkawi et al. (2025) explored the positive politeness strategies used in requests by Jordanian and Omani students within an academic setting. They aimed to identify the preferred strategies students used when communicating with classmates. The results indicated that Jordanian students primarily employed four positive politeness strategies: providing reasons, showing concern for the listener's wants, making promises, and emphasizing in-group identity. Conversely, Omani students utilized five different positive strategies: giving reasons, assuming reciprocity, offering sympathy, using hedging, and seeking agreement.

The speech act of offering in Jordanian Arabic was examined by Haddad (2023). The results of the data analysis indicated the primary role in choosing the politeness modification strategy in Jordanian culture. The most frequently encountered offering strategy in the three corpora was the direct offer strategy. Bader and Ma'ali (2025) aimed to identify the obstacles faced by women entrepreneurs in managing their small enterprises and the predictive ability of career counseling in reducing these obstacles. They found that an effective tool in reducing these obstacles is career counseling. It helped to provide administrative and financial knowledge that enhances entrepreneurs' marketing and sales skills and supports strategic decision-making.

Alazzam (2021) investigated verbal disagreement strategies used in Jordanian Arabic and sought to determine the politeness strategies used for showing verbal disagreement. Eleven strategies were employed by those who speak Jordanian Arabic in their daily interactions to show verbal disagreement, and the degree of directness was varied in the utilized strategies, explicitness, and

face-aggravating. Similarly, Jordanians tend to employ various politeness strategies to mitigate the other party's face. Saideen et al. (2024) investigated the methods used to translate the Jordanian movie *The Alleys* from the Jordanian vernacular variety into English, paying close attention to swear words and culture-specific items (CSIs). The study revealed that language may deliberately and artistically be changed to convey underlying ideas, emotions, and cultural settings. The same speech act of disagreement was examined by Al-Hawamdeh et al. (2025). The participants of the study were students and their professors in an academic setting. They concentrated on the disagreement strategies employed by Jordanian students and their professors during classroom interactions at Jerash University in Jordan. They sought to highlight an important hypothesis they were going to examine. First, that students and professors share common disagreement strategies; and second, that professors employ different strategies compared to students due to their higher status. It was expected that the findings might serve as a basis for future research on politeness strategies and their implications in cross-cultural academic settings.

Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Al-Natour et al. (2024) investigated the positive politeness strategies used by English professors towards their students. The analyses of the data helped in presenting the positive politeness strategies used by the professors. Eight positive politeness strategies were preferred by professors with their students. The most preferred strategy was the positive politeness strategy, because it is used to inspire students to feel comfortable and participate in their classes. It helped professors to minimize the distance while communicating with their students, making them feel closer to one another. Al-Eer (2025) conducted an in-depth study into the use of positive politeness agreement strategies among Jordanian EFL students and their professors. They expected to outline the most common and culturally salient positive politeness agreement strategies employed by both participant groups, providing significant understanding into the sociolinguistic dynamics of educational institutions in Jordan.

The usage of terms of address by Jordanian students was examined by Al-Natour et al. (2024). The study revealed that Jordanian students desired to use terms of address in their interactions. They are cautious about using them to soften their speech with others. Moreover, their comprehension of using them is to save the face of the receivers of their speeches. The results of the study show that they use them to be polite, whether the act is achieved or not. Additionally, participants are impacted by social and cultural norms in Jordanian society when they use terms of address in their interactions. Alarsan and Khan (2025) sought to conduct a thorough investigation, translation, and transliteration of multi-word expressions (MWEs) commonly found within the Arabic language and Jordan's cultural landscape. They focused on idiomatic expressions and proverbs. Their investigation highlights the intricate connection between language and culture, demonstrating that the complexity found in Jordanian Arabic's idiomatic and proverbial phrases extends beyond vocabulary and provides insights into the collective knowledge and perspective.

2.3 Socio-Pragmatic Past Studies on Congratulatory Strategies

The significance of congratulations motivated numerous researchers from different cultures to investigate it. Elwood (2004) explored one of the most recognized studies on the congratulatory speech act when she investigated the American and Japanese congratulatory strategies. She stated that there are various strategies for congratulations in her framework. Accepting, mitigating, rejecting, no-response, and requesting interpretation are the five primary strategies she classified congratulatory responses into. This study adopts her analytical framework to analyze the Jordanian and Saudi congratulatory strategies. To indicate the importance of this study and distinguish it from previous studies, several prior studies will be reviewed to highlight the gaps they did not address. One of these studies, conducted by Ammari et al. (2024), examined the features of Jordanian social media users who congratulate each other. They revealed that the delivery of congratulations and happiness is interposed in one word, "Allah," and some prayers. Al-Natour (2025) stated that Jordanian students used different congratulatory strategies in the notebook congratulations, such as congratulatory statements, happiness clauses, compliments, good wishes, and the ability to attach presents.

Abu Manie et al. (2025) investigated the preferred strategies of congratulation and politeness utilized by users of Facebook during the royal wedding of Prince Hussain. They concluded that Facebook users used the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) in their congratulations. Determining the linguistic and non-linguistic responses to congratulations by Saudi Facebook users was examined by Mahzari (2017). The congratulatory strategies most often used by them were congratulations, offers of good wishes, praise, and statements indicating the situation was warranted. Migdadi et al. (2024) investigated childbirth congratulations by Jordanian Facebook users. They stated that Jordanian Facebook users were impacted in their congratulations by their religious and socio-cultural norms and conventions.

Al-Hour (2019) sought to investigate positive politeness and gender differences in the speech act of congratulation in Palestinian society. She concluded that giving gifts to the hearer was the most highly employed positive politeness strategy. The congratulatory term "congratulations" was utilized frequently by both males and females. Fathoni et al. (2025) focused on various speech acts such as congratulations, condolences, and happiness. They demonstrated that the interlocutors were employed as instruments for social cohesiveness and to build public relations in their management. Semiotic research was conducted by Al-

Khatib (1997) for the terms of congratulation and thank you among Jordanian and Egyptian Arabic societies. It was discovered that both societies used the same announcements, reflecting their cultures, religions, and social backgrounds.

Malik et al. (2021) examined the impact of social distance factors on congratulatory strategies among Pakistani English as a second language (ESL) learners and British English speakers. According to the analysis of the data, the students employ different congratulatory strategies based on their cultural background. Emery (2000) sought to examine various speech acts such as greeting, congratulating, and commiserating in Omani Arabic. The majority of Omani dialectical groups used "home-grown" terms in contrast to the elderly Omani, who were less open to the pan-Arabic influence. Additionally, the joyful Facebook status was investigated by Saleem and Yasmin (2024). They found that a variety of congratulatory strategies were adopted by Pakistani users. They preferred to use them for the function of the illocutionary force indicating device (IFID).

Alqahtani (2015) examined asking for a favor. This study sought to explore whether the level of imposition affects the Saudi Arabian favor. It was found that the Saudis preferred to be indirect, although they asked for a favor more directly. Najdi Arabic is one of the dialects of Saudi Arabic that was investigated by Al-Rojaie (2021). He found that religious expressions played a crucial role in their interactions. The word "Allah" serves a variety of pragmatic functions.

Congratulatory strategies in computer-mediated social networks were examined by Minoo Alemi et al. (2021). The study investigated the utilization of congratulatory strategies in English and Persian speeches. The study revealed that the speakers were influenced by various categories that encouraged them to employ different congratulatory strategies. Congratulatory strategies used by Jordanians on a royal birthday Facebook status were studied by Al-Shboul et al. (2022). They concluded that proverbs and an illocutionary force-indicator device (IFID) were the preferred strategies by Jordanians. Aziz (2024) investigated congratulations among Iraqi undergraduate students. She disclosed that saying congratulations, giving good wishes, expressing happiness, using jokes, mentioning the reason, asking for information or details, and giving compliments and encouragement were the strategies that they utilized in their interactions.

Celaya et al. (2019) found that younger learners lean towards using units that focus on themselves rather than on the interlocutor, whereas older learners, who are more proficient, use categories that directly involve the interlocutor, as expected in this speech act. Hambali, Risdianto, and Rahma (2024) showed that seven types of expressive speech acts were utilized by the commenters, such as 26 expressions of sorrow, four expressions of congratulating, two expressions of thanking, 13 expressions of praising, four expressions of happiness, and one expression of blaming and regretting. Comparing congratulatory speech in Javanese and Sundanese and the influence of culture on the congratulatory strategies examined by Nofendralova and Sartini (2024). The expression of surprise was the most frequently utilized strategy. IFID was the second strategy used by the interlocutors. The influence of Islamic culture in Indonesia was a remark in the act of congratulating among the interactants.

Alghazo et al. (2021) inspected the pragmalinguistic manifestations of congratulatory strategies by Kabyle and Jordanian Arabic (JA) according to the usage of congratulatory strategies in their speeches. Such differences in the use of congratulatory strategies between the two groups were observed. Gender differences played a crucial role in their employment of congratulatory strategies, and some of Elwood's (2004) congratulatory strategies were not utilized by Kabyle and Jordanian Arabic (JA). Vahid Dastjerdi and Nasri (2012) investigated the cross-cultural differences regarding the congratulatory speech act among different societies. They declared that there are such differences and similarities in terms of the strategies that the societies utilized. Analysis of the data revealed several similarities and differences among the three groups, which will have implications for researchers as well as language teachers.

Eshreteh (2022) examined the congratulatory speech act used by Palestinian Facebook users. The illocutionary force indicating device (IFID) was clearly favored by Palestinian users. Furthermore, giving a gift to the listener, exaggeration, and in-group identity markers were their most commonly used strategies. Al-Janabi and Al-Tememi (2021) studied congratulatory strategies employed by English and Arabic officials. They analyzed the pragma-stylistic features of illocutionary acts and FSA politeness strategies used by the interlocutors. They found that English congratulators tended to use assertive strategies, while Arabic congratulators preferred expressive strategies.

Keshishian (2018) examined the congratulations among Lebanese Arabic and English speakers based on the politeness strategies they used at university. It was concluded that Lebanese students employed 13 different congratulatory strategies in their interactions. In contrast, Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), expression of happiness, expression of validation, and offer of good wishes were the most frequently used strategies among the English speakers.

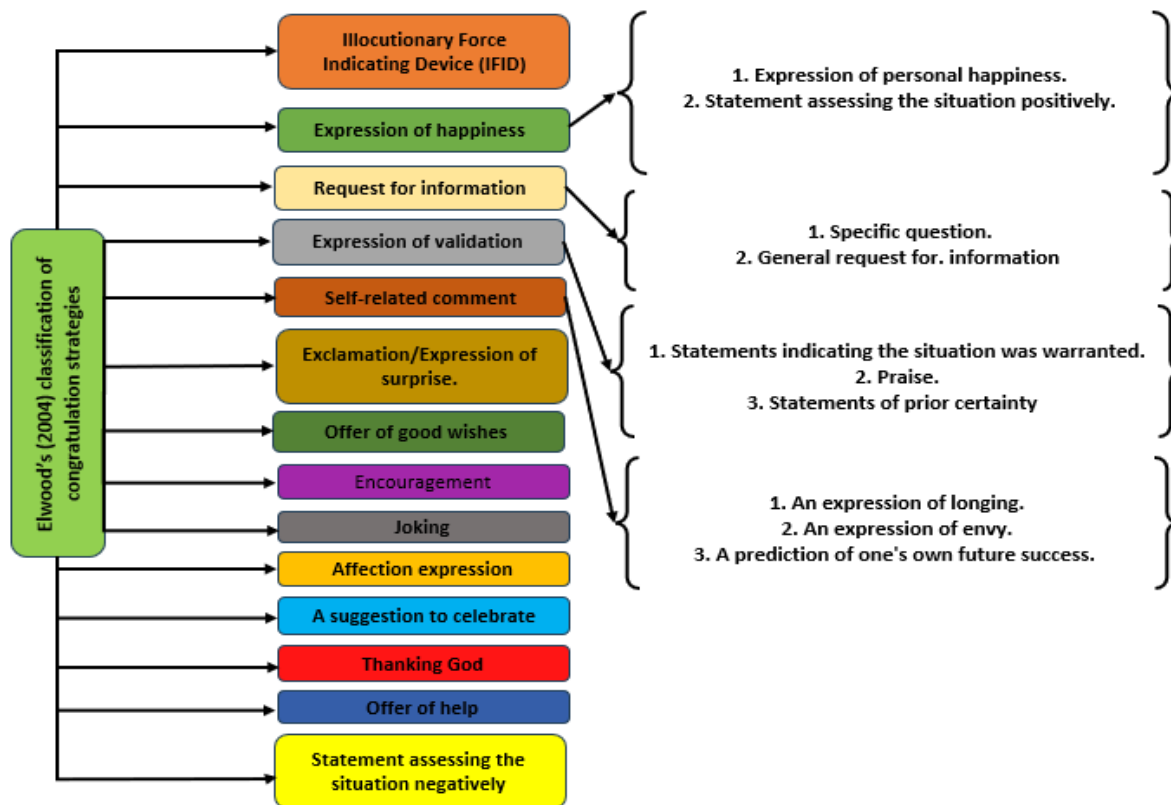
Jalal (2022) evaluated the speech act of congratulating in Moroccan Arabic and its expression on social media. It was revealed that politeness in congratulatory messages in Moroccan society was used to keep communication smooth and avoid conflict and friction. Ahmed and Hammadi (2020) investigated congratulatory messages on social media. Typical expressions, religious expressions, pride, invocation, repetition, compliments, wishes, and emoticons were the most frequently used congratulatory strategies in Moroccan Arabic. Thanking strategies utilized by native speakers of Saudi Hijazi Arabic in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

were examined by Alahmadi (2025). The results showed that Saudi speakers preferred to use various strategies such as simple thanking, religious formulas, and expressions of positive feelings. They expressed their gratitude by producing longer utterances that include compliments.

2.4 Analytical Framework

Congratulations can be examined from various aspects such as politeness, language competency, and cultural factors. This study followed Elwood’s (2004) taxonomy of congratulatory strategies. Within these strategies, some sub-strategies relate to the remarks made by congratulators. Figure 1 illustrates these strategies and their sub-strategies to clarify their importance.

Figure 1. Elwood’s (2004) Classification of Congratulatory Strategies



As illustrated in Figure 1, Elwood (2004) classifies congratulatory strategies into fourteen strategies. Part of these strategies includes sub-strategies such as expressing happiness, requesting information, expressing validation, and making self-related comments.

It is expected that Jordanian and Saudi students are likely to employ some of Elwood’s (2004) congratulatory strategies, as well as others that are not listed in Elwood’s (2004) analytical framework. This expectation can be improved after collecting and analyzing data. Each one of the employed strategies by the Jordanian and Saudi students will be listed and analyzed in detail, with examples to illustrate their usage and forms. Then, a comparison will be made to highlight the similarities and differences in their utilization of the congratulatory strategies in their speeches.

3. Methodology

A quantitative approach will be adopted in this research using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire that will be distributed to respondents. DCT consists of 10 scenarios that will be prepared by the researchers. These scenarios will be reviewed by a specialist in the field to assess their validity. After scenarios are rectified by the experts, data will be collected from the students at both universities. The data will be collected from undergraduate students studying in English departments at both universities. To ensure the reliability of the research, the researcher will follow eight steps. First, the researcher will get a permission letter from the universities to collect data from their students. Second, the researcher will coordinate with the lecturers and heads of

departments to meet the students in suitable places. Third, the researchers will collect data progressively until the data reaches saturation and there is no new data to be collected from other respondents. Fourth, the researcher will create lists for the congratulatory strategies that are employed by Jordanian and Saudi students based on the classification of the congratulatory strategies that are proposed by Elwood's (2004) taxonomy. Fifth, the researcher will identify the similar and different strategies utilized by both groups. Sixth, highlight the new congratulatory strategies that are not mentioned by Elwood's (2004) taxonomy. Seventh, the researcher will write the examples in front of each strategy in a table to facilitate analyzing and citing them in the analysis section. Finally, the researcher will analyze the data according to the classification of the congratulatory strategies that are mentioned in the table, together with the examples that are stated beside them.

In the analysis section, each congratulatory strategy will be analyzed independently. Different examples will be demonstrated under each one of them to illustrate the usage of Jordanian and Saudi for the congratulatory strategies in their speeches. The varieties of forms utilized by both groups will be highlighted to shed light on the power of varieties in their speeches, although they speak Arabic. After analyzing the congratulatory strategies used by the two groups, an in-depth discussion will be organized to scrutinize the similarities and differences in the congratulatory texts. More elaboration will be explained in the discussion to attain the precise meaning of their congratulatory forms. Explaining the exact meaning of the congratulatory forms can help classify them correctly, even if they have the same meaning with different forms utilized by the respondents. The expected results in the analysis can help future researchers looking into the impact of Arabic language varieties on recipients' responses to congratulations in various contexts.

4. Conclusion

The current study proposes a comparative socio-pragmatic analysis of congratulatory speech act strategies in Jordanian and Saudi cultures, with special emphasis on similarities and differences in terms of shared pragmatic roots and context-dependent variation. By referring to Elwood's (2004) taxonomy, it is argued that despite sharing a common Arabic linguistic background, Jordanian and Saudi cultures exhibit different strategies in congratulatory speech acts due to their sociocultural background. The current study indicates that pragmatic variation may be present between culturally similar groups; therefore, it is crucial to investigate speech act realization in Arabic cultures beyond cultural homogeneity. In addition, the current study indicates that possible extensions of speech act strategies beyond existing taxonomies may be proposed; hence, congratulatory speech acts may be subject to evolutionary variation. The current study may be considered a significant contribution to socio-pragmatic theory in that it clarifies how shared linguistic roots do not always imply shared speech act strategies; therefore, it enriches cross-cultural and intra-cultural speech act studies.

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