

# Speech Acts in Facebook Status Updates: Exploring Gender Differences in Iraqi Arabic-Speaking Communities

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## Abstract

This study examines the utilization of speech acts in Facebook status updates among Arabic-speaking communities in Iraq, with a particular focus on gender differences. The primary objective of this research is to identify the most frequent types of speech acts used in Facebook status updates by Iraqi males and females. The analysis encompasses a comprehensive examination of 1534 Facebook status updates gathered over a two-month period, categorized according to Searle's speech acts taxonomy. The findings reveal diverse patterns of speech act usage within the Iraqi Facebook community. The study identifies ten distinct speech act categories, including Emojis, Directives, Images, Expressives, Humor, Representatives (Assertives), Declaratives, Quotations, God's Invocation, and Commissives. These categories shed light on the prevalent modes of communication within this demographic, highlighting the roles of emotional expression, commands, visual elements, information sharing, and humor. Furthermore, this study investigates the impact of gender on speech act production among Iraqi Facebook users. The analysis uncovers notable disparities between genders in the usage of speech acts. While both males and females commonly employ directives to issue commands or instructions, males exhibit a slightly higher frequency. Females incorporate emojis more frequently into their updates, emphasizing emotions and adding visual cues. Moreover, males demonstrate a higher frequency of humor, suggesting a greater tendency to use humor as a means of expression. These findings contribute to a better understanding of speech act behavior within Arabic-speaking communities in Iraq, specifically within the context of Facebook status updates. The study highlights the significance of gender differences and cultural factors in shaping linguistic practices and online communication patterns. The insights gained from this research can inform future studies on speech acts, social interaction, and gender dynamics within online communities.

**Keywords:** Facebook Status Updates, Speech Act, Gender Differences, Iraqi Speech Community, Searle'S Taxonomy.

## Introduction

Effective communication is a fundamental aspect of human existence, and scholars have offered various interpretations of this concept (Mustikawati et al., 2023). According to Rusu (2023), communication involves the reciprocal exchange of facts, ideas, opinions, or emotions between two or more individuals. Okunn (2002) defines it as any process that enables us to comprehend others and be understood by them. This broader definition encompasses various aspects of understanding, including the ability to interpret others' intentional actions Perner et al (2018), the deictic characteristics of understanding in relation to reference points Yerznkyan and Movsisyan (2021), the complexity of understanding in different domains such as medicine and psychotherapy Valdes-Stauber (2023), the philosophical debate on theories of social understanding Coninx and Newen (2018), and the ways in which we both understand and misunderstand other people (Power, 2014). These abstracts highlight the multidimensional nature of understanding and the various perspectives from which it can be examined.

Consequently, communication can be viewed as a means of sharing and expressing thoughts, opinions, feelings, emotions, and information, among other things, to fulfill both social and individual needs. Austin (1962) argues that communicative acts, such as sharing information, posing inquiries, or conveying emotions, fall under the umbrella of "speech acts," a well-established field in pragmatics. Searle (1975), building upon Austin's framework, suggests that speaking or writing in a language involves performing speech acts, such as making statements, issuing commands, asking questions, making promises, and so forth. In essence, the Speech Act Theory (SAT) posits that communication is a process of enacting actions.

Social networking sites (SNSs) are regarded as distinctive platforms for communication, offering functionalities that enable users to effortlessly share their interests, values, and beliefs with others (Wilson et al., 2012). According to information from Statista.com in January 2024, Facebook was the most popular social networking website with approximately 3.049 billion active monthly users worldwide, a significant portion of whom were young individuals between the ages of 18 and 28. This data highlights the significant reach and popularity of Facebook as a social network site, indicating its widespread usage among various age groups, particularly among young users.

Facebook's microblogging feature, such as status updates, provides a valuable source of data for researchers interested in studying the linguistic aspects of online language (Sun et al., 2021). Users can share text-based messages that reflect their thoughts, emotions, and activities with others on the platform. This feature allows for the examination of communicative acts within the social network, offering insights into the ways individuals interact, discuss interesting events, cultural topics, and more. By analyzing these status updates, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic features and patterns of online communication on Facebook.

According to several studies, Facebook status updates (FSUs) are seen as a reflection of users' views, feelings, and activities that they care about (Abdalhadi et al., 2023; Banikalef et al., 2014; Howlader et al., 2018). Researchers argue that FSUs provide users with a platform to share their thoughts and engage with others in a spontaneous and less structured manner (Wöhler et al., 2021; Wharton et al., 2021). This allows for a wide range of speech acts to be

expressed through FSUs. Social scientists find Facebook to be a valuable tool for observing human behavior and social phenomena in a natural and authentic setting (Theocharis et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). Examining Facebook can be compared to studying culture over time, as users accurately represent their beliefs, values, and interests in their online profiles. These online expressions are seen as reflections of users' offline culture, providing insights into their beliefs and practices.

While numerous studies have examined interactive communication on Facebook and other social networking sites (SNSs), few have utilized the Speech Act Theory or similar taxonomies to analyze the data. Previous research in diverse contexts, such as English and European settings Carr et al (2012); Stidham (2014), as well as in Asian Ilyas & Khushi (2012); Yusof et al (2015) and African contexts Mohanlal (2013); Stoll (2015), have been conducted, but there is a notable lack of research on this topic in the Iraqi Arabic environment. Most speech act research in Iraq has focused on interlingual or cross-linguistic analysis of specific speech acts, resulting in limited data and an incomplete understanding of how young Arab Iraqis (YAs) perform speech acts in both real and virtual settings.

Moreover, several investigations of speech acts in the Iraqi context have been conducted. These studies mainly focused on cross-cultural comparisons using one type of speech act, such as apologies Ubla et al (2016), refusals Jasim (2017); Abed (2011), compliments Al-Hilu (2020); Mahmood et al (2018), requests Rasheeda (2020); Sattar et al (2015); Alzeebaree et al (2017), invitations Abbood (2016); Mohammed (2020), and acceptance. Refusals, apologies, and compliments have received the most attention compared to other speech acts in the Iraqi context. However, research on speech acts via Facebook status messages is still in its early stages and needs to be explored further.

The study acknowledges the importance of considering gender differences in language use within the Iraqi context. It aims to investigate how male and female Iraqi Facebook users employ speech acts in social networking sites, particularly through Facebook status updates. By applying speech act recognition techniques to analyze these updates, the study aims to develop a comprehensive framework for data analysis. This framework will serve as an analytical lens to understand the communication acts used by Arab Iraqi youth on social network sites, such as Facebook, and provide insights into the social and cultural norms prevalent among the Arab Iraqi online community.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the understanding of speech act behavior within Arabic-speaking communities in Iraq, specifically within the context of Facebook status updates. The study highlights the significance of gender differences and cultural factors in shaping linguistic practices and online communication patterns. The insights gained from this research can inform future studies on speech acts, social interaction, and gender dynamics within online communities. By shedding light on the communication practices of young Iraqis on Facebook, this study aims to enhance our understanding of how language functions in digital environments and its implications for social and cultural dynamics.

## **Objectives**

1. To identify the most frequent types of speech acts in the status updates posted by Iraqi males and female Facebook users.
2. To identify the gender on the speech act production among the Iraqi males and females.

## **Literature Review**

The rapid growth of the internet and digital technology has revolutionized communication practices, enabling individuals to engage in social interactions using online platforms (Al-Sa'di and Hamdan, 2005). Among these platforms, Facebook has emerged as a prominent digital domain that offers new opportunities for studying social behavior Baker ( 2013). It serves as a dynamic database of social attitudes, with users constantly updating their status messages, making friends, and engaging in various activities.

While previous studies have explored different aspects of Facebook usage, such as user behaviors Jamtvedt, et al (2006); Rothen et al (2016) and the role of Facebook in political changes in Arab countries, there has been a growing interest in examining speech acts within the context of Facebook. Speech acts refer to communicative acts that not only convey information but also perform a specific action or have an effect on the interlocutor (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Understanding how speech acts are presented on Facebook is valuable for gaining insights into the social interactions and communication patterns within this online platform. Facebook provides a rich source of data that captures real-time updates and expressions of social attitudes. By examining speech acts on Facebook, researchers can delve into the ways in which individuals use language to express their intentions, beliefs, and emotions, and how these online interactions reflect and shape social behavior.

However, while there has been some research on speech acts in relation to Facebook, the focus has been limited, and there is still much to explore. In particular, there is a need for more studies that investigate the influence of culture and gender on speech act production within specific contexts, such as the Iraqis context. By examining speech acts in the status updates of Iraqis Facebook users, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature by shedding light on the cultural and gender dynamics of online communication in Iraq.

Previous research has indeed focused on understanding the motivations behind individuals' use of Facebook. These studies have consistently found that the primary purposes of using Facebook are related to social and daily activities, rather than educational or school-related pursuits (Batenburg and Bartels, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2015). Users engage with Facebook to have fun, connect with friends, and stay updated on news and events in their social circles.

The findings suggest that Facebook is rarely used for educational purposes. Several studies have supported these conclusions, highlighting that Facebook is primarily utilized for maintaining social connections and strengthening social ties (Rodrigues et al., 2019; Banikalef 2019; Abdalhadi et al., 2023; Jung and Sundar, 2022). It has become an integral part of users' daily routines, serving as a platform for social interaction, information sharing, and staying connected with others.

These research findings underscore the prevalent social and recreational nature of Facebook usage. While Facebook offers various features and functionalities, it is predominantly perceived and utilized as a social networking platform rather than an educational tool. Understanding these usage patterns is important for comprehending the context in which speech acts are performed on Facebook and how users navigate the platform's social dynamics.

researchers have examined the role of social networking sites, specifically Facebook, in influencing political change in Arab countries during the Arab Spring. Studies have shown that Facebook played a crucial role in these revolutions by facilitating communication and coordination among rebel groups and protesters. It also helped in broadcasting their messages globally and garnering international support. Facebook was considered a major factor in paving the way for the Arab Spring, as it provided individuals with a platform to mobilize and unify themselves, especially in societies where traditional means of organization were limited. The platform served as a virtual channel for individuals to share their stories of the revolution, inspiring neighboring countries and contributing to political transformations. These findings highlight the transformative power of online social networks like Facebook in driving political mobilization and facilitating collective action.

the available literature on speech acts in Facebook status updates is limited but provides valuable insights. Studies have explored the communicative functions and speech act categories present in status updates on Facebook in various contexts.

Ilyas and Khushi (2012) found that expressive speech acts were the most prevalent in status updates, followed by assertive, directive, commissive, quotations, and poetic verses. They concluded that language use in status updates not only expresses individuals' thoughts and emotions but also plays a role in shaping their identities.

Yusof et al (2015) examined status updates of Ghanaian university students on a Facebook group page and identified five speech act categories: directives, assertives, expressives, quotations, and commissives. The study revealed that directives, such as requests and advice, were the most frequent speech acts used by students.

Building upon this research, Tsoumou (2020) analyzed Facebook interactions related to political communication in Congo-Brazzaville. The study treated each Facebook post as a speech act, emphasizing that illocutionary force (intended meaning) and perlocutionary force (consequential effect) were both essential for a complete speech act. The research highlighted the importance of both Facebook posts and comments as components of dialogic speech acts.

Syafitri (2020) focused on Indonesian Facebook users' status updates, identifying fourteen categories of expressive speech acts, including disagreement, apologies, admiration, grief, exclamation, volition, anger, disappointment, encouragement, satire, irritation, pride, and congratulations. The study emphasized that expressive speech acts were employed to convey emotions beyond the literal meaning of the status updates.

While previous studies have explored how Facebook users from various cultural backgrounds use speech acts in their status updates, there is a lack of research on the use of Facebook

status updates in the Arab and Iraqi context. Understanding the use of speech acts in Facebook status updates in the Arab and Iraqi context is crucial for comprehending the underlying motivations and social implications of these online interactions. Khalaf & Rezk (2019) conducted research at Ain Shams University in Egypt on the communicative functions of Facebook status updates and identified digital discourse's formal characteristics and functions. Using Searle's Speech Act framework and Grice's theory of cooperative maxims and implicature, a total of 10 postings and a number of comments were evaluated. Males and females between the ages of 21 and 35 were included in the study. Certain aspects of digital discourse that are categorized into formal features and functional manifestations that are linked to the post's function.

Another significant study was carried out by Banikalef (2019), which explored the impact of gender disparities and Jordanian cultural norms on Facebook Status Updates' usage of speech acts (FSUs). They gathered 1718 FSUs over two months and classified them using Searle's taxonomy of speech acts. The study found that males and females had different language repertoires, with males using more aggressive speech acts and females using more expressive speech acts. This study highlighted the influence of cultural standards in Jordan's speech community, which are shaped by Islam and tribalism.

In the Iraqi context, Mohammed et al (2020) investigated Iraqi Facebook users' compliments behavior and found that both verbal and nonverbal strategies were utilized, with men often using appraisal strategies. Ali (2020) examined the supporting motions of criticism among Iraqi and Malay university students and found that both communities used similar types of supporting motions, but Iraqis used them more frequently. Additionally, Iraqi and Malay women were more likely to use supportive body language while making comments.

Overall, this proposed study aims to fill the gap in the literature by examining how language is constructed through speech acts in Facebook status updates among young Iraqi users. By exploring the specific cultural forms of speech acts in Iraq and considering gender disparities, this study can contribute to the development of culturally sensitive language teaching and learning practices, as well as to intercultural communication and understanding.

### **Speech Acts According To Gender**

Recent studies on gender, language, and speech acts have explored the differences between men's and women's speech. Researchers such as Lakoff (2004); Mercer and Maybin (1996); Tanaka (2004); Kissau (2006); Herring (2008); Gray (2012); Talbot (2010) have contributed to this field.

Two major theories, Lakoff's Dominance Theory (1975) and the Difference Theory Tannen (2007); Uchida (1992), are often discussed in relation to gender differences in language. Lakoff's Dominance Theory suggests that men and women's speech differences arise from unequal power dynamics in society. Women, in a male-dominated culture, are expected to exhibit characteristics of weakness and subservience, leading to language that reflects their inferior social status. Men, on the other hand, use language to assert their power. Lakoff also argues that women are socialized from a young age to display traits, attitudes, and behaviors considered "ladylike," resulting in language differences such as the use of formal forms, empty adjectives, direct citation, and a lack of humor.

The Difference Theory posits that men and women belong to distinct cultural groups, influencing their communication styles (Tannen, 2007; Uchida, 1992). This theory suggests that despite living in the same society, men and women have different relationships with that society, leading to different speech styles. Tannen describes this as "different words, different worlds." According to this theory, women's language serves different functions and follows different norms compared to men's language.

Tannen (1994) also argues that men are socialized in a culture where communication is often competitive, aimed at gaining dominance or preventing others from exerting control. In contrast, women frequently use language to seek confirmation and support for their beliefs.

These recent studies shed light on the various ways in which men's and women's speech differs. They highlight the influence of power dynamics, cultural norms, and socialization processes on language use. However, it's important to recognize that individual communication styles can vary widely, and societal attitudes towards gender and language are subject to change.

The studies provide insights into the impact of gender on speech acts in various contexts, including digital communication. They suggest that gender plays a significant role in language use and speech acts, with differences observed between men and women.

In online communication, such as social media platforms like Facebook, researchers have found that men and women exhibit different communication styles. For example, studies by Herring (2008); Lawson et al (2012) indicate that men tend to exchange lengthier messages, launch and conclude conversations in mixed-sex groups, and express their views more assertively (Coates & Pichler, 2023). On the other hand, women are more likely to present information as "facts," use harsh language, and have an adversarial attitude toward their interlocutors. Women also tend to use more supportive and aligned language, such as apologizing, showing support for others, and maintaining a friendly tone.

Moreover, Herring (2008) found that in online forums, individuals adjust their communication behavior based on the gender distribution of the group. The minority gender in a group tends to adopt communication patterns similar to the dominant gender. For instance, women may display more hostility in male-dominated groups, while men may show less hostility in female-dominated groups.

These gender differences in speech acts are not limited to online communication. Studies by Mahmood & Ali (2018); Ali (2020); Al-Hour (2019) examined speech acts in different cultural contexts. They found that gender influences complimenting behavior, supportive criticism, and congratulatory speech acts. Women tend to focus on looks in compliments, while men focus on ability and expertise. Additionally, female critics are more likely to employ supportive actions in their comments compared to male critics.

The research also emphasizes the influence of cultural and religious backgrounds on language use. For example, Al Sad (2021) found that Jordanian students' linguistic choices in Facebook status updates were influenced by their religious and cultural background, with differences observed between Jordanian and American students.

Overall, these studies highlight the importance of considering gender when studying speech acts in various contexts, including digital communication. They contribute to the sociolinguistics of different groups and provide insights into how gender influences language use and communication styles.

## Method

### Subject and Setting

The study, conducted between March and April 2023, examined language use and speech acts in Facebook status updates among young Iraqi Facebook users. A total of 50 participants, consisting of an equal number of males and females, were recruited from five different universities in Iraq: Anbar University in the western Anbar Governorate, Baghdad University and Mustansiriyah University in the capital city of Baghdad, Tikrit University in the Salah ad Din Governorate north of Baghdad, the University of Kufa in southern Iraq, and the University of Basrah in southern Iraq. The researchers collected 1,524 Facebook status updates during the study period, with participants posting updates multiple times per day and updating them daily. The study also analyzed the responses to these updates, aiming to gain insights into the communication patterns among young Iraqi Facebook users across a wide geographic region of Iraq.

### Instruments

In the study, content analysis was conducted to examine the types of speech acts in the students' Facebook statuses. The researchers utilized Searle's speech acts taxonomy (1969: 16) as a framework for classifying the collected status updates. Each status update was manually categorized into one of the five categories: Commissives, Directives, Expressives, Assertives, and Declarations.

Interestingly, the analysis revealed the emergence of five new speech act categories from the data, including humor, God's Invocation, and quotations, which had not been previously explored in existing research or covered within Searle's taxonomy. Additionally, the researchers identified two categories within the dataset that had been overlooked: Emojis and Images. To provide a better understanding of the construction of these speech act categories within the dataset, the researchers included illustrative examples from the extensive data collection.

Overall, the study expanded on existing speech act categories and introduced new ones, highlighting the diverse range of speech acts present in the students' Facebook statuses. However, here are some general examples of different types of speech acts:

- **Directives:** Commands or requests that are intended to get the listener to do something, such as "Pass me the salt" or "Please close the door."
- **Declarations:** Statements that change the world by the act of saying them, such as "I now pronounce you husband and wife" or "I resign from my position."
- **Expressives:** Utterances that express the speaker's feelings or attitudes, such as "I'm so happy!" or "I'm really sorry."
- **Commissives:** Statements that commit the speaker to a future action, such as "I promise to be there on time" or "I will finish the project by Friday."

- **Assertives:** Statements that assert or claim something to be true, such as "The Earth revolves around the Sun" or "I have a headache."
- **Quotation:** refer to speech act category within the realm of speech acts represents a unique form of expression in which individuals employ quotes or utterances that they have not originally crafted themselves. such as 'All the world's a stage.' Shakespeare.
- **Humor :** Humor is defined as an "intended or unintended message interpreted as funny" (Lynch 2002: 423), encompassing a wide range of expressions that evoke laughter or amusement. such as "I asked the librarian if they had any books on paranoia. She whispered, 'They're right behind you'.
- **God's Invocation:** refers to a unique category within Facebook status updates where users express their deep spiritual connection and devotion. It encompasses a wide range of expressions, including supplications, invocations, and profound spiritual sentiments. Users utilize this category to convey gratitude, seek blessings, request guidance, and share verses from religious texts, invoking the name of God (Allah) and seeking His mercy and forgiveness. Such as "On the first day of the month, O Allah, grant us the arrival of Ramadan that changes our condition for the better"
- **Emojis:** refer to small visual symbols used in Facebook status updates to convey a wide range of emotions, reactions, and nuances. These expressive icons serve as a bridge between written language and non-verbal communication, adding emotional context and depth to textual messages. Emojis are not mere embellishments; they play a pivotal role in enhancing speech acts within status updates by effectively communicating sentiments such as joy, sadness, surprise, or humor. They encapsulate the essence of speech acts, enabling users to convey rich emotional experiences (Kaye et al., 2022 ; Dainas, and Susan 2021 ; Novak, Smailović, & Mozetić, 2015). For instance, consider the status update by Karim: "Karim breaks his fast and Suhoor Barcelona" 
- **Images:** in Facebook status updates refer to visual content that adds depth and richness to communication. Incorporating personal photographs and internet memes, images serve as a canvas for users to enhance their textual content with vibrant visual narratives. They go beyond mere illustration, allowing individuals to express thoughts, experiences, and emotions that surpass written language's limitations. The taxonomy recognizes Images as a distinct category of speech acts, acknowledging their pivotal role in conveying information, eliciting emotions, and contributing significantly to the overall meaning of a status update. Users strategically select images to convey precise messages, making them an integral part of their communicative intent (Tang & Hew 2018 .; Guo & Zhang 2019).



"As if I had sinned by looking at you. May God punish me with your love"

#### *Data Collection*

In this research, the data collection process involved the use of Kobo Toolbox for analysis. The collected data was then organized and analyzed based on Searle's Taxonomy of speech acts. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, additional categories were added to the taxonomy if found during the analysis. The Facebook status updates (FSUs) were collected over a two-month period from March to April 2023. The FSUs were written in Arabic language. They were examined for similarities and categorized accordingly. Codes were assigned to the categories to provide meaningful labels for the descriptive and inferential information gathered during the research.

#### *Reliability of The Analysis*

In line with Banikalef (2019); Krippendorff (2011), the reliability of the analysis depended on the agreement among coders, judges, observers, or measuring instruments. To enhance the reliability of the research, the analysis was conducted in two stages.

The first stage involved the researcher personally examining the linguistic expressions of speech acts in the status updates and assessing them based on the regularity of co-occurrence with Searle's speech acts classification.

In the second stage, two independent raters, who are Ph.D. holders in contrastive linguistics and native Arabic speakers from Iraq, were involved. They had sufficient experience in analyzing speech acts coding schemes. The raters were provided with the collected status updates and asked to code each one according to one or more types of speech acts from Searle's taxonomy. Their ratings were used to confirm the match between the status updates and the data in light of Searle's speech acts taxonomy.

#### **Results**

The analysis of interpersonal status updates on Facebook provides valuable insights into how users construct updates for multiple potential addressees. As global communication becomes increasingly prevalent, speech acts serve as a common form of communication.

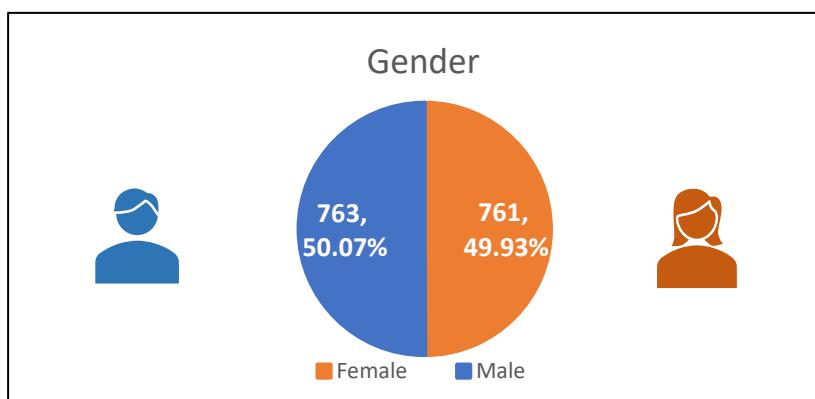
To effectively identify and evaluate the study, a detailed annotation guideline was created for five of Searle's speech act basic classes that frequently appear in Facebook status updates: Commissives, Directives, Expressives, Assertives and declarations.

Interestingly, the analysis uncovered five novel speech act categories that emerged from the data, including humour, God's Invocation, and quotations. These categories had not been previously explored in previous research or covered within Searle's taxonomy. Furthermore, the analysis identified two visual categories within the dataset that had been overlooked: Emojis and Images.

A total of 1,524 status updates (761 from females and 763 from males) were collected and categorized based on their communicative functions. On average, this amounted to approximately 30.48 status updates per user. Many of these status updates were divided into two or more parts since a single status update could contain multiple sentences, and each sentence could encompass more than one speech act. This resulted in a total of 3,942 instances of speech act categories being collected, averaging around 78.84 per status update. This calculation was derived by dividing the total number of speech acts by the total number of status updates. For instance, consider the following status update:

"اللهم الطف القدر ، وحلوة الأيام ، وسعادة الروح ، وراحة القلب صباح الخير" O Allah, grant us the kindness of fate, the sweetness of days, the happiness of the soul, and the comfort of the heart. Good morning, my friends."

In this status update, two distinct speech acts are evident. The first part, "O Allah, grant us the kindness of fate, the sweetness of days, the happiness of the soul, and the comfort of the heart," is categorized as a directive. The second part, "Good morning, my friends," is an expressive speech act. By utilizing Searle's taxonomy and adapting it to the context of Facebook status updates, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how young Arab Iraqi users employ speech acts within the digital realm. The analysis not only identifies common speech acts but also unveils new categories that illuminate the nuanced communication patterns of YAIFS in online contexts. The frequency and percentages of each speech act category, categorized by gender, are presented in Figures 1 and 2. These figures provide a visual representation of the distribution of speech acts among male and female YAIFS.



Figures 1: Frequency and Percentages of Gender in Facebook Status Updates

The data analysis revealed the identification of five new speech act categories in addition to the original five categories proposed by Searle. These new categories, which emerged naturally during the comprehensive data collection and analysis process, include humor, quotation, God's invocation, Emoji, and Image. Their inclusion sheds light on the intricate and

diverse nature of online communication, particularly among young Iraqi Facebook users. These additional categories provide valuable insights into how individuals express themselves and communicate in the digital realm, contributing to our understanding of online discourse.

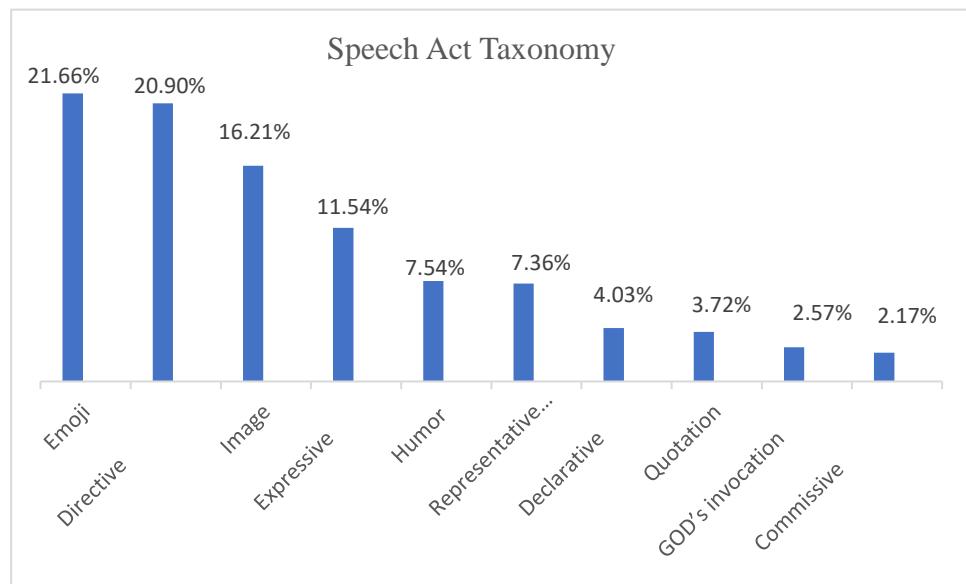


Figure 2. speech acts taxonomy

To provide a clearer understanding of how these speech act categories are constructed within the dataset, illustrative examples are provided from the extensive data collection. These examples offer insights into the speech act classes present in the dataset and how they are manifested in the collected data.

1. **Directives:** in the context of Facebook status updates involve the writer instructing, requesting, or prompting the receiver to take a specific action. This category includes commands, requests, questions, advice-seeking, and invoking God for guidance. In informal online communication, such as on Facebook, directives may be written as questions without a question mark. For example, a status update like "ماذا لو رأيتم بعضكم صدفة بأحدى الطرق؟" (What if you saw each other by chance on one of the roads) functions as a directive despite its question form. Understanding the nuances of directives is crucial for comprehending the complex nature of online communication, particularly in the context of young Iraqis on Facebook, where the primary goal is to engage the audience and prompt specific responses or actions.

2. **Expressives:** Expressive speech acts play a significant role in Facebook status updates among young Iraqis. These acts involve the speaker conveying their psychological state or emotions to the listener. They are prevalent in various contexts, including greetings, complaints, apologies, and expressions of gratitude. In FSUs, users commonly employ expressive speech acts to warmly greet their audience or express condolences. For example, phrases like "مساكم الله بخير رحباب" (Good evening, my dear friends) are used to greet friends and followers in a warm and affectionate manner. Additionally, individuals may use expressive speech acts to convey sympathy and offer condolences, as seen in phrases like "باسمي وباسم اخوتي في كلية الاداب قسم اللغة الانكليزية أتقدم بأحر التعازي الى أخي وزميلي وصديقي" (In my name

and on behalf of my colleagues in the College of Arts, Department of English Language, I extend my deepest condolences to my brother, colleague, and friend).

Expressive speech acts in Facebook status updates provide individuals with a means to express their emotions and psychological states to their audience. They serve as a prevalent form of communication, facilitating emotional expression and fostering connections within the online community.

**3. Representatives (Assertives):** The category of "Representatives," also known as "Assertives," is employed to influence the receiver's adoption of a specific belief. These speech acts are particularly relevant for identity construction and maintenance, as they express the sender's belief in something that can be objectively assessed as true or false. Representatives are prevalent in various contexts, including suggesting, swearing, and drawing conclusions. They are commonly found in Facebook status updates (FSUs) as users seek to shape their identity and uphold their personal self-image. In the realm of Facebook status messages, any utterance can be categorized as a representative speech act when users explicitly confirm or express their beliefs or hypotheses about the presence or absence of daily life events. For example, a user might write, "تأكد أنك ستواجه من البشر صنفًا لا يفكّر إلا بنفسه،" (Be sure that among humans, you will encounter some who only think of themselves, others who will let you down halfway, and yet others who will deny any kindness you've shown them as if they've never known you before!) This statement represents the user's belief about human behavior, highlighting the diversity of attitudes and behaviors. It's important to note that the belief expressed here may or may not align with reality.

In the context of "Representatives" (Assertives), the beliefs and thoughts expressed can be either true or false. These speech acts are not limited to conveying only true information; they encompass statements or expressions of belief that may or may not align with reality. Users may employ Assertives to express their beliefs, opinions, or even false information, making them a versatile category of speech acts in online communication.

**4. Declaratives :** also known as "Declarations," are a category of speech acts used to make statements or convey factual information. They aim to inform or assert something as true or factual, presenting statements that can be objectively assessed as true or false. Declaratives are commonly employed across various contexts to provide straightforward statements of fact, share knowledge, express opinions, or convey beliefs.

In the context of Facebook status updates and similar online platforms, users frequently utilize Declaratives to share news, express their views, or provide information about events. For example, a user might post "مركز الفلك الدولي: الخميس 23 آذار أول أيام شهر رمضان المبارك" (International Astronomy Center: Thursday, March 23, marks the beginning of the blessed month of Ramadan). This statement represents a Declarative speech act, conveying factual information about the start of Ramadan on a specific date. It is an objective statement that can be verified as either true or false.

In summary, Declaratives are speech acts used to make statements or convey factual information. They are prevalent in various contexts, including Facebook status updates, where users share news, express their views, or provide information about events. These speech acts play a fundamental role in online discourse, contributing to the exchange of factual information and objective statements.

5. **Commissives:** Commissives are a category of speech acts in which individuals commit to future actions, typically involving promises, threats, plans, or commitments. The main objective of Commissives is to convey to the recipient that the speaker intends to undertake a particular action in the future. These acts serve as declarations of intention, establishing a sense of assurance and accountability.

وبقى المدرسة هي الوحيدة التي تهتم بغيابك ("And the school remains the only one who cares about your absence"). This statement highlights the speaker's belief that the school is committed to caring for someone's absence. By expressing that "the school remains the only one who cares," the speaker emphasizes the school's dedication to providing support and care when the individual is absent. This represents a Commissive speech act, as it conveys an intention or commitment on the part of the school to carry out these actions.

Commissive speech acts involve expressing intentions, commitments, or promises regarding future actions or beliefs. These statements indicate the speaker's dedication to fulfilling these actions or holding these beliefs, making them an integral part of the Commissives category

### New Speech Act Categories

This research focuses on young Iraqi Facebook users and expands upon Searle's established taxonomy of speech acts by identifying previously unexamined categories. It represents a pioneering effort in the Arab context, as previous investigations into online speech acts among Iraqi users have been limited. This study is the first to systematically construct a taxonomy based on in-depth analysis of naturally occurring data exchanged among friends. The newly identified categories of speech acts include invocation of God, humor, quotation, emoji and image. These categories emerged naturally during the data collection and analysis process. They provide valuable insights into the complex nature of online communication among young Iraqi Facebook users and contribute to a better understanding of this specific demographic's online discourse landscape.

1. **Quotation:** The "Quotation" speech act category involves the use of quotes or utterances that individuals have not created themselves. These quoted expressions carry a deeper level of meaning and are often selected because they resonate with the users' emotions, beliefs, or perspectives. On social media platforms like Facebook, users incorporate these quotes into their status messages to convey their inner thoughts or emotions to their online community. Within the "Quotation" category, there is a diverse range of quoted material that reflects the cultural and emotional richness of young Iraqi Facebook users. For example, a famous quotation like "لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سَبَحَنَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ" (There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers) represents a powerful Quranic verse and supplication. By using this quote, individuals draw upon religious or philosophical wisdom to express their spiritual reflections.

The inclusion of quotations in Facebook status messages allows users to tap into shared cultural and emotional references, adding depth and resonance to their online communication. It provides a means for individuals to convey their thoughts and emotions through the words of others, making the "Quotation" speech act category an important aspect of online discourse among young Iraqi Facebook users.

2. **Humor:** is an independent category within the realm of speech acts, encompassing expressions intended to be funny or amusing. It plays a crucial social function in virtual

communities, and investigating how Iraqi Facebook users employ humor in their status updates is important. The frequency of humor within speech acts serves as an indicator of its role in online discourse.

For example, a humorous status update might be: "شك لزوجته سوء حفظه للقرآن ، فأقسمت له قائلة " لو حفظته سأزوجك زوجة ثانية بكمال رضاي !! ، فحفظ القرآن كاملا في ستة أشهر ، فصامت 3 أيام 😂" (He complained to his wife about his poor memorization of the Qur'an, so she swore to him, saying: If you memorize it, I will marry you to a second wife with my complete consent!! He memorized the entire Qur'an in six months, then she fasted for 3 days 😂).

In this study, humor is considered an independent category within speech acts, aligning with Austin's perspective that speech acts encompass self-talk and language use. Humor involves conveying messages in a humorous manner, with generating laughter being the illocutionary act and the effect on the hearer considered as perlocutionary. Analyzing humor provides insights into the behavior of young Iraqi Facebook users in the virtual world, including potential gender differences in the usage of humor. While previous research often integrated humor into expressive or assertive classes of speech acts, this study establishes humor as a distinct category due to its unique role in communication. This distinction allows for a more nuanced examination of humor within the speech acts of young Iraqi Facebook users.

**3. God's Invocation:** represents the profound realm of spiritual expressions within Facebook status updates. Many Facebook users, deeply connected to their faith, utilize this category to convey their devotion, seek blessings, or share profound spiritual sentiments. Prayers, or "الادعية" in Arabic, hold a fundamental place in the online presence of many users. These supplications and invocations encompass a range of expressions, from simple expressions of gratitude and requests for guidance to verses from religious texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, that invoke the name of God (Allah) and seek His mercy and forgiveness.

﴿فَأَسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ﴾

اللهم أرزقنا شعور هذه الآية 🙏

"We responded to him."

O God, grant us the feeling of this verse. 😢 🙏

Description: The speaker is referring to a specific Quranic verse and expressing a desire for a similar response from God. They seek a deep spiritual connection and understanding of the verse's meaning in their life. This status falls into the "God's Invocation" category as it involves a prayer-like expression and a connection to religious texts.

.. إغفر لي ولأصدقائي يا الله لننعم سوياً في جنتك ❤️ 🙏

.. فإنني أريد صحبتهم حتى في الجنة 🦸‍♂️ 😊

"Forgive me and my friends, O Allah, so that we may enjoy together in Your paradise... ❤️ 🙏  
For I desire their companionship even in paradise... 🦸‍♂️ 😊"

Description: The speaker is seeking forgiveness from Allah for themselves and their friends. They express a deep desire to be in the company of their friends even in paradise, emphasizing the importance of their friendships in this life and the afterlife. This status reflects a strong spiritual connection and falls under the "God's Invocation" category as it includes a prayerful element.

These prayers serve both personal and communal purposes, reflecting the coexistence of individual spirituality and collective religious identity within the online community. By incorporating "Prayers" as a distinct category in the taxonomy of speech acts developed in this study, the significance of faith and spirituality in the discourse of young Iraqi Facebook users is acknowledged. It also highlights how digital communication platforms are not only spaces for casual interaction but also avenues for the expression of profound religious and spiritual beliefs.

### **The Role of Emojis and Images, in Speech Act Taxonomy**

In the study of speech acts in Iraqi Facebook status updates, it was found that the contemporary digital sphere introduces new dimensions through multimodal communication. Emojis, Images, play a crucial role in this context. Emojis are used to convey emotions and add depth to messages. Images serve as visual tools to convey messages, evoke emotions, and support content. combining visual and auditory elements. By incorporating these elements into the taxonomy of speech acts, the study recognizes their significance in online discourse among Iraqi Facebook users, enhancing communication richness and diversity.

**Emojis:** Emojis, those diminutive visual symbols that convey an extensive range of emotions, reactions, and nuances, proved to be omnipresent in the Facebook status updates we meticulously examined (Kaye et al., 2022). These seemingly modest yet highly expressive icons constitute a bridge between written language and non-verbal communication (Dainas, and Susan 2021). They offer users a remarkable tool for infusing their textual messages with emotional context, thereby transcending the confines of mere words. Emojis in our taxonomy serve as a testament to their pivotal role in enhancing and enriching the speech acts nestled within status updates. These small icons are not merely embellishments; they encapsulate the essence of speech acts, enabling users to effectively communicate sentiments such as joy, sadness, surprise, or humor (Novak, Smailović, Sluban, & Mozetič, 2015).

Here are some illustrative examples showcasing their versatile usage:

صباحكم\_امل 

"Your morning is filled with hope 

والحليم تكفيه الاشاره 

"And the patient person understands with a gesture 

This example employs emojis to emphasize a proverb's message: "Speak positively or choose silence," with the patient person comprehending through a gesture. The mask emoji represents the act of remaining silent.

In this instance, the red heart emoji is often used to convey feelings of love or affection. It adds an emotional layer to the message, emphasizing the positivity of the morning.

**2. Images:** The inclusion of images in Facebook status updates adds a captivating dimension to communication, as highlighted by research conducted by (Tossell, et al., 2012). These images, which can be personal photographs or internet memes, allow users to enhance their textual content with visually engaging narratives (Guo & Zhang 2019). The taxonomy developed in this study recognizes Images as a distinct category of speech acts, acknowledging their crucial role in conveying information, evoking emotions, and contributing to the overall meaning of a status update. Users purposefully select images to convey specific messages, making them an integral part of their intended communication (Tang & Hew 2018; Guo & Zhang ,2019).

"The man searching for problems from underground before the Maghrib call to prayer in



(الرجل وهو يبحث على المشاكل من تحت الأرض قبل أذان المغرب في رمضان) "Ramadan"

For instance, consider the image of a man with his head inserted into a crack in the street, intently peering inside. Accompanying this image is a Facebook status update that humorously suggests, "The man searching for problems from underground before the Maghrib call to prayer in Ramadan" (الرجل وهو يبحث على المشاكل من تحت الأرض قبل أذان المغرب في رمضان). This visual depiction playfully conveys the idea that the man is comically looking for any mishaps underground just before the Maghrib Azan in Ramadan, humorously implying that he might be driven by hunger or thirst to create problems.

This example illustrates how images are powerful vehicles for conveying complex emotions, narratives, and humor within the digital discourse of Facebook status updates. By incorporating images, users can enrich the spectrum of speech acts and expand the interpretations within the online community. Images have the ability to evoke strong emotional responses, tell intricate stories, and inject humor into the message being communicated. They provide a visual context that enhances the overall meaning and impact of the status update, allowing users to express themselves in ways that go beyond the limitations of written language.

In the comprehensive analysis of Facebook status updates among young Iraqis, ten distinct speech act categories were identified, each with a specific number of instances. These categories provide valuable insights into the diverse landscape of online communication within this demographic. Leading the list is Emojis, with 850 instances (21.66 percent), playing a significant role in expressing emotions and sentiments. Directives follow closely with 820 instances (20.90 percent), serving as a prominent means of issuing commands and instructions. Images feature 636 instances (16.21 percent) and enrich communication visually, allowing explicit expression of feelings. Expressives have 453 instances (11.54 percent), contributing to emotional expression and adding depth to communication. Humor

adds a comedic element with 296 instances (7.54 percent), while Representatives (Assertives) share facts and information with 289 instances (7.36 percent). Declaratives offer concise information and opinions with 158 instances (4.03 percent), while Quotations present recognizable quotes with 146 instances (3.72 percent). God's Invocation introduces a spiritual dimension with 101 instances (2.57 percent), and Commissives express commitments with 85 instances (2.17 percent). This comprehensive breakdown highlights the prevalence of these speech act categories and underscores their unique roles in shaping digital discourse among young Iraqi Facebook users.

By closely analyzing the speech acts used by male and female Iraqis in their Facebook status updates. By examining these speech acts, such as sharing personal experiences, expressing opinions, seeking advice, offering congratulations, expressing gratitude, and engaging in social interactions, we gain insights into how gender influences communication patterns in this digital context. Understanding these speech acts is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of online communication within the Iraqi cultural context and identifying potential gender differences in self-expression and interaction on Facebook.

The study focuses on investigating gender differences in speech act behavior among Arab Iraqi youths, specifically in the context of Facebook status updates. A total of 50 participants (25 males and 25 females) were included in the study, and 1,524 status messages were collected over a two-month period. The study utilized a modified version of Searle's speech act taxonomy, consisting of ten speech act categories. The data analysis revealed potential gender-based differences in speech act responses, with female participants showing a higher level of engagement on Facebook compared to males. The study introduced new five categories to examine the linguistic styles typically used by women and men in Facebook status updates. The findings contribute to the existing literature on gender differences in language use and provide insights into the speech act behavior of Arab Iraqi youths in the online environment.

By examining the taxonomy of speech acts within Facebook status updates and comparing the frequencies and percentages between male and female users, this section aims to unravel the nuanced ways in which each gender communicates through their online presence.

Table 1

*Speech Act Construction Comparison Between Male Group and Female*

Speech Act Taxonomy	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Directive</b>	408	22.76%	412	19.33%
<b>Emoji</b>	278	15.50%	572	26.84%
<b>Image</b>	259	14.45%	377	17.69%
<b>Expressive</b>	215	11.99%	238	11.17%
<b>Humor</b>	194	10.82%	102	4.79%
<b>Representative</b>	126	7.03%	163	7.65%
<b>Declarative</b>	120	6.69%	38	1.78%
<b>Quotation</b>	57	3.18%	89	4.18%
<b>Commissive</b>	43	2.40%	42	1.97%
<b>God's Invocation</b>	22	1.23%	79	3.71%

These analyses are described in Table 1 take together the comparison between male and female taxonomy frequencies in Facebook status updates unveils notable variations in the utilization of speech acts.

The data analysis presents the frequencies and percentages of various speech act categories observed in the communication patterns of males and females on Facebook. The speech act taxonomy includes multiple categories that shed light on how individuals express themselves and interact on the platform.

The most prevalent speech act category for both genders is the directive, which involves issuing instructions or commands. Males exhibit a higher frequency of directives at 408 (22.76%), while females show a slightly lower frequency at 412 (19.33%).

Emojis, visual cues used to express emotions or add emphasis, are used more frequently by females. The data shows that females incorporate emojis into their updates at a frequency of 572 (26.84%), whereas males use them at a frequency of 278 (15.50%).

Both genders utilize images in their updates to enhance the message visually. Males have a frequency of 259 (14.45%) for image usage, while females exhibit a slightly higher frequency of 377 (17.69%).

Expressive speech acts, involving the sharing of emotions, opinions, and personal experiences, are comparable between males and females. Males display a frequency of 215 (11.99%), while females show a frequency of 238 (11.17%).

Interestingly, the data reveals a higher frequency of humor in males' updates compared to females. Males exhibit a frequency of 194 (10.82%) in using humor, while females display a lower occurrence at 102 (4.79%).

Representative speech acts, which involve conveying information or reporting facts, are relatively evenly distributed between males (7.03%) and females (7.65%). This suggests a comparable inclination for both genders to share information and provide updates.

Declarative speech acts, involving making statements or assertions, are more prevalent in males' updates at a frequency of 120 (6.69%) compared to females' updates at a frequency of 38 (1.78%).

Additional speech act categories include quotation, commissive, and God's invocation. Males tend to use quotations (3.18%) more frequently, while females exhibit higher frequencies in commissive (2.40%) and God's invocation (3.71%) speech acts.

These findings are consistent with other literature which found that men use language to enhance social dominance and achieve tangible outcomes (Lakoff, 2004; Tannen, 1992; Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Kalbfleisch & Herold, 2006; Kothari et al., 2013; Tarrant, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of Facebook status updates among Arab Iraqi youths reveals interesting variations in the utilization of speech acts across different categories and genders.

For directives, both males and females commonly use this speech act category, but males exhibit a slightly higher frequency. This indicates that both genders are inclined to issue instructions or commands in their updates.

Regarding the use of emojis, females incorporate them more frequently into their updates, emphasizing their emotions or adding visual cues. Males, on the other hand, use emojis less often. When it comes to image usage, both males and females utilize images to enhance the visual aspect of their messages. Females exhibit a slightly higher frequency of image usage compared to males.

Expressive speech acts, involving the sharing of emotions, opinions, and personal experiences, are comparable between males and females. This suggests that both genders are inclined to express themselves in a similar manner in their Facebook status updates.

Interestingly, males exhibit a higher frequency of humor in their updates compared to females, indicating a greater tendency to use humor as a means of expression.

Representative speech acts, involving conveying information or reporting facts, are relatively evenly distributed between males and females. This suggests that both genders have a comparable inclination to share information and provide updates in their Facebook status messages.

Declarative speech acts, involving making statements or assertions, are more prevalent in males' updates compared to females' updates. This indicates that males tend to assert their opinions or make statements more frequently in their Facebook posts.

The analysis also reveals differences in the usage of quotation, commissive, and God's invocation speech acts between males and females. Males tend to use quotations more frequently, while females exhibit higher frequencies in commissive and God's invocation speech acts.

These findings provide valuable insights into the communication styles and preferences of Arab Iraqi youths on Facebook. They highlight both similarities and differences in how males and females express themselves, utilize various speech acts, and engage with others on the platform. Understanding these patterns can contribute to a deeper understanding of online communication dynamics among Arab Iraqi youths and inform future research in this domain.

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