

## Jordanian Facebookers' attitudes: A speech act analysis

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### ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Facebook is widely regarded as one of the most popular networking sites, enabling users to follow local and international pages for the latest news. Status updates on Facebook address various social aspects, prompting followers to comment and express their feelings and opinions. Motivated by an interest in studying the speech acts within these comments, the researchers aimed to identify the types of speech acts (Searle, 1969) that occur in the comments on Jordanian status updates. The researchers also analyzed the role played by the speech act sequence. Status updates covering social, economic, educational, and religious topics were collected from two of the most popular Facebook pages in Jordan: Al Mamlaka TV and Roya News. A total of 200 comments were analyzed under these updates. The analysis revealed the occurrence of most of Searle's speech acts, along with additional acts such as swearing, sarcasm, and accusation. Furthermore, no gender differences were observed in the use of speech acts, except in the case of swearing. The analysis of speech act sequences demonstrated how commenters establish interactions, whether in agreement or disagreement with one another. The findings spotlight how Jordanians deliver their thoughts on various social topics, reflecting different cultural aspects. This paper contributes to the limited body of literature examining comments on Facebook status updates, offering insights into the consequences of speech act sequences and illustrating how commenters use language to communicate their intentions.

**Keywords:** Facebook comments; gender differences; Searle's taxonomy; speech acts; speech act sequence

#### Received:

02 March 2023

#### Accepted:

21 April 2025

#### Revised:

19 April 2025

#### Published:

2 May 2025

#### How to cite (in APA style):

Abu-Elrob, R. A., & Tawalbeh, A. I. (2025). Jordanian Facebookers' attitudes: A speech act analysis. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 15(1), 47-58.  
<https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v15i1.55984>

### INTRODUCTION

People use language as a means for several purposes, such as expressing emotions (Abu-Elrob, 2022; Almahameed & Farghal, 2025), exchanging information (Holmes & Wilson, 2017), representing culture (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2024), performing actions (Abu-Elrob, 2019; Tawalbeh et al., 2023), and communicating referents that receivers can identify (Abu-Elrob et al., 2025). These purposes can be described as speech acts, wherein an act is performed during the process of speaking (Sadock, 2006) or through writing that conveys feelings and emotions. Nowadays, social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram provide people with the opportunity to express their thoughts

and feelings by posting status updates or writing comments.

Facebook is one of the most popular websites, used by Facebookers not only as a means of communicating with old and new friends, but also as a tool for expressing thoughts on various personal and public topics and sharing them with others (Al-Saidat et al., 2023). It has been recognized as an effective platform for connecting communities and cultures across diverse groups (Harris, 2020). As such, Facebookers post updates on a range of personal and public topics to share their ideas and opinions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Das & Sahoo, 2011; Tong et al., 2008). Popular public Facebook pages frequently share status updates on topics such

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as politics, religion, economics, health, and social life. Facebook users who spend their spare time reading these posts often respond to the content by using language to perform actions. These actions include various types of speech acts, which are directive, commissive, expressive, declarative, and assertive (Searle, 1969). Remarkably, the use of these speech acts may vary between males and females according to different social and cultural aspects (Banikalef, 2019). Therefore, the study of Facebook can be viewed as theoretically aligned with the study of culture (Androutsopoulos, 2014).

Several studies have analyzed communication on Facebook through the lens of speech act taxonomies. Researchers such as Banikalef and Al Bataineh (2017) and Ilyas and Khushi (2012) have analyzed the speech act of Facebook status updates by applying Searle's (1969) taxonomy. Notably, these studies have identified speech acts beyond Searle's original categories. For instance, Banikalef and Al Bataineh (2017) discovered additional speech acts like discovered additional speech acts like God's invocation, humor, and quotation in Jordanian Facebook status updates, attributing the prevalence of religious invocations to the deep-rooted Islamic culture in Jordan. Similarly, Ilyas and Khushi (2012) observed the use of Quranic verses in Facebook status updates, suggesting that such practices allow users to share feelings and information, thereby enhancing their presence.

The analysis of Facebook status updates has also explored gender differences in speech act usage among Jordanian users. Banikalef et al. (2014) noticed that the females were less humorous than the males in humorous Facebook status updates. It was also noticed that the males are interested in humorous daily life activities, whereas females are interested in hilarious romantic anecdotes. In another study by Banikalef (2019), the findings showed that the most frequent speech act used by males was assertive, whereas the most frequent one among females was expressive. This result was attributed to the cultural norms of the Jordanian speech community.

A few studies (Che Hassan & Nor, 2022; Suwarno, 2020) have analyzed comments on Facebook status updates. Che Hassan and Nor (2022) analyzed 555 Facebook comments on COVID-19 status updates using Searle's framework. Their study focused on the differences between male and female users in the use of speech acts and how cultural norms influenced these users. The analysis identified five speech act categories: assertives, declaratives, commissives, directives, and expressives, as well as a new category: quotation. Suwarno's (2020) thesis tackled the anger expressions in comments on Senator Fraser's Facebook post, using Yule's (1996) theory for a pragmatic analysis. The study reported several types of speech acts, including representatives,

expressives, commissives, and directives. While these studies focused on specific themes such as COVID-19 and anger, the current study seeks to explore a broader range of topics from daily life, namely, social, economic, and political topics.

Another study (Joiner et al., 2016) compared unactualized Facebook comments in terms of gender differences. Joiner et al. (2016) asked undergraduate students to fill in a questionnaire, which included two Facebook status updates, with their comments. It was noticed that the females' comments on the raised females' Facebook status updates showed higher emotional support than the males' comments on the males' status updates. However, there was no difference in their responses to the opposite gender. The participants in this study were aware of the fact that their comments were to be investigated for research purposes, as they were asked to comment on the updates, the matter that may affect the nature of these comments, and thus, they were considered non-naturally occurring data.

The previously mentioned studies spotlight the analysis of either Facebook status updates or comments on Facebook updates. Researchers have given more attention to the analysis of Facebook status than to the comments. The dearth of studies on analyzing Facebook comments in Arabic encouraged the researchers to conduct a detailed analysis of the speech acts of Jordanians' comments. While previous studies mainly focused on the assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative speech acts, this paper expects new speech acts to emerge as a result of the effect of the Jordanian culture. Furthermore, the study of the relation between gender and speech acts on Facebook was examined at the level of status updates only, and there is no study, to the researchers' best knowledge, that dealt with the effect of gender on Facebook comments. In the present study, the selected Facebook status updates are not tied to a specific occasion, as in the previous studies, but deal with various topics that are of people's concerns and occupy an important, relevant space in people's lives. This study has significant implications for the study of social and cultural aspects in Jordan, as it can shed light on the divergent use of speech acts between males and females.

This paper is based on Searle's (1969) speech act taxonomy that includes assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives speech acts. Assertive means that the producer represents how things are in the world. An assertive act counts as an attempt to explain the actual state of affairs comprising phrases used to address a specific idea, proposition, or belief. This act would include asserting, concluding, informing, predicting, and reporting. There are some verbs that can indicate assertion, such as deduce, conclude, and boast. As for directives, the words are used as an attempt to

push the recipient to do something, as in commands, orders, requests, and suggestions (Holtgraves, 2002). The verbs that can express directives are command, request, ask, pray, order, advise, and invite. The commissive speech act is used to show that the producer is committed to a future action, either by doing it or not. The intention behind commissive acts is likely to be that of offering, promising, refusing, vowing, and volunteering. The expressive act expresses someone's psychological state and feelings about a situation. It can be realized by actions like welcoming, thanking, apologizing, and congratulating, and by statements of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, joy, or sorrow. The declarative act includes creating a new fact and changing some states of life as a response to the propositional content. Some examples that can represent this speech act are 'I define', 'I name', 'I call', 'I pronounce', and 'I fire'.

Thus, the current study aims to analyze the comments on a sample of Facebook status updates to answer the following questions:

1. What speech acts do the comments on Jordanian Facebook status updates perform?
2. What is the relation between gender and the speech acts used?
3. What role can a speech act sequence play?

## **METHOD**

### **Study sample**

A total of 200 comments were collected from four Facebook status updates, distributed as follows: 53 comments on the first status update, 48 on the second, 55 on the third, and 44 on the last status update. Among these, nine comments consisted solely of emojis and photos, and eight verbal comments were excluded due to their irrelevance to the status updates. Consequently, the final dataset comprised 183 comments contributed by 192 individuals (101 males and 91 females).

The researchers analyzed all the comments using Searle's (1969) speech act taxonomy. Visual comments, such as emojis and photos, were interpreted within this framework, considering their potential to convey verbal equivalents and perform specific speech acts. This approach aligns with recent studies suggesting that emojis can function as nonverbal means of performing speech acts, such as expressing emotions or conveying intentions.

### **Data collection**

The researchers selected status updates from two of Jordan's most prominent Facebook pages: Al Mamlaka TV and Roya News, with a total of 15.9 million followers. These two social pages represent two of the official news channels in Jordan, which upload status updates that relate to local and international news. The researchers selected the status updates that relate to local news on which

Jordanians comment, express their feelings and opinions, and share information. The status updates covered social, economic, educational and religious topics as these topics touch people's feelings and address relevant issues that are of interest to them.

### **Data analysis**

The present study benefits from Tawalbeh (2021) methodology in applying both top-down and bottom-up processing to the analysis of the data. We used a prescribed analytical framework, Searle's speech act taxonomy, to conduct the top-down processing on all the comments of the Facebook status updates. Some comments could not find their realizations in the speech acts of Searle's taxonomy; therefore, a bottom-up processing was employed to investigate at the lower level the linguistic features to find out how their combinations make an action and perform a speech act at the higher level of analysis.

Applying this method at this stage ends with an inductive development of Searle's taxonomy by adding new speech acts: swearing, accusation and sarcasm, which seem to be vital to represent the speech acts of the comments on such status updates. For example, the researchers noticed that the following comment "بالفعل طفل يقرقانون طفل": Indeed, a child approves the bill of a child" does not match with any of Searle's speech acts. The bottom up processing of this comment enables the researchers to look at the linguistic elements that make up this comment. The action of approving the bill of the children is performed, in the above mentioned comment, by the agent "a child". Since the bill of children needs responsible decision makers, the speech act cannot be an assertive one in this example. Inserting the noun phrase "طفل: a child" as an agent in this comment supported by the adverb of certainty "بالفعل: indeed" performs another speech act which is sarcasm. The researchers assign the speech act of sarcasm as a result of the contradiction between the adverb of certainty and a significant decision that cannot be made by a child.

### **Reliability**

To establish the reliability of the analysis, an external rater specialist in linguistics was asked to re-analyze the data using the modified framework of the study after he had taken a training session in the analysis procedures. The rater and the researchers discussed and solved some discrepancies in assigning a few comments to the speech act that they realized.

Attention has been paid to gender differences in terms of the use of speech acts. The gender was identified based on the commenters' names and profile photos. As their profiles were made public, the researchers could visit the commenters' profiles and found some clues that helped make sure of their gender, such as the pronouns and dialects. This

study showed how speech acts were used by male, female, or both. In the results section, we gave a number of examples of each speech act. All the status updates and the comments were in Arabic, so we translated them into English. The researchers consulted two specialists to revise the translation. They suggested some few corrections, which were taken into consideration.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Speech act taxonomy

This section presents the four status updates with their translations. It was found that there are 103 comments where each one realizes two speech acts. The speech acts (total of 295) performed by the comments on these updates are categorized in Table 1. The (✓) sign in the table indicates which speech act is realized in the given status update. Table 2 provides detailed numbers of the frequency of each speech act.

The first status update is  
"مجلس النواب يقر مشروع قانون حقوق الطفل."

["The Parliament approves the bill on the child's rights."]

The second status update is

"نحن نتجاوز الطاقات الاستيعابية نتيجة الضغوط المجتمعية..وخفضنا القبول في تخصصات الطب وطب الاسنان هذا العام 20%."

["We are exceeding the capacities because of societal pressures, and we have reduced admission to medicine and dentistry specialties this year by 20%."]

The third status update is

"ارتفاع قيمة الفاتورة النفطية للأردن بنسبة 62% في 7 شهور."

["The value of Jordan's oil bill increases by 62% in seven months."]

The fourth update is

"قرار تثبيت التوقيت الصيفي لاقى تباينا في الآراء بين المواطنين ومركز الدراسات الاستراتيجية يقول إن 61% من الأردنيين مع اعتماد التوقيت الصيفي والشتوي."

["The decision to install daylight saving time met with a divergence of opinions among the Jordanian citizens. The Center for Strategic Studies says that 61% of Jordanians support the adoption of summer and winter time."]

**Table 1**

*The Speech Acts of the Comments on the Status Updates*

	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative	Swearing	Sarcasm	Accusation
status update (1)	26	25	1	18	0	11	8	3
status update (2)	15	19		12	0	9	5	6
status update (3)	12	27		13	0	9	6	4
status update (4)	16	30		0	0	13	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>16</b>

**Table 2**

*The Frequency of each Speech Acts in the Comments on the Status Updates*

	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative	Swearing	Sarcasm	Accusation
status update (1)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
status update (2)	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
status update (3)	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
status update (4)	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓

**Table 3**

*Speech Acts and Gender*

Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative	Swearing	Sarcasm
M/F	M/F	M	M/F		M/F	M/F

The relationship between speech acts and gender is shown in Table 3. The 'M' is for males, the 'F' is for females, and M/F is for both males and females. In addition, Table 4 below provides

detailed numbers of the use of each speech act by males and females. This is followed by an analysis of the speech acts relying on some selected examples of comments.

**Table 4**  
*The Frequency of each Speech Act in relation to Gender*

	Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Declarative	Swearing	Sarcasm	Accusation
M	39	46	1	19	0	24	12	9
F	30	55	0	24	0	18	11	7

#### Assertive

The comments that perform the assertive speech act attempt to report or explain a state of affairs from the commenters' point of view. Banikalef (2019) and Che Hassan and Nor (2022) stated that an assertive speech act is used to state a belief, fact, or opinion regardless of its truth. Depending on the context of the assertion, a Facebooker's comment could be interpreted as true or false (Narty, 2013). In this study, assigning assertive to comments has not been influenced by their truth value. Some comments raised by both males and females on the first status perform this act with propositions similar to the following comment: "مهو معروف بدهم وافقوا". It is known that they will agree.] The commenter wants to report the current state of affairs by asserting that the Parliament has to approve the bill on the child's rights. Another example of a comment on the second status update uses a proverb to report the current state of affairs: "نبحث عن الحلول كنائع القول" [we look for solutions like someone who soaks beans in water]. The commenter uses this proverb to show that the solutions are useless. On the same status, one utterance seems to perform an assertive act although its interrogative form gives the impression that it performs a directive act: "ليش تفتحهم بالجامعات الخاصة" [Why do you set these specialties in the private universities.] The commenter raises an assertion about opening the specialties of medicine and dentistry in private universities, trying to blame the Ministry of Higher Education for reducing the number of accepted students in these specialties in the public universities. One example of the third status update reflects the religious influence on the commenter, as he inserts a phrase from a Quranic verse into his comment "بِئْسَ بَخِيلٌ" [for a cheap price.]

#### Directive

Many comments on the status updates raised by male and female Facebookers are in the form of a request. Normal forms of requests have occurred in Narty's (2013) study when students used this type to request information from their colleagues. In the present study, the directive is realized most often using invocations raised against the decision makers, such as those against the Parliament: "الله يَنْتَقِمَ مِنْهُمْ.." [May Allah take revenge from them] (on the first status) and: "لا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله" [There is no power and might except by Allah] (on the third

status). This latter invocation can be used when someone faces trouble and is unable to do anything without the support of Allah. To realize a request within this speech act, the commenters also make invocations quoting some Quranic verses, such as: "حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ" [Allah is sufficient for us! For He is the best disposer of affairs.] In the current paper, one commenter quoted another Quranic verse (on the first status): "أَلَا لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ" [Indeed, the curse of Allah shall fall upon the wrongdoers.] The commenter is likely to express his anger at the imposed 'child rights' new decision and those who approved it. Another Quranic verse is also inserted by a commenter on the fourth status update to invite the decision maker to fear Allah and get the reward: "وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّاتٌ" [And for him who fears to stand before his Lord are two gardens.]

Other forms like questions or suggestions realizing directive also appear but in fewer comments, such as: "سؤال! من هي الدائرة المسؤولة عن حقوق الإنسان" [A question! Who is responsible for human rights?] An example of a suggestion is "خفض الایجار یقل الاقبال" [If you lower the price, the turnout is reduced.] The commenter wants to suggest that when the doctors' and dentists' wages are lowered, the number of students in medicine and dentistry specialties would be reduced.

#### Commissive

Only one male Facebooker commits himself to a threatening act on the first status, which is: "حذاري افكارهم تسميم او أطفالنا من الاقتراب من" [Beware of approaching our children or poisoning their thoughts.] This example shows a case of using the commissive for a warning purpose. Similarly, Che Hassan and Nor (2022) found that commissive is used to warn the government of the rising number of COVID-19 cases.

#### Expressive

In some previous studies (Banikalef, 2019; Che Hassan & Nor, 2022; Narty, 2013), the expressive act is realized in expressions of happiness and joy. In addition, expressive speech act reflects the effect of disasters on the way people use language and communicate (Anggraeni et al., 2020). This study also shows how some male and female Facebookers' comments serve as an expressive act to express their positive and negative emotions. One female welcomes the Parliament's decision, as in: "

هاد احسن "شي صار بالأردن [This is the best thing that happened in Jordan.] This is followed by the emoji love face, which expresses the commenter's happiness toward the post. On the other hand, another female used the emoji 'See-No-Evil Monkey' solely in her comment, which seems to express her shyness from reading such news. An 'Eye-Roll' emoji is also used by a female expressing her annoyance from the second status update. Her emoji is preceded by the religious statement: "لا إله إلا الله" [There is no god but God,] which would mean in this context a complaint to God, as she seems that she does not like or agree with the reported status update.

There is one comment which is realized in an interrogative form, but does not perform a directive act: "وين المنطق بتسكر على ولادنا في الحكومة نتيجة الاشباع" [Where is the logic in closing the specialties of medicine and dentistry in public universities and opening them in private universities?] This comment seems to express the commenter's anger and disagreement with the status update, as he is likely to mean that there is no logic in the decision given in the post.

It is noticed that commenters use different forms to express their feelings: emoji, religious statement, and interrogative form. The use of such implied and indirect forms can be attributed to the fact of being polite and avoiding threatening the face of the addressees (Abdalahdi et al., 2023; Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri, 2019; Al-Khawaldeh & Abu Rahmeh, 2022; Guo & Ren, 2020; Syafitri, 2020)

It is also observed that a few comments under the third update share the same proposition in expressing their annoyance by admitting that people in Jordan are those who will tolerate the consequences of the oil bill increment. For example, one male commented with the statement: "طلعوها على" [They gain the cost from the people] and an 'Eye-Roll' emoji. Sharing the same proposition is in line with Ren and Guo (2020), who found that building identity can happen through sharing information and practice. In the current study, Facebook is a platform that helps build the identities of the commenters through sharing information and practices.

### Swearing

There are some comments that perform a new speech act of swearing, which does not belong to the already mentioned ones in the framework. This act is performed by some male Facebookers and a few females commenting on all of the status updates. Examples of males' comments are: "فعلا انكم مجلس تافه" [Verily, you are a trivial decor Parliament], and "سنحكوا" [Screw you.] An example of a female's comment, which holds a similar swearing message to already posted comments, is: "أفشل قرار بالحياة" [The most failed decision in life.]

There are a few male Facebookers' comments that tend to swear more harshly than other comments, as in: "فاتورة الفاسدين والخور" [the bill of corrupt and traitors] and another comment includes an emoji of a slipper.

### Sarcasm

Another new function performed by some male Facebookers and a few females is a sarcasm act. The comments reflect the Facebookers' dissatisfaction with the status updates sarcastically, as in: "بالفعل طفل" [Indeed, a child approves the bill of a child], and "مبروووك والله زي ما اجا من الحكومة" [Congratulations! This is what is imposed by the government.] The commenter here is sarcastically congratulating rather than performing an expressive act, as he claims that such a decision is imposed on the Parliament, not freely taken. It also appears that one comment on the second status update mentions a religious formulaic expression in realizing sarcasm: "هسا في جامعة طبية خاصة بالعقبة سبحان الله" [Now there is a medical private university in Aqaba, Glory be to Allah what a coincidence!] It should be noticed here that the expression 'Glory be to Allah' is uttered when something great or significant is taking place. In the comment above, the commenter reports the coincidence of opening the medical private university simultaneously with reducing the number of students in specialties of medicine and dentistry in public universities. This religious expression in this context would mean that the commenter sarcastically does not believe such a coincidence, as he may think that the number of students is reduced in these specialties in public universities, so that students would enroll in private universities.

A comment on the third status update sarcastically suggests minimizing the increment in the oil bill: "البراميل الفاضية بيعوها بتجيبلكم الفرق" [sell the empty barrels to reduce the difference.] The commenter seems to report that what exists is only empty barrels to sell. He does this sarcastically; therefore, a directive speech act that this suggestion tends to perform is not realized.

### Accusation

This function refers to the act of accusing someone of wrongdoing. It is realized in a few males and females' comments, as in: "الكذب العلني" [overt lie] (on the second update) and "سرقات" [Theft] (on the third update). Another comment includes an integrative form which seems to accuse the governments of no transparency rather than raising a question: "متى يكون شفافية في اتخاذ القرارات في الحكومات؟" [When will there be transparency in decision making in governments?] Since the commenters have claimed that what they read in the status updates is such a lie or theft without relying on a solid ground, this speech act can be called a false accusation.

### Speech act sequence

It seems that the commenters read and comment on each other's comments, establishing an interaction between them. This interaction is classified into two types: one that shows agreement between commenters and another that shows disagreement or an argument. The following is an analysis of some selected examples representing sequences of speech acts. This function refers to the act of accusing someone of wrongdoing. It is realized in a few males' and females' comments, as in: "الكذب العلني" [overt lie] (on the second update) and "سرفات" [Theft] (on the third update). Another comment includes an integrative form which seems to accuse the governments of no transparency rather than raising a question: "في القرارات اتخاذ في شفافية يكون متى؟" [When will there be transparency in decision making in governments?]. Since the commenters have claimed that what they read in the status updates is a lie or theft without relying on solid ground, this speech act can be called a false accusation.

### Agreement

Several commenters share a similar proposition in expressing their annoyance about the decision given in the fourth status update, 'installing daylight saving time'. The first example of interaction given below was developed between commenters commenting on this update.

Commenter 1:

كذابين

[liars]

Commenter 2:

والله كذابين ومهو صحيح هالحجي

[I swear they are liars and what they are saying is untrue.]

One of the commenters describes the high percentage of Jordanians who support the adoption of summer and winter time as liars. This comment realizes an accusation speech act which is followed by a confirmation of another accusation "والله كذابين" [I swear they are liars] and by an assertive act "ومهو صحيح هالحجي" [what they are saying is untrue.] Therefore, commenter 2 above not only agrees with commenter 1 in accusing the decision makers but also expands his accusation by confirming it with an assertive act.

On the same status update, one commenter uses an assertive act embedded in a directive act:

Commenter 1:

ارحمو بناتنا واطفالنا الذين لا يملكون مواصلات للذهاب للمدارس في مثل هذا التوقيت

[Have mercy on our daughters and kids (directive act) who do not have any transportation at this time to go to school] (assertive act). (My parentheses).

Commenter 2:

قرار خطير بالنسبة لطلاب المدارس وخاصة من اهلهم لا يملكون سيارات لتوصيلهم للمدارس

[It is a dangerous decision for the school students, especially for those whose parents do not have cars to drive them to school.]

There is an assertive act in the commenter's 2 statement, which confirms the assertive act in the commenter's 1 statement. There is an agreement on expressing annoyance about the decision for the reason that there are some parents who do not have cars to drive their children to school. Moreover, commenter 2 not only supports commenter 1, but also develops their disagreement by describing the decision as dangerous and adding another assertive act, as seen below, claiming that the children of those decision makers have government cars to drive them to school. It seems that commenter 2 could find his way through commenter 1 to express his anger from the comfort that those decision makers enjoy.

اذا اولادكم مخصصه لهم سيارات الدولة اولادنا بروحوا سيراً على الاقدام قبل اقامة صلاة الفجر

[Your children have government cars to drive them, whereas ours walk to school before praying Al-Fajr.]

On the same status update, one commenter uses a swear word which is intensified by another commenter, as seen below:

Commenter 1:

قرار فاشل

[A failed decision]

Commenter 2:

أفشل قرار بالحياة, عنا ما بزيبط بالاردن ابدا

[The most failed decision in life. It never works in Jordan.]

In this example, the second commenter uses the superlative form of the adjective: 'أفشل فاشل' [bad decision: worst decision], which intensifies the swearing act performed by commenter 1. The second commenter explains his opinion by adding an assertive act: "It never works in Jordan." It seems that the second commenter relies on and gets motivated by the first comment to strongly express his annoyance with the decision.

In the second status update about "reducing admission to medicine and dentistry specialties by 20%," two commenters express their disagreement, as follows

Commenter 1:

ليش تفتحو بالجامعات الخاصه طب و طب اسنان؟! لا تخفضوا الطب بالحكومـه ولا تفتحو بالخاص. ولا اهم اشـي المصارـي يعني؟

[Why do you set medicine and dentistry specialties in the private universities? Do not lower the fees for medicine in the public

universities, and do not open in private ones.  
Or is money the most vital issue?!

Commenter 2:

مصخره

[Ridiculous]

The first commenter expresses his annoyance with the decision by using a directive speech act to blame the Ministry of Higher Education for reducing the number of accepted students in these specialties in the public universities. As support for this commenter's opinion, the second commenter uses the swearing act to describe such a decision as ridiculous.

The above comments show a kind of interaction between commenters who share similar opinions. Volkovskii and Filatova (2022) found that such kind of like-minded people increase the level of interactivity, and commenters develop each other's comments and thoughts when they agree and justify their opinion.

### Disagreement

In an example from the fourth status update, one of the commenters expresses his annoyance using a directive act and then an assertive act to present his disagreement:

على الحكومه اخذ العبره مقتل الطالبه فجر، قرار غير عادل  
[The government has to learn a lesson from the murder of the student at dawn. It is an unfair decision.]

Another commenter disagrees with this comment using an assertive speech act:

القتل و الحوادث يحصل بكل الاوقات صيف شتا بس بدم  
قصص حكي فيها

[Murder and accidents happen all the time, summer and winter. You just want stories to talk about.]

Commenter 1 wanted to show his disagreement with the government decision by presenting an experience of murder of a girl at dawn claiming that it is such a negative consequence of using summer timing in winter (when this murder event happened in Jordan, many people attributed the reason of murder to using this timing, as the girl was on her way to university before sunrise). Commenter 2 argues that murder cannot be attributed to timing and then adds a new comment (you just want stories...), which may commence a new argument that may lead to conflict.

In a comment on the first status update about approving the bill on the child's rights, the commenter expresses his agreement with the status.

هاد احسن شي صح صار بالاردن هاد و قانون سيداو

[This bill along with CEDAW law are the best things that happened in Jordan.]

Another commenter disagrees with this comment using a sarcasm speech act:

هزولت مجلس النواب يقر قرارات سيداو

[This is ridiculous; the parliament approves CEDAW decisions.]

Commenter 1 uses an assertive speech act to express his positive attitude towards the child's right bill by admitting that this bill, along with CEDAW law, is the best thing that has happened in Jordan. Commenter 2 uses the expression 'هزولت' to sarcastically express his disagreement with commenter 1 and with the parliament's approval of CEDAW law. Such interaction may open the path for arguments between commenters, and hence, negative attitudes may be expressed.

On the same status update, a commenter using invocations which perform a directive speech act:

لا بارك الله بكل من خالف الدين والعادات و التقاليد والقيم.  
جعل الله هذا القانون بميزان سيناتهم.

[May God not bless all those disagree with religion, customs, traditions and values. May God make the law the balance of their misfortunes.]

Another commenter disagrees with this comment:

شعب بحب نظرية المؤامرة. مافي شي مخالف للدين. القانون  
عن الزامية التعليم

[People like the conspiracy theory. Nothing in the bill is against the religion. The law is about the compulsory education.]

Commenter 1 uses a directive speech act in the form of an invocation to express his disagreement with the bill on children's rights, as it is against the religion. Commenter 2 uses an assertive act in his statement, "people like the conspiracy theory". It occurs sometimes in Jordan that things people do not agree with are attributed to a conspiracy. This is what commenter 2 is likely to inform commenter 1 of in his response. Commenter 2 also argues that the bill is not against the religion and closes his comment by explaining that the bill is about the obligation of education. This counterargument can be a reason for more interaction between commenters to agree or disagree with the commenter's 2 points of view.

In the previous examples, a kind of interaction occurs between the commenters despite their disagreement with each other. They also tried to justify their disagreements. Volkovskii and Filatova (2022) support this result as they also noticed that participants with polarized points of view raised a level of interaction when they expressed their disagreement.

### DISCUSSION

This study aimed to analyze the comments on a sample of Facebook status updates to identify the occurred speech acts and to examine the relation between gender and the speech acts. It also aimed to investigate the role that speech act sequence can



play. In this section, each of the research questions will be discussed in terms of the findings of the study.

#### **What speech acts do the comments on Jordanian Facebook status updates perform?**

The above analysis reveals the speech acts performed by the commenters on all four status updates. The most common functions that comments tend to perform are assertives, directives, and expressives, which match with Banikalef and Bataineh (2017), Che Hassan and Nor (2022), and Narty (2013), in addition to some other new speech acts, such as swearing and sarcasm. This may be because commenters attempt to interact with the raised posts and engage themselves in commenting by reporting or describing the state of affairs, making requests, giving suggestions, and expressing their feeling. The commissive act has hardly occurred in the data, as it did in Banikalef and Bataineh (2017), Che Hassan and Nor's (2022), Ilyas and Khushi (2012), and Narty's (2013) studies, and there is no evidence for the declarative acts. In the current paper, it seems that the commenters are neither willing to commit themselves to any action nor capable of changing the state of affairs. This may be due to the nature of the investigated status updates, which raise topics approved by the decision makers in the Jordanian government, so commenters cannot take action or play a role in changing the world. In addition, the absence of declarative acts in Facebook comments may be related to the fact that declarative acts would only be used by those with institutional power, like lawyers (Narty, 2013). Therefore, Facebookers usually comment to reflect their feelings and opinions rather than making utterances that change the state of affairs.

The nature of the raised topics may justify the emergence of some new speech acts that are not part of Searle's framework, these are swearing, sarcasm, and accusation. The status updates tackle the following topics: approving the bill on the child's rights, reducing admission to medicine and dentistry specialties, increasing the cost of the oil bill, and confirming the summer time in the whole year. It can be observed that all or some of these topics may not gain people's satisfaction or agreement. Instead, they motivate the commenters to swear, accuse, and sarcastically comment on the posts. In the case of sarcasm, Abdalhadi et al. (2023) refer to its occurrence as the stress that Jordanians feel. As a result, Jordanians use sarcasm to relieve stress (Abdalhadi et al., 2023), and this meshes well with the current study, where commenters used sarcasm to relieve stress and escape reality. This is also in line with Ogungbe and Omolabi (2020), who noticed the occurrence of sarcastic videos to expel panic and depression.

#### **What is the relation between gender and the speech acts used?**

Gender features are prominent in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Alenazy et al., 2024). As for the relationship between speech acts and gender, the results show that all of the speech acts found in the study are realized by both males and females, except for the commissive act, which is performed by one male commenter. However, swearing, sarcasm, and accusation speech acts tend to be performed by more males than females. Since females employ such speech acts, it can be said that their linguistic behavior does not appear to be more prestigious than that of males. This contradicts Coates (2004) in her conclusion about the females' adoption of more prestigious linguistic behavior than males. Males' swearing appears in a few cases to be tougher than that of females. This lends support to Altkhaine et al. (2019), who found that the language choice used by males to realize swearing was tougher and aggressive than that of females.

It is noticed that some male and female commenters quote some Quranic verses and use some religious statements and invocations reflecting their religious beliefs on the realization of the assertive, directive, expressive, and sarcastic speech acts. This lends support to Al-Ali (2006) and Tawalbeh (2021), who reported that the religious background is reflected in the wedding invitation genre and plays a role in shaping its construction. The reflection of the commenters' religious beliefs is concentrated in the directive act, as it is realized by mainly requesting support from God and making invocations against the decision makers, who hold the responsibility of the given status updates. Similarly, Banikalef and Bataineh (2017) found that the speakers' directive act is performed by requests in the form of an invocation. The invocations and religious statements employed express the commenters' anger and dissatisfaction with the status updates. Therefore, such threatening face acts of religious formulation do not conflict with the appearance of swearing and accusation speech acts, which reveal the commenters' negative attitudes toward the status updates.

#### **What role can a speech act sequence play?**

Based on Searle's speech act taxonomy, van Dijk (1979) developed the speech act sequence. The term 'speech act sequence' is built on the idea that a speech act can be the base of an upcoming speech act. Speech acts can be developed, expanded, or defused by other speech acts. A potential context for such a sequence occurrence is in Facebook comments. Some comments may validate other comments by sharing a very similar proposition or disprove already given comments. Each comment has a speech act to reflect the commenter's point of view, which may evoke other commenters to perform speech acts. In other words, a new speech

act may emerge based on previous speech acts, which cause speech act sequences.

In line with van Dijk (1979), it was noticed in the present study that the commenters read and commented on each other's comments, establishing an interaction between them. Some of the comments appear to share very similar propositions showing that as if some commenters tend to adopt other commenters' perspectives. The comments would reflect an image of interaction wherein the commenters either agree with already given comments (as seen above under assertive or swearing) or disagree with other comments and reject them. In case of agreement, commenters seem to build on the already mentioned comments and may expand them. This may lead to face threatening acts as a result of developing possible negative attitudes based on which other commenters rely on in establishing their comments. As for disagreement, commenters may disagree with each other and develop arguments that may result in undesirable conflict.

## CONCLUSION

After analyzing the speech acts of Jordanian Facebook commenters on status updates, various speech acts appeared, including assertives, directives, and expressives. The commissive act has hardly occurred in the data of the study. In addition to Searle's speech act taxonomy, swearing sarcasm and swearing occurred as additional speech acts. In the case of gender and its relation to Searle's speech acts taxonomy, it was noticed that both males and females used assertives, directives, and expressives. According to the commissive act, it is performed by one male commenter. However, the newly revealed speech acts (swearing, sarcasm, and accusation) tend to be performed by more males than females.

Moreover, the analysis of speech act sequences shows how commenters establish an interaction between themselves, either when they agree or disagree with each other. This analysis reveals how commenters develop each other's thoughts when they justify their opinions. In the case of agreement, it was noticed that the speech act sequence between commenters most often includes the same speech act in the order: accusation-accusation, assertive-assertive, and swearing-swearing. This may indicate that commenters use the same speech act to share similar propositions and support each other's opinions, so that the level of interactivity is enhanced. In the case of disagreement, there is no pattern detected to describe the speech act sequence. However, it was noticed that the sequence directive-assertive occurs in some cases. In a pair of these sequences, one commenter used a directive act to express their opinion in the form of a request or a command to suggest a change in a decision or a law. An invocation was also present to express anger and disagreement with the decision. Another commenter responded with an assertive speech act in a counterargument in an attempt to strengthen and prove their point of view.

The current paper contributes to the field of knowledge by analyzing new data from the Arabic language. The use of Searle's (1969) speech act taxonomy, as a top-down processing, helped analyze the types of speech acts. The detailed analysis of the data also relied on bottom-up processing, which results in developing Searle's taxonomy, as can be seen in Table 5 below. The analysis also adds a significant contribution to the small amount of literature that has looked at the comments on Facebook status updates. Moreover, the theoretical contribution lies in the detailed analysis of the comments on Facebook status updates, which explored the speech act sequences and the effect of gender on using speech acts.

**Table 5**

*The developed version of Searle's taxonomy*

<b>Assertive</b>	The producer represents how things are in the world.
<b>Directive</b>	The producer attempts to push the recipient to do something, as in commands, orders, requests, and suggestions.
<b>Commissive</b>	The producer is committed to a future action either by doing it or not.
<b>Expressive</b>	The expressive act expresses someone's psychological state and feeling about a situation.
<b>Declarative</b>	The declarative act includes creating a new fact and changing in some states of life as a response to the propositional content.
<b>Swearing</b>	It represents an act of insulting others
<b>Sarcasm</b>	It criticizes situations ironically.
<b>Accusation</b>	It refers to the act of accusing someone of wrongdoing.

Empirically, the paper contributes to assessing the different styles of commenters in communicating and using language to perform an action and to express their feelings and attitudes through a detailed analysis of speech act sequences. In addition, the use of certain sequence patterns provides information on the acts and behaviors of Facebookers in communication.

It should be noted that the results of the study are constrained by several limitations: First, this study analyzed a limited number of comments. The increased number of comments would increase the chance of discovering more types of speech acts or potential patterns of sequence. Second, the analysis of more sociable interactive topics needs to be analyzed to find more about people's reactions and

speech act sequences. There is a limited number of sequences, which does not allow drawing and generalizing more detailed conclusions about their behavior.

It was also noted that the present paper analyzed comments on a limited number of topics that reveal the gender's effect on using speech acts. It may be useful to work on more viable topics that encourage male and female users to interact, and then to assess their role in using speech acts and politeness forms. More attention can also be paid to new predicted forms of speech acts, such as emojis, in future research. Moreover, the use of visual comments by both genders can also be studied to investigate any differences in their use.

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