

Congratulation Strategies: Pragmatic Study

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ABSTRACT: *There are different ways to express positive emotions and feelings when people come across happy occasions. The present study investigates how people pragmatically express congratulations. One hundred and sixteen participants were recruited to answer a DCT which was used as a tool for uncovering the strategies of congratulations and answering the questions: (1) what are the main pragmatic strategies for congratulations? (2) what are the differences in using these strategies when it comes to males and females? (3) pragmatically, what are the positive politeness strategies used in expressing congratulations? And (4) are there any differences between males and females in using these positive politeness strategies? Among the findings revealed seven pragmatic strategies of congratulations saying congratulations, giving good wishes, expressing happiness, using jokes, mentioning the reason, asking for information or details, and giving compliments and encouragement.*

KEYWORDS: congratulations, politeness strategies, speech act, give gifts

INTRODUCTION

It is common when hearing good news or being in a happy situation to express positive and happy feelings. In happy situations like a wedding, birth, or promotion people may use different ways or patterns to say "*congratulations*". Within the speech act theory, Searle (1969) classified congratulation as an *expressive act*, since it expresses the speaker's feelings towards a situation or another person, and such psychological state requires sincerity condition. The same is considered by Marki-Tsilipakon (2011) who also viewed congratulations as *expressive acts* that present the speaker's feeling of joy.

From a politeness point of view, expressions of congratulation are seen as "*intrinsically polite*" and contain illocutionary goals which are most like to be social goals (Leech, 1983: 106). The speaker, by saying congratulations to someone, is adhering to the listener's positive face. Hence, it can be associated with maintaining a positive face act. From this view, congratulations are related to two politeness maxims; approbation and modesty. Thus, congratulations represent the acts of maximizing the listener's praise while minimizing that of speakers.

This study aims to understand the different strategies or patterns of giving congratulations that Iraqis (more specifically postgraduate students) use in different happy situations (the situations used at the CDT were five happy news situations: weddings, baby-birth, promotions, getting a new job, and buying a house. The main questions raised by the study were: (1) how do Iraqi undergraduates express congratulations? (2) what are the differences between males' and females' realization of congratulations strategies? (3) what are the main politeness strategies of congratulations? And (4) are there any differences between males and females in using these positive politeness strategies?

Congratulation: A Pragmatic Perspective

1. Congratulation as a Speech Act

As a speech act, congratulation is defined as a kind of act that expresses positive feelings to others (Searle, 1969). According to Searle (1969), congratulation as an illocutionary force is achieved when the speaker expresses the attitudes or feelings about an event that is good. Therefore, the speaker is not making the words fit the world because the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed (Searle, 1979). It is the act of expressing the speaker's joy and giving a congratulation means that there is a happy event, related to the addressee, and the speaker reflects and shares the addressee's happiness (ibid: 67).

Following the constitutive rules, Searle (1969:67) defines congratulation as a speech act when:

1. The propositional content rule: An event related to the hearer.
2. Preparatory rule: The speaker believes that this event is of interest to the hearer.
3. Sincerity rule: The speaker believes that he/she is pleased with that event.
4. Essential rule: Pleasure expression is counted at the event.

In terms of speech acts, Austin (1962) defines congratulation as a "*performative verb*" since the speaker is performing the act of "*I congratulate you*". whereas, Aziz et al. (2018) categorized it within the acknowledgment's acts since they express the speakers' acknowledgments of congratulations (like apologizing, explaining, and greetings) to the listener.

Norricks (1987, 285–286) defines it as a speech act when the speaker can observe that the addressee received a positive value. The same is asserted by Clark (1996) who defines congratulation as a speech act when it has a positive effect on the hearer. Another indication is added by Searle and Vanderveken (1985) to define congratulation which is fortune, and they (ibid, as cited in Mohammad, 2017:16) define it as "*expressing pleasure at the good fortune of others*". Jakubowska (2003) defined congratulation, from a ritualistic point of view, as a "*supportive ritual*" and the same view is concluded by Makri-Tsilipakou, (2001) who defines congratulation as an act of strengthening social intimacy.

In her investigation of cross-cultural congratulations expressions, Elwood (2004) found out that there are different patterns that can be found among Americans and Japanese in responding to expressing good news. Her results (ibid) revealed that Japanese tend to use self-related responses, whereas Americans tend to use question-related responses by asking for more information. Elwood (2004) classifies the strategies of congratulations as follows in Table (1)

Table (1) Classification of Congratulation Strategies by Elwood (2004)

1	Illocutionary force indicating device (IFID)	"Congratulation"
2	Expression of happiness:	I am so glad
3	An offer of good wishes	"I wish you the best of luck in your new life"
4	Request for information	"Is it a boy or a girl?"
5	Asking for sweets	"You must bring me some sweet"
6	Self-related comments: an expression of envy and longing	"May God give me a cute baby as yours"
7	Joking	"You better if you didn't get married"
8	Thanking God	"Thank God"
9	Encouraging	"Always try your best"

2. Politeness and Congratulations

In terms of politeness, Leech (1983: 106) defines congratulation as "*convivial*" by which its illocutionary aim coincides with social aims and modesty maxims, hence, they are "intrinsically polite" expressions just like the expressions of greeting, thanking, offering and inviting because congratulating adheres to the listener's positive face (ibid, 105). In the same vein, Thomas (1983, 132) views congratulating speech act as an "*intrinsic courtesy*" which goes in line with the "*Maxim of Approbation in Politeness Principle*" where the social goal coincides with it. Two politeness maxims, proposed by Leech (1983:132), go in line with the act of congratulation. the "*approbation maxims*" where the speaker maximizes praise of the addressee and the "*modesty maxims*"; where the speaker minimizes the praise of himself and concerning politeness and face corners, Orecchioni (2005, cited in Barthes, 2006) confirms that congratulation is directly related to face-saving strategies of politeness.

In Arabic context, G. Emery (2000) studied congratulations in Omani Arabic in three situations (weddings, baby-births, and religious occasions). The findings of the study revealed some differences in terms of age some differences between old and young congratulates. For example, older women and men tended to use two main strategies of congratulations; a direct one like saying "*congratulations*" and a wishing strategy like "may god bless you with a boy child". however, the younger did not use the wishing strategy. Wardat and Alkhateeb (2020) examined congratulation in a wedding setting and they concluded that exaggeration is used as a main congratulations strategy and there is no much difference in terms of using congratulations strategies between males and females. Khalil's study (2015) also focused on congratulations strategies between Kurdish males and females and his results indicated slight differences where Kurdish females tended to use thanks expressions and the Kurdish males added to these expressions the wishes expressions. Makri-Tsilipakou (2001) also asserted the role of social relations in expressing congratulations and how the listener is concerned with being appreciated which is achieved in congratulating someone and, thus, it is an act of politeness. In their study of seven situations of expressing congratulation speech act, Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) followed Levinson's model of politeness (1987) and the results revealed different politeness strategies among which "*Illocutionary Force Indicating Devise*", "*Expression of happiness*" and "*Offer of good wishes*".

Data Collection and Analysis

A) Participants

The present work was conducted at three colleges (College of Arts/ Department of English Language Studies) (College of Sciences/Biology Department) (College of Tourism Sciences/ Hotel Management Studies). The participants were Iraqi undergraduates with the ages ranging from (19 - 25). The total number of participants is (116) covering (85) males and (85) females.

B) Data Collection

Data were collected by means of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT); The participants were asked to fill (DCT) which consists of six happy news situations. The gathered answers were in Arabic and translated into English. The DCT was designed by the author and the answers of congratulations were analyzed based on the taxonomy of Elwood (2004) and Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness strategies with some modifications.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Table (2) Congratulation Strategies

	Congratulation strategies	Token	%
1	Saying "congratulations"	28	24 %
2	Giving good wishes	19	17 %
3	Expressing happiness	18	16 %
4	Using jokes	15	13 % ³
5	Mentioning the Reason	15	13 %
6	Asking for information or details	13	11 %
7	Giving Compliments and encouragement	8	6 %
	Total	116	100 %

Table (2) above shows that the strategy of saying "*congratulations*" is one of the main strategies with a percentage of (24 %). Compared to Elwood's taxonomy (2004), the above results support using IFID as the main strategy for congratulations. Such an expression as "*congratulations*" is the first expression that comes to mind when hearing good news or in a happy situation. The second most-used strategy appeared to be "*giving good wishes*" with (17 %) close to "*expressing happiness*" (16%). Since congratulation occurs in happy situations, using jokes is expected and accepted, using the "*jokes*" strategy achieved (13%). The results also indicate that speakers prefer to be specific and "*mentions the reasons*" of congratulating (like, "congratulations for your new job") with a percentage of (13 %). "*Asking for information or details*" was used by the participants recorded (13) participants out of (116) and only (8) used compliments and encouragement in their congratulations

which indicates that this technique is highly associated with how close the interlocuters; in another word, close-level interlocuters know each other enough to encourage each other.

Table (3) Congratulation Strategies between males and females

Congratulation strategies		male Token	%	female Token	%
1	Saying "congratulations"	16	28 %	12	21 %
2	Giving good wishes	9	16 %	10	17 %
3	Expressing happiness	8	14 %	10	17 %
4	Using jokes	9	16 %	6	10 %
5	Reasons	7	12 %	8	14 %
6	Asking for information or details	5	8 %	8	14 %
7	Giving Compliments and encouragement	4	6 %	4	7 %
Total		58	100 %	58	100 %

Concerning male and female differences, Table (3) shows that males tend to be more direct in their congratulation strategies by simply using the expression "*congratulations*" (28%), while 21 % of females use the IFID only. Females tend to be more talkative and this is revealed with the responses of using strategies of "*giving good wishes*" and "*expressing happiness*" when congratulating, and this is disclosed with the percentages of (17%) for both strategies, whereas males' responses recorded only (16 %) and (14%) respectively. The high percentages of "*giving good wishes*" are also related to social and religious principles; in Islamic society, using blessings like well-wishes and prayers when hearing good news is believed to be a protection from the evil eye.

Regarding the sense of humor, males appear to be more humorous in giving congratulations, especially to friends. among the expressions used jokes like "*You got married! It's too late*", and "*Poor friend*". it is worth mentioning that among the techniques of humor in congratulating utterances like "*Where is my share of cake?*". Another difference between males and females can be observed in using the strategy of "mentioning the reason" of congratulating. both used this strategy with (12 %) for males and (14 %) for females. this may indicate that females tend to be more precise. examples of mentioning the reason for congratulation included utterances like: "*Congratulations on the promotion*", "*Ramadan Kareem*", and "*Happy Eid*".

Noticeably, the strategy of "*asking for information or details*" is not preferred by male participants; only (5) out of (58) asked about details and information regarding the happy situation. whereas, there were (8) females out of (58) more curious to know more about the details reaching a percentage of (14 %). This strategy is expressed by questing speech acts like "*Who is the lucky man?*", "*When did that happen?*", and "*Great! But who told you that?*". Whereas, males appear to be more conservative and prefer not to ask about the details of a happy situation like a wedding for instance. "*Giving Compliments and encouragement*" was another congratulation strategy with (6 %) of males

and (7 %) of females using it. Among the expressions used with this strategy included "you earn it", and "good for you".

Table (4) Congratulation positive politeness Strategies

	Positive Politeness Strategies	Token	%
1	Giving gifts	50	43 %
2	Exaggerations	20	17 %
3	Ask or Give reasons	17	15 %
4	Use in-group identity maker	12	10 %
5	Intensify interest to the hearer	9	8 %
6	Jokes	8	7 %
	Total	116	100 %

Considering the positive politeness strategies found in the DCT, Table (4) shows that the most frequent strategy used is "giving gifts" (43 %) with (n=50) of participants, which is, according to Brown & Levinson (1987), not necessarily a physical one, but also indicates sympathy, understanding, caring, and admiration. "exaggerations" was the second top frequent strategy used by the participants (n=20) (17 %). "Ask or Give reasons" came as the third most frequent strategy used in approximately (15 %). The "use of in-group identity maker" (e.g., "congrats, my friend") was the fourth most used strategy in approximately (10 %). As for the sixth positive politeness strategy, "intensify interest to the hearer" (e.g., "what lovely news we heard?") in approximately (8 %) of the (n=9). "Jokes" was viewed as the final frequent strategy used by the participants (n=8) at (7%)

Table (5) Congratulation Positive Politeness Strategies Between Males and Females

	Positive Politeness Strategies	male Token	%	female Token	%
1	Giving gifts	25	43 %	29	50 %
2	Exaggerations	9	15 %	10	17 %
3	Ask or Give reasons	8	14 %	7	12 %
4	Use in-group identity maker	8	14 %	5	9 %
5	Intensify interest to the hearer	3	5 %	4	7 %
6	Jokes	5	9 %	3	5 %
	Total	58	100 %	58	100 %

Speaking about male-female differences, Table (4) above shows approximately both males and females prefer to *give gifts* as a sign of politeness to congratulate others (43%) and (50%) respectively. Females also show to exaggerate more than males (17%) when giving congrats. Whereas males tend to use this strategy less (15%). "*Ask or give reasons*" appears to be a preferred male politeness strategy (14 %). Males also show to use "*use of in-group identity maker*" more than females, about (14%) and females (5%) only. On the other hand, females appear to use "*Intensify interest to the hearer*" as a positive politeness strategy (7 %) and males use such strategy with the percentage (5 %). Finally, "*jokes*" are forms of being friendly and they are used more by males (9 %) as a sign of positive politeness strategy; whereas, females appear to be a little more conservative and use the "*Jokes*" strategy with about (5 %).

CONCLUSION

Considering the results discussed above, it can be said that congratulations are among the most used speech acts that are used frequently in everyday communication. The result of the CDT revealed seven main congratulations strategies among undergraduate Iraqi students: Saying "congratulations", giving good wishes, expressing happiness, using jokes, mentioning the Reason, asking for information or details, and giving compliments and encouragement. In the case of the undergraduate students, male-female differences were detected in the results; generally speaking, males appear to be more direct in their way of expressing happiness to others and congratulating them, thus, they prefer to use the IDID as a main strategy of congratulations. Females, on the other hand, appear to use "*giving good wishes*" as the most frequently used congratulations strategy. They also appear to be more curious and *ask for more information or details*. Considering the positive politeness strategies, "*Giving gifts*" is the most used strategy used by both (males and females) to show an expression of being happy for others and congratulating them. The use of "exaggeration" is also viewed as a means of being polite. It is worth mentioning also that the strategies detected in the analysis are culturally and socially oriented. In other words, these strategies are related to cultural and social factors that encourage using certain congratulations strategies rather than others or using some of them more than others.

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