
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Food Invitations in Jordanian and Saudi Arabian Societies: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Food invitation is one of the speech acts examined in cross-cultural pragmatics. The diverse invitation strategies employed across societies have motivated substantial scholarly attention. Enhancing intercultural communicative competence in this speech act can strengthen interpersonal relationships. This study examines similarities and differences in the politeness strategies employed in food invitations in Jordanian and Saudi Arabian societies. Two instruments—memos and semi-structured interviews—were used to collect the data. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was adopted to analyze the strategies employed by both groups. Examining accepted and declined food invitations among Jordanians and Saudis can facilitate successful communication. Following the classification of politeness strategies used by both communities, the study provides an in-depth analysis of the cultural perspectives that may motivate the preference for particular invitation strategies. Future research could compare other sociolinguistic phenomena in the two communities, such as agreement and disagreement strategies.

KEYWORDS

Jordanian Arabic; Saudi Arabic; sociolinguistics; politeness; food invitations; memos

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1. Introduction

Food invitation is a common speech act used by members of society in everyday interaction. Individuals extend invitations to friends within their own communities and across national boundaries. When inviting a friend from another country, speakers need to be aware of culturally acceptable and unacceptable practices to avoid misunderstandings. Understanding such cultural nuances can enhance shared dining experiences and foster closer interpersonal relationships. Awareness of dietary habits, traditional practices, and mealtime etiquette enables individuals to demonstrate respect for their guests' cultural backgrounds. Politeness strategies play a central role in establishing and maintaining successful relationships among interlocutors. Protecting the face of both the inviter and the invitee is important for maintaining mutual respect. This objective can often be achieved through careful communication that ensures both parties feel valued in interaction. By attending to participants' feelings and perspectives, interlocutors can strengthen their relationship and facilitate future interaction.

For an invitation to be successfully negotiated, both the inviter and the invitee must act courteously in accordance with relevant cultural conventions. Both parties must use language that is appropriate within their respective societies. Such mutual understanding fosters respect and appreciation, ensuring that the invitation is not merely acknowledged but also valued. Observing these social norms can promote stronger relationships and more harmonious social interaction. Therefore, the use of politeness strategies is essential to protect each participant's face and reduce potential interactional risks.

Numerous Arab scholars have examined speech acts such as requests, agreements, invitations, and refusals across Arabic-speaking communities, including Al-Natour (2025) and AL-Yousef (2024), demonstrating that these acts are realized differently across

communities. This body of research highlights communicative nuances that reflect cultural values and social norms specific to each region. Comparative analyses of these speech acts can improve understanding of the social dynamics that shape interaction among Arabic-speaking populations.

To improve understanding of invitations across cultures and facilitate effective communication, this study investigates similarities and differences in the politeness strategies employed in Saudi Arabian and Jordanian communities. The study explores how both cultures value respect and formality in invitations, while recognizing that subtle differences in phrasing and contextual conditions may result in different interpretations. By analyzing these nuances, the research aims to enhance cross-cultural interaction and foster stronger relationships between individuals from these neighboring regions. These similarities and differences are examined through the following hypotheses: Saudi and Jordanian participants employ similar politeness strategies in their invitations. Saudi and Jordanian participants may also employ different politeness strategies. Both groups may employ comparable strategies in dialect-specific ways.

These nuanced variations may reflect deeper cultural values and traditions that shape social communication. Understanding these constraints can enhance communication and foster stronger relationships among people from these regions. Cross-cultural research of this kind can demonstrate the role of culture and linguistic variation in social interaction. Moreover, it can help communities strengthen their interactions by promoting respectful communication. Consequently, greater mutual understanding may reduce the challenges that they encounter.

This research seeks to narrow gaps arising from differences in Jordanian and Saudi Arabian food-invitation practices, particularly because the two societies maintain close relations and many Jordanians work in Saudi Arabia across different sectors. Furthermore, many Saudi students study at Jordanian universities. Accordingly, this study can help members of both communities learn more about one another's cultures and recognize cultural differences in food invitations.

2. Literature Review

The analytical framework adopted in this study is explained in detail to clarify the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). This framework has been widely used in previous research because it provides an influential account of politeness in intercultural interaction. The following review examines studies of Jordanian and Saudi Arabian cultures across a range of speech acts in order to identify perspectives on what is regarded as polite or impolite language use. These insights improve understanding of politeness in these cultures and provide a basis for examining how such strategies operate in diverse linguistic contexts. Examining these distinctions facilitates a better appreciation of the social norms that shape communicative practices in diverse settings.

2.1 Analytical Framework of the Study

This study uses Brown and Levinson's politeness framework to identify the strategies employed in food invitations in Jordanian and Saudi Arabian societies. Given the importance of politeness research in pragmatics, the study compares food-invitation speech acts among Jordanians and Saudis to examine pragmatic variation across the two cultures.

Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that, although face is universal, practices for attending to face differ according to cultural norms. They maintained that interlocutors are expected to attend to others' face needs and to avoid threatening faces where possible. In their theory, face refers to the public self-image that individuals seek to have respected by others. To attend to others' face needs, interlocutors use politeness strategies in interaction. They outlined five broad strategy types: First, negative politeness addresses the hearer's negative face. Second, positive politeness attends to the hearer's positive face. Third, bald-on-record strategies convey a message directly to the hearer. Fourth, off-record strategies enable speakers to perform a face-threatening act (FTA) indirectly, leaving their utterances open to multiple interpretations. Finally, speakers may choose not to perform the face-threatening act.

2.2 Past Studies on Jordanian Society

Al-Natour et al. (2024) investigated politeness strategies in refusing food invitations among Jordanians. They revealed that the invitees employed indirect strategies in their interactions to be more polite with the inviters. They utilized various politeness strategies such as rejecting by employing religious terms, justified reasons, prayers, promising, ask for forgiveness. Examining the apology strategies was conducted by Banikalef et al. (2015). They found that Jordanian Arabic employed acknowledging responsibility as the most preferred strategy in their interactions. Moreover, Jordanians used acknowledging responsibility and swearing by God's name as the most integrated apology strategies in their interactions. Non-apology strategies were observed to indicate deserving of discussion. Lastly, the data indicated that new culture-specific apology strategies were found. The pragmatics

of politeness were inspected by Ali Al-Natour et al. (2015) in relation to the essential request strategies employed by Jordanian students in a classroom. According to the results, Jordanian students employed a range of strategies, from the most direct to the most indirect, including preparatory, mind, permission, appreciation, and inquiry strategies. The preparatory strategy accounted for 335 out of 700 employed by Jordanian students.

Eid and Abdullah (2021) examined taboo language through animal names in Facebook Messenger in Jordanian interactions. The study found that several themes, including humor, relaxation, anger, and abuse, were expressed through the usage of taboo language. The colloquial proverbs that Jordanians use in several contexts were studied by Migdadi et al. (2023). The findings exhibited that proverbs could be classified into four groups: proverbs about eating-related body organs, proverbs about the eating process itself, proverbs about eating tools, and proverbs about edible objects. Al-Natour (2025) inspected how Jordanian students responded to compliments in a classroom context. According to the students' responses, they responded to compliments in a diversity of ways, such as acceptance, mitigation/deflection, rejection, non-response, and request interpretations. In addition, they employed several strategies for each type, including silence, disagreement, downgrading, and gratitude.

The functions of Jordanians' pinned Facebook statuses were explored by Alkhaza'leh et al. (2023). The analysis displayed that these statuses assisted six essential purposes: religious, sayings, personal, family, and miscellaneous. From a cultural perspective on communication, Altakhaineh et al. (2024) studied the pragmatic mistakes made by Jordanian EFL learners. It was found that EFL learners may struggle to cooperate with native speakers and fully participate in social and professional activities, even if they employ a firm grasp of English grammar rules. Al-Bawareed and Al-Harashsheh (2024) used metaphorical expressions of stupidity and stubbornness in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA) to examine the effects of age and gender on the use of impoliteness strategies. Positive impoliteness strategy was the most employed strategy among both male and female respondents, while sarcasm was the least commonly employed strategy. The findings also showed that younger speakers were more likely than speakers of other ages to employ impoliteness strategies. In JSA, middle-aged female speakers employed these strategies the least, while older Jordanian female speakers employed them more than male speakers.

Al-Natour et al. (2025) examined the congratulatory strategies employed in the written texts in Jerash University undergraduate students' graduation notebooks. According to the study, the students utilized a variety of congratulatory strategies, such as the ability to attach gifts, congratulations, happiness clauses, compliments, and good wishes. The sociopragmatic uses of death formulas by Bedouins in eastern Jordan were investigated by Alshraah et al. in 2024. According to the results, death formulas have contextual purposes, including preserving social rapport, offering condolences, and emphasizing God's predestination of life and death. This research has practical suggestions for intercultural communication and advances our knowledge of Bedouin language and cultural practices in eastern Jordan.

The sociological phenomenon of male university students using swearing gestures in Jordanian culture was inspected by Hamdan and Eid (2021). According to the study's findings, swearers typically don't mean what they say. Besides, the researchers revealed that swearing has mostly nonliteral meanings, such as idioms, and should not be taken literally since doing so would cause it to misplace its connotative meaning. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Al-Natour et al. (2024) observed how Jordanian students used terms of address. According to this study, Jordanian students are enthusiastic about using terms of address to soften their speech when speaking with others. Moreover, they considered that employing them preserved the hearers' faces. The use of positive politeness agreement strategies by Jordanian EFL students and their professors was thoroughly studied by Al-Eer et al. (2025). The expected results involved important insights into the sociolinguistic dynamics of Jordanian educational settings by describing the most common and culturally noteworthy positive politeness agreement strategies used by both participating groups.

The strategies employed with the speech act of criticism in Jordanian Arabic (JA) were examined by Al Kayed and Al-Ghoweri (2019). The study's results exhibited that Jordanians used more indirect than direct strategies of criticism. Al-Harashsheh (2012) used a socio-pragmatic approach to scrutinize how speakers of Jordanian Arabic and Australian English perceived and used silence in everyday conversation. The study's findings displayed how significant silence is. The interlocutors' interactions were framed and structured by silence. Additionally, silence serves pragmatic and sociolinguistic purposes, such as discourse and politeness purposes.

Al-Khaza'leh (2023) sought to elucidate the dialectical expressions and proverbs of the Jordanian Bani Hasan tribe. The tribe has some unique lexemes and proverbs. The meaning and pronunciation of mutual idiomatic colloquial expressions are given, along with the proverbs' illocutionary force. According to the analysis, the majority of Bani Hasan proverbs serve practical purposes of criticism and giving advice. Haddad (2023) investigated the significant influence of Jordanian culture on selecting offer strategy and the politeness modification strategy. In all three corpora, direct offers were found to be the most commonly used offer strategy. Swearing (in the sense of taking an oath) as a speech act that is commonly used in everyday conversations in Jordan was discussed by Abdel-Jawad (2000). It was found that swearing had a variety of communicative purposes and displayed discrepancies regarding the form, usage, and function.

Al-Rousan and Alsharairi (2024) aimed to examine the factors influencing the choice to use such strategies as well as the external modifications of requests among Jordanian male and female university students in cross-gender settings. The study concluded that although male students used aggravating supportive moves (such as threats, insults, and moralizing) more frequently than female students, female students preferred mitigating supportive moves (such as imposition minimizers, grounders, disarmers, preparators, getting a pre-commitment, and promise of reward). It's interesting to note that Jordanian students' requests also comprised other distinctive fundamentals that fall under the category of mitigating supportive moves, such as self-introduction, gratitude, and apology. AlYousef et al. (2025) examined the persuasive strategies used by Jordanian interlocutors in an academic context using Aristotle's rhetorical triangle ethos (credibility), logos (logic), and pathos (emotion) as a framework for analysis. According to the findings, when professors and students use all three rhetorical appeals, diverse preferences become apparent. Logos-driven tactics, which underline logical reasoning and arguments supported by evidence, are typically favored by professors. In contrast, students tended to employ pathos-driven strategies to realize their persuasive goals by appealing to feelings and common experiences.

Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Banat et al. (2024) concentrated on recognizing the negative politeness strategies used by Jordanian professors toward their students. Seven negative politeness strategies were elucidated from the analysis of the data, such as indirect, questioning, hedging, giving deference, impersonalizing the speaker and hearer, apologizing, and minimizing imposition, which were found to be preferred by the professors. The negative politeness strategy was one of the professors' desired strategies because it indirectly saved the students' faces in class, and it made them feel closer to their professors. The reasons and forms of code-switching among bilingual Jordanian speakers of Arabic and English were also examined by Al Yousef et al. (2025). The outcomes identified two significant facets of code-switching among the participants. First, code-switching has dissimilar motivational functions, foremost among them being the simultaneous use of both languages to convey identity and confidence. It also fills in lexical gaps when responding to words or deeds of others. Second, the study found that three kinds of code-switching were employed: intra-sentential, tag, and inter-sentential.

International agreements or accords were examined by Almahasees et al. (2025). The challenges and approaches associated with translating legal terms from English into Arabic and vice versa. According to the study's findings, the absence of most legal expression equivalents is the biggest issue. In addition, Almahasees et al. (2024) investigated how remote interpreters viewed the impact of switching from on-site to online interpreting. Zoom, telephone, and Kudo are the most commonly used interpreting services. Moreover, international organizations and healthcare providers were the main clients for remote interpreting. The positive politeness strategies that English professors employ with their students were studied by Al-Natour et al. (2024). The findings revealed that professors preferred to use eight positive politeness strategies with their students, with this strategy being the most frequently employed because it helped students feel at ease and involved in the course. This strategy not only fostered a supportive learning environment but also encouraged greater student participation and engagement. Finally, these strategies contributed to a more collaborative classroom atmosphere, improving the overall educational experience.

2.3 Past Studies on Saudi Society

Saudi Arabia is one of the Arabic countries. Saudi society is known for being generous and helping others locally and internationally. The invitation speech is common among Saudis, as they incorporate traditional invitations into their daily communications. They often invite others to have Arabic coffee and dates with them in the morning, either at home or work. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the Saudi food invitation to illuminate their strategies for food invitations. Understanding these cultural practices can provide deeper insights into the social dynamics and hospitality norms within Saudi society. By examining the nuances of food invitations, we can appreciate how they foster connections and strengthen community bonds among individuals. One of the studies that looked at this speech act was conducted by Alzamil, H. S. A. (2023), who provided readers with a complete understanding of the context of invitations and social gatherings; several broad social aspects of Saudi culture about invitations should be explained. For example, social events with friends and/or family are highly valued in Saudi culture. As a result, it is typical in Saudi Arabia for friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and coworkers to schedule regular get-togethers over a cup of coffee and tea, lunch, or dinner on weekends or weekdays.

The dialogic system of the directive speech act of request and its response of approval versus refusal in Egypt and Saudi Arabia were compared by El-Dakhs, D. A. S. (2018). According to the study, there were significant similarities between Saudis and Egyptians in terms of combination patterns, techniques, and the impact of social variables. Alaboudi, S. (2020) investigated the refusal strategies employed by Arabic-speaking Saudi women. The fact that the participants utilized more indirect than direct refusal strategies may suggest that they are endeavoring to lessen the impact of their rejections. In the context of requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions, Ismail Saud, W. (2019) sought to investigate the refusal strategies used by Saudi English as a foreign language (EFL) undergraduate students as well as the association between these strategies and social status. The findings demonstrated that in each of the four strategies, the participants' refusals varied. However, the findings verified that their use of refusal strategies is not significantly influenced by their social status. This indicates that while cultural factors play a role in how

refusals are articulated, social hierarchy may not have as strong an impact as previously thought. Further research could explore additional variables that might shape refusal strategies among different demographic groups.

Al-Azzam et al. (2017) aimed to investigate the social and cultural euphemism in Saudi Arabia as a universal linguistic phenomenon. The study revealed how social and cultural factors play a noteworthy role in euphemism expressions. Moreover, it demonstrated a substantial and obvious change in the way euphemisms are used in Saudi culture; in the past, Saudis did not use them as regularly as they do now. With an emphasis on invitations and offers, Al-Zubeiry & Alzahrani (2025) investigate the socio-pragmatic roles of ostensible commissive speech acts in Saudi spoken Arabic. Eight essential communicative strategies are exposed by the research: welcoming others, showing thanks and appreciation, being courteous, easing conversation endings, acknowledging familiarity, softening embarrassment, expressing sympathy and concern, and lessening social pain.

In the cultural setting of Sarat Asir, a region in southern Saudi Arabia, Alqahtany, A. (2024) investigated the language aspect of gift-giving dynamics. According to the research, managing relationships in Asir entails exchanging sociality and face rights and responsibilities while displaying different rapport concerns and orientations depending on the situation. Declarative statements are frequently used in verbal gift-giving, but nonverbal cues are vital for establishing rapport, especially with women, in formal situations, and with strangers. Gift-giving communications frequently established rapport-building characteristics because gifts were accepted quickly and easily, particularly in male-to-male relationships and with non-monetary gifts. (Kurita, 2024; Zhang et al., 2025) declared that older or more traditional learners in Saudi Arabia and Jordan often use rejection; contemporary research illustrated that young people are rejecting compliments less, particularly in informal online interactions, indicating a gradual but evident shift toward more flexible, context-sensitive responses.

Alzamil, H. S. A. (2023) explained that Hail people are famous in Saudi Arabia for their tendency to insist on invitations. Since it's normal to end conversations or daily discussions with an offer for a cup of coffee, invitees will actually always decline invitations. Invitees will therefore not accept invites instantly; instead, they will typically decline at the outset with broad, ambiguous justifications or a request to reschedule the invitation to another time. This cultural practice highlights the significance of politeness and preserving social harmony among communicators. Considering these nuances can pointedly improve interpersonal relationships and interactions in Saudi Arabian society.

Saudi Arabia has diverse important dialects, such as Najdi, Hijazi, Gulf varieties, and each of them has its different pragmatic conventions for praise and politeness (Alqarni, 2017). The compliment strategies among Saudi EFL learners are described as modesty and religiously-inflected deflection. This demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is rooted in rich values and Islamic standards. Thus, several aspects such as Vision 2023, with its emphasis on open social interaction, and the growth of female participation in both public and academic life lead to a shift into an interactional style, especially among university academics, staff, and students. Saudi Arabian female learners commonly use expressive, emotionally rich responses, while males select short responses, especially in mixed-age contexts. Mahzari, M. (2017) examined Saudi Facebook users' verbal and non-linguistic reactions to congratulations. "Congratulations," "offer of good wishes," "praise," and "statements indicating the circumstance was warranted" were their most often employed congratulatory strategies. Jordanian Facebook users' congrats on giving birth were examined by Alshraah et al. (2024). They stated that Jordanian Facebook users' congrats were influenced by their sociocultural and religious imitations.

Asking for a favor was studied by Alqahtani, A. N. (2015). The study aimed to explore whether the Saudi Arabian favor is influenced by the degree of imposition. Although they requested a favor more explicitly, it was revealed that the Saudis prefer to be oblique. Al-Rojaie, Y. I. (2021) inspected several Saudi Arabian dialects, encompassing Najdi Arabic. He found that their interactions were pointedly affected by religious statements. There are some practical uses related to some religious words, such as the word "Allah." These results advocated a complex interplay between language, culture, and social norms in Saudi Arabia. Comprehending these dynamics can improve communication strategies and foster deeper connections in both personal and professional communications.

Politeness in the Najdi Arabic speakers' invitation was scrutinized by Alsmay, N. A. (2022). He concentrated on the socio-pragmatic parameters of gender, social distance, and the in/formality of the speech event affecting strategy selection and modes of delivery. The results presented that the level of (in)formality of the invitational situation recognized the way invitations are shaped either textually or digitally, notwithstanding social distance and gender. It was observed that indirectness is not universally paralleled with politeness; meanwhile, Najdi Arabic speakers reveal a propensity toward directness and imposition to carry interest in and affiliation with the invitees. El-Dakhs (2021) collected responses from 443 Egyptian and 428 Saudi undergraduates to observe the variations in compliment strategies between Egyptian and Saudi Arabic speakers. The results showed significant differences in managing politeness: Saudis selected implicit strategies and combinations, while Egyptians preferred explicit praise strategies.

3. Methodology

This section comprises three subsections: participants, instruments, and data collection. Each subsection is described below.

3.1 Participants

Participants are students from the English departments of two universities, one in Saudi Arabia and one in Jordan. The study will include 20 participants: 10 from Qassim University in Saudi Arabia and 10 from Jerash University in Jordan. They will participate in semi-structured interviews. Participants will have completed a range of language courses, including sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics. They will be selected from diverse educational backgrounds to capture variation in the politeness strategies used in their interactions. To compile observational memos, researchers at both universities will document participants' responses and observe their use of politeness strategies in food invitations. Gender representation will also be considered to examine potential gender-based differences in politeness strategies used in invitations to share food. Random selection will also be used to account for variation in age and year of study. Each participant will be assigned a numerical code to protect the confidentiality of their responses.

3.2 Instruments

Qualitative data, according to Creswell & Creswell (2017), is information gathered from carefully chosen informants. Memos and semi-structured interviews are the two qualitative methods that will be employed to get information from the participants. As previously proposed by Musante and DeWalt (2010), observers analyze what is happening and why; discriminate between regular and irregular actions; search for disparities to view the event from multiple perceptions; recognize negative cases or exceptions; and, when behaviors align with the theoretical goals of the observation, look for parallel opportunities for observation and plan systematic evaluations of those events or behaviors. With the assistance of these two approaches, the researcher will be able to gather data as it is formed by the students, offering reliable data and simplifying an insightful inspection of the politeness strategies formed by Saudis and Jordanians in their food invitations.

3.3 Data Collection

This section outlines the six procedures that the researcher will follow to collect data from Saudi and Jordanian students. First, the heads of the English departments at the respective institutions will be asked to grant permission for data collection from their students. Second, selected students will sign an informed-consent form to confirm their agreement to participate. Third, students will provide data to the researchers through the designated instruments. Fourth, researchers will observe participants' use of politeness strategies and record memos in order to categorize the strategies employed. Fifth, the researchers will prepare a table listing the strategies used in food invitations in Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Finally, using Brown and Levinson's (1987) analytical framework, the researchers will identify and count instances of each politeness strategy for detailed analysis.

4. Conclusion

This study explores three hypotheses concerning politeness strategies in food invitations among Saudis and Jordanians. First, it posits that Saudi and Jordanian participants share similar politeness strategies. Second, it proposes that Saudi and Jordanian politeness strategies differ. Third, it anticipates dialect-specific realizations of these politeness strategies. Potential findings include greater diversity in the politeness strategies used by Jordanian students than by their Saudi counterparts, or vice versa. Variables that may influence the use of particular politeness strategies include context, gender, and cultural nuances; analysis of these variables may elucidate food-invitation practices in both groups.

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