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Birth Congratulation Messages on Facebook in Jordan: A Sociopragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines online congratulation messages for childbirth as expressed in Facebook users' comments on birth announcements in Jordan. The principal aim is to study the congratulatory strategies and their pragmatic functions. To this end, a total of 1206 comments on six birth announcements were analyzed within the framework of Mey's (2001) pragmatic act theory. The analysis revealed that congratulation messages can be classified into seven distinct categories, with the congratulation act being the primary means of conveying congratulations. Other supportive strategies include expressing good wishes, expressing happiness, complimenting, using protection formulas, using non-verbal language, and welcoming the newborn. When these strategies are examined within social, cultural and contextual parameters, they perform various pragmatic acts such as congratulating, blessing, well-wishing, advising, praising, and welcoming. This study concludes that birth congratulations given on Facebook in Jordan are typically influenced by religious and socio-cultural norms and conventions.

Keywords: Congratulation, Newborn, Context, Pragmatics, Strategy

I. Introduction

Pragmatics explores language in use and how the meaning of utterances is influenced by the particular conditions of their contexts (Yule 2006, 126; Stadler 2013, 1). According to Stadler (2013,1), mere linguistic knowledge, covering knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, is not sufficient for interacting appropriately because the meaning of words often depends on contextual factors such as setting, participants, and purpose of communication. However, the effect of these contextual parameters varies from culture to culture and language to language. Schneider (2011, 25) points out that there is a lack of research on how customs and social values influence verbal behavior in specific cultural contexts.

The interaction between linguistic forms and socio-cultural contexts is referred to as sociopragmatics (Flores-Salgado 2011, 1; Harlow 1990, 328). Leech (1983, 10) has described it as "the sociological interface of pragmatics". Sociopragmatics typically focuses on the analysis of speech acts such as complimenting, apologizing, requesting, congratulating, suggesting and advising. Many studies (e.g., Holmes 1986; Boxer 1995; Saleem et al. 2018, 2021; Migdadi 2003, 2021; Migdadi et al. 2012; Al-

Khatib 1997; Haddad 2022; Salman et al. 2022) have revealed that the realization of speech acts differs across languages and cultures in terms of their semantic meaning and pragmatic functions. The present study adopts a sociopragmatic approach, which is likely to enhance our understanding of speech acts and other language phenomena in specific cultural contexts. Using data from Facebook, the study examines the linguistic formulas employed in congratulations on newborn children and explores how such linguistic formulas are influenced by religious and socio-cultural parameters in Jordan.

Congratulation, as defined by Bach and Harnish (1979, 51), refers to a speech act that "expresses gladness for H's having done or received something good noteworthy". Wierzbicka (1987) pointed out that congratulations are used to express emotions and feelings toward people to convey a warm message to them. Searle (1976,12) further explained that congratulation represents an expressive speech act that is used "to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content", depending on its intended function. However, speech act theory has been criticized as "individual-oriented rather than societal-oriented" (Mey 2001, 214). This criticism suggests that the theory gives a peripheral value to or neglects the contextual elements surrounding different utterances.

In this study, realizing the crucial role of context along with the uttered words, we will analyze the data based on Mey's (2001) action-theoretic societal pragmatics known as pragmatic act theory or Pragmeme. In this framework, the context of the utterance and cultural parameters such as reference, metaphor, shared situational knowledge, shared cultural and religious knowledge are taken into consideration when interpreting different utterances.

2. Research on congratulation

Numerous studies have investigated congratulations across different cultures (e.g., Elwood 2004; Allami and Nekouzadeh 2011; Kochovska 2013; Unceta-Gomez 2016; Al-Khatib 1997; Khatatbeh and Al-abed Al-Haq 2018; Badarneh et al. 2021; Derks et al. 2008; Boyd and Ellison 2007; Tang et al. 2012). Elwood's (2004) research examined congratulation strategies used by American and Japanese students in scenarios including promotions, marriages, and grants. Both groups were found to use primary congratulatory responses like illocutionary force indicating device (IFID), expressions of joy, information requests, and affirmations. Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) studied congratulations in Iranian culture, revealing five basic congratulation strategies, most frequently used in 'wedding' and 'getting a trophy' situations. In Latin culture, congratulatory strategies often included expressions of good wishes or happiness. Kochovska (2013) classified congratulatory expressions into 'expressions with an IFID' and 'expressions of joy'. Unceta-Gomez (2016) introduced a taxonomy for Latin comedies' congratulation acts, including performative verbs and phrases, admiration, and well-wishing expressions of happiness and surprise.

In Arabic, Al-Khatib (1997) examined congratulatory announcements in Jordanian newspapers, distinguishing standard and non-significant features. Al-Qudah (2001) revealed two types of congratulating expressions in Jordanian culture: short and extended expressions. Bataineh (2013)

compared politeness strategies between Jordanian and American cultures, demonstrating similarities in strategies but differences in religious formulas. Cuesta (2017) studied Arabic congratulations in wedding and childbirth contexts, recognizing formulaic expressions and blessing expressions. Khatatbeh and Al-Abed Al-Haq (2018) identified exaggerated expressions, with numerical expressions being more common than impossible descriptions. Al-Ghazo et al. (2021) compared congratulatory strategies in Kabyle and Jordanian Arabic, finding minor differences related to sociopragmatic and sociocultural factors. Badarneh et al. (2021) examined graduation congratulations, highlighting the use of *mabru:k* "congratulations" as the primary IFID in Arabic. They also revealed various congratulation strategies such as expressing well wishes, compliments, banter, shared experiences, validation, encouragement, happiness, self-directed well wishes, and gift attachments.

A few researchers have also touched upon congratulating online, emphasizing the importance of cultural context, linguistic choices, non-verbal cues, and the dynamics of online platforms. Boyd and Ellison (2007) argued that digital platforms like social media have become famous means for expressing congratulations. They added that these platforms enable users to share positive news, including congratulations with their network, thus strengthening social relationships. Emojis were also found to play a vital role in congratulation in a study be Derks et al. (2008). These researchers contended that emojis help convey emotions effectively in written communication, enhancing the sincerity of force of congratulating online. In cross-cultural research, Kim and Lee (2011) pointed out that congratulating online can vary significantly across cultures. Understanding these cultural differences is essential to ensure that congratulatory messages are produced appropriately and received completely. Herring (1994) suggested that gender differences exist in online communication patterns, including the way people express congratulations. For example, women may use more affecting language in their congratulatory communications. According to Tang et al. (2012), online platforms often incorporate feedback mechanisms like "likes" and "comments." Congratulatory messages can receive such feedback, adding to the social reinforcement of these messages. Berger and Milkman (2012) noticed that online positive events, including congratulatory messages, play an important role in preserving and strengthening social relationships. They mention that these favorable occasions are more likely to be shared, enhancing social bonds.

In certain cultural contexts, expressing congratulations online has also been explored, as revealed in Mahzari's (2017) research on congratulations on Facebook as employed by Saudi people. Using 1721 comments of congratulations on 61 different events (e.g., graduation, birth of a baby, passing a PhD/MA thesis defense and so forth), the research demonstrated the presence of 23 verbal strategies, such as prediction regarding the person's future, using a proverb, and expression of pride; 100 patterns of verbal compound strategies, such as praise, thanking God, and expression of personal happiness, and 42 types of non-verbal strategies, such as sharing the news and using emoji reactions to posts, for example, thumbs up, love (beating heart), and wow (surprised face).

The literature reviewed reveals that most research has been conducted in offline contexts such as weddings, greeting cards, newspaper announcements and graduation notebooks. While social media platforms have become a common place for people to congratulate others, there is limited research on

congratulating online, and no specific study on birth congratulation messages in Jordan. The current research bridges this gap in the literature by examining the strategies and pragmatic functions of online birth congratulation messages. It investigates how such messages are expressed and how they influence the recipients' emotions, well-being and relationships. In addition, since different cultures have different ways of expressing joy and support, the study focuses on the variations in online birth congratulations that are attributed to the conventions and socio-cultural norms in Jordanian society.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework employed in this study is Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory or 'Pragmeme', which attempts to address the shortcomings of Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory. Mey (2001) argues that Austin's theory, despite the latter's statement that it comprises contextual considerations, essentially functions as a theory of reference. In contrast, Mey (2001) posits that pragmeme constitutes a theory of action, contextualizing speech acts within their relevant socio-cultural settings. Pragmeme is defined as "a situated speech act in which the rules of language and society synergize in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object, sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded" (Capone 2005, 1357). Thus, the theory focuses on the communicative acts performed in language and their pragmatic functions within specific contexts. Mey posits that language is not merely a set of abstract symbols but a means of performing acts. Pragmatic acts encompass locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts, all of which play a principal role in understanding the purpose and impact of different expressions. The theory highlights the importance of context in interpreting language. The meaning and function of an utterance are deeply associated with the particular conditions of the context, including the social-cultural and situational factors. Mey (2001, 221) pointed out that a pragmatic act is revealed through an "ipra" or a "pract", and that a "every pract is at the same time an allopract". In other words, a pract is determined by participants' knowledge of the interactional situation and the potential effect of a pract in a particular context. Thus, Odebunmi (2006) stated that practing resolves the problem of separating between illocutionary force from Perlocutionary force. In addition, the Pragmeme involves two parts: the activity part and the textual part. The former describes different choices such as: speech acts, indirect speech acts, psychological acts (emotions), prosodic features, physical acts, etc. through which the speaker can achieve the communicative functions that he wants. The textual part, conversely, refers to the realization of the pragmatic function (pract) in a given communicative event such as: reference (REF), relevance (REL), voice (VCE), shared situational knowledge (SSK), shared cultural knowledge (SCK), metaphor (MPH), or metapragmatic joker (M). This theory is applicable for analyzing the data in the present study for several reasons. Firstly, it allows for an effective investigation of the different communicative acts involved in birth congratulations on Facebook such as the congratulating act, complimenting, expressions of happiness, and good-wishes. The theory also helps in explaining how culture and social factors in Jordan influence the way people congratulate parents on newborn children, acknowledging cultural norms, values and traditions. Moreover, since this theory is a function-based

approach, it can be used to classify and analyze birth congratulations based on their functions, such as well-wishing, strengthening congratulation, expressing happiness, or conveying cultural beliefs about newly-born children.

4. Method

This section is divided into two parts. In the first part, the data collection procedures are described. The second part presents the coding scheme and data analysis procedures used in the study.

4.1. Data collection

The data of this study consisted of 1206 congratulatory comments on six birth announcements posted on Facebook between 2019 and 2022. Three of these announcements were about baby girls, receiving 52.57% (634) of the congratulatory comments. The other three posts which obtained 47.42% (572) of the comments were about baby boys. The birth announcements and the comments on them are accessible to the announcer's network and are basically written in Arabic using one or more of these intelligible language varieties: Jordanian Colloquial Arabic, Standard Arabic, or chat language. Many comments used a mixture of two varieties such as Jordanian Arabic and English or Jordanian Colloquial Arabic and Standard Arabic. Non-verbal language such as stickers and emojis were also employed in some comments. Each birth announcement included a picture indicating the gender of the newborn baby with a blue color representing a baby boy, a pink color representing a baby girl, or by writing "a boy", or "a girl" in English.

4.2. Coding scheme and data analysis

In this corpus-based analysis, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used. During the qualitative stage, we examined the corpus several times to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the main types and the frequency of congratulatory strategies identified in the comments investigated. The analysis was essentially based on taxonomies of congratulations identified in earlier research, especially Elwood's (2004) study since it was probably the earliest on congratulation strategies. Her study was used as a model to provide us with useful insights for classifying the various congratulatory strategies. Other studies of congratulation in Arabic including Al-Ghazo et al.'s (2021), Badarneh et al. (2021), and Mahzari (2017) were also utilized due to their comparable backgrounds. However, we should note that our naming protocol deviated in some cases from the models used in these studies. Following the analysis of the congratulatory strategies, we took measures to ensure the reliability of our classification system. We repeated the classification two weeks later using different excel sheets. Subsequently, we computed the degree of agreement between the earlier and the latter classification using Holsti's (1969) coefficient of reliability. This analysis revealed a high level of similarity, with an experimental value of 0.89. These statistics indicates remarkable consistency in the coding results between the two categorizations.

Seven primary congratulatory strategies were identified in the current research. They are defined and exemplified in Table (1) below:

Table 1: Definitions and examples of the congratulatory strategies

Strategy	Definition	Example
The congratulating act	An expression performing the act of congratulation	*mabru:k* "Congratulations"
Expressing good-wishes	An expression including one or more of three wishes to the baby: 1) to have a glorious upbringing, 2) to be virtuous offspring, or 3) to have a bright future	*yitrabba: bi- ʕizzkum* "May it (the baby) grow up in your glory"
Expressing happiness	An expression conveying joy and/or satisfaction for the safety of the mother and the arrival of the newborn	*al-ħamdulillah ʕala: as-sala:mih* "Thank God for your safety."
Complimenting	An expression complimenting the parents on the newborn	*ya: ʔħla: um Salma: bid-dinya:* "the best beautiful Um Salma in the world!"
Using protection formulas	An expression used to protect the newborn and parents from harm and "evil eye."	*Allah jiħmi:lik iy-ya:h* "May God protect him for you."
Using non-verbal language	One or more non-verbal tools conveying the congratulator's positive feelings and sentiments.	*Using stickers and emojis*
Welcoming the newborn	A greeting expression directed toward the newborn.	*ahlan wa sahlan bi-Hashem* "Welcome, baby Hashem"

The following is an illustrative example of coding an online congratulatory comment on a baby girl[1]:

ʔalf ʔalf muba:rak wa-lħamdillah ʕala sala:mitkum rabna: yiħfaðˤaha wiba:rik bʕumurha: witku:n min isˤ-sˤa:liħa:t wilba:ra:t wifariħkum fi:ha:

"A million congratulations! Thank God for the safety of the mother and the new baby girl. May God protect and bless the baby girl, making her a good and caring person. May you (i.e., parents) live until you see her a bride"".

The above example consists of the following four congratulatory strategies:

1. The congratulating act: *ʔalf ʔalf muba:rak* " A million congratulations"

2. Expressing happiness*: al-ħamdulillah ʕala sala:mitkum* "Thank God for your safety (i.e., the baby and her mother)"

3. Using protection formula: *rabna: jiħfaðˤ-ha: wiba:rik bʕumurha:* "May God protect and bless her"

4. Wishing the baby to be a virtuous offspring*: tku:n min asˤ-sˤa:liħa:t wa al-ba:rra:t if- farriħ-kum fi:ha* "[Wishing] her to be a good person and honor to her parent; may you be pleased with her"

The data were analyzed quantitatively by comparing the frequencies and percentages of the congratulating strategies identified. In case a strategy was repeated in the same comment, such duplication was disregarded for the purpose of the quantitative analysis. In addition, although more than one sticker/emoji was often used in the same congratulatory comment, that repetition counted as only one token of using non-verbal language.

5. Results and discussion

As shown in Table 2 below, the congratulation strategies identified occur in different percentages and are ordered from the most to the least frequently used.

Table 2: Frequencies and percentages of the congratulating strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
The congratulating formula	1170	49.47
Expressing good- wishes	748	31.62
Wishing the baby a glorious upbringing	*555*	*23.46*
Wishing for the baby to be good offspring	*171*	*7.23*
Wishing the baby a bright future	*22*	*0.93*
Expressing happiness	210	8.87
Complimenting	122	5.15
Using protection formulas	71	3.00
Using non-verbal language	30	1.26
Welcoming the newborn	14	0.59
Total	2365	100

Since more than one congratulating strategy may appear in the same comment, the total number of congratulating strategies is 2365, which is greater than the number of comments collected. Thus, the mathematical frequency calculation is the number of strategies divided by 2365 and then multiplied by 100, represented as follows (*the frequency = the number of strategies used in the comments ÷ 2365* *100%*). As indicated in Table 2 above, the most frequently used strategy is *the congratulating act* which accounts for 49.47% of the data. This is followed by *expressing good wishes* which occurred in 31.62% of the congratulation formulas collected. The remaining five strategies, namely, *expressing happiness*, *complimenting*, *using protection formulas*, *using non-verbal language* and *welcoming*, occurred in lower percentages at 8.87%, 5.15%, 3%, 1.25%, and 0.59%, respectively. In the subsequent sections, the congratulatory strategies will be defined, exemplified and discussed in terms of their pragmatic functions and correlations with effective communication in Jordanian culture. In addition, the frequencies and percentages of the identified strategies will be discussed in relation to the study's findings and implication to research in congratulation and pragmatic act theory.

5.1. The congratulating act

This strategy directly performs the fundamental act of congratulation by utilizing the IFID *mabru:k* "congratulation", along with its variants like *muba:rak* "congratulation!" and *ba:raka* "a blessing". The English *congratulations* and *congrats* are also used to describe the act of conveying congratulation in some instances. The following are examples of this strategy:

1. *mabru:k wayitrabba: bi- ʕizz-kum wa dala:l-kum wil- ħamdulillah ʕa-sala:mit almada:m*

"Congratulations! May she (the baby girl) be raised in your glory and pride; thank God for the madam's safety".

2. *muba:rak wil- ħamdulillah ʕas-sala:mih*

"Congratulations, and thank God for their safety (the child and the mother)".

3. *ba:raka allah fi: al-mawhu:b wa ʃakarte al-wa:hib wa balaɣa aʃuddahu wa*

ruziqta birrahu.

"May God bless you with His gift to you. I thank the Endower, and may the child grow up and may you
be granted his good deeds".

4. Congraaaats.

In examples 1-4 above, *mabru:k* "congratulation", as well as its variants, initiates each of the
comments, thus rendering the speech act discernible. In instances 1-3, it is subsequently followed by
several positively affective expressions. These formulas not only emphasize congratulation, but also pray
for God to bless the newborn child. In addition, *mabru:k* "congratulation" incorporates the noun *barakah*,
defined as a "beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and
prosperity and happiness in the psychic order" (Colin 1986, 1032). Therefore, it functions as a prayer for
God to bless the child, which is also viewed as *rizq* "provision" and *niʕmah* "grace" donated by Allah to
the parents. This is consistent with the Quranic description of newly-born children as *hibah*, signifying
"unexpected gift" (Quran ch.4, verse 249; ch.37, verse 100). In Pragmeme theory, when factors such as
SSK, co(n)text, and shared religious knowledge (SRK) are applied, two pragmatic acts (practs) can be
performed by this strategy: prayer and congratulating: In the first pract, the congratulator beseeches God
to bless the newborn and their family, while in the second one, the speaker expresses profound
congratulations to the addressee.

As far as the distribution of this strategy in the congratulatory comments is concerned, it may be
used independently or intensified by some pre-modifiers or internal vowel lengthening as in examples 5-8
below:

5. *mabru:k*

"congrats"

6. *?alf mabru:k wi yitrabba: bi- ʕizz-kum wa dala:l-kum wil- ħamdulillah ʕala:*

"Warmest congratulations! May he be raised in your glory and love. Thank God for your safety, my
darling".

7. *?alf ?alf muba:rak ❤ yitrabba: bi ʕizzukum*

"Warmest congratulations! May he be raised in your glory and love".

8. *retuh muba:rak ya: rabb yitrabba: bi-ʕizzik*

"Congratulations! May he grow up in your glory".

While *mabru:k* "congratulations" is used independently in example 5 above, it is amplified by the
cardinal number *?alf* "one thousand", *?alf ?alf* "one million" or the invocation *retuh* "may it" in example
6-8, respectively. The practice of amplifying politeness expressions through numerals was earlier
remarked by Ferguson (1967) who asserted that responses to greetings and congratulations in Syrian
Arabic may consist of a quantity of good wishes as in *marħabten* "two hellos", *mara:ħib* "hellos", *mi:t
marħaba* " one hundred hellos". This observation is further substantiated by studies of congratulations
including Mahzari (2017, 111), Badarneh et al. (2021), and Khatatbeh and Al-abed Al-Haq (2018).
Additionally, enhancing congratulatory expressions is in accordance with Leech's (2007) observation that
intrinsically courteous speech acts such as congratulations need intensification or gradable expressions.

When this strategy is approached in terms of frequencies, it accounts for the highest percentage (49.47%) of the data. This makes it the most predominant in the congratulation formulas recognized. Its prevalence indicates that those extending congratulations on Facebook are likely to have their congratulation messages publicly recognized. This aligns with the Jordanian social value of *?alqiya:m bilwa:jib* " performing social duties", which emphasizes the importance of fulfilling social duties and recognizing the significant life events of others, such as weddings, graduation, child birth, death, illness, etc. The strategy was also found to be an essential component of congratulation in various cross-cultural contexts including promotions and marriages scenarios in Japanese and American culture (Elwood 2004), weddings and getting a trophy in Iran (Allami and Nekouzadeh 2011), newspaper announcements in Jordan (Al-Khatib 1997), weddings, graduation, promotion, child birth on Facebook comments in Saudi Arabia (Mahzari 2017), and graduation notebooks among college students in Jordan (Badarneh et al. 2021). Therefore, this strategy is a primary congratulation formula in offline and online contexts regardless of the congratulation topic, interactional context or communication medium.

5.2. Expressing good wishes

This strategy represents the expressions that show excitement and good wishes toward the new baby. These expressions are divided into three categories: (1) wishing the baby a glorious upbringing, (2) wishing the baby to be virtuous offspring, and (3) wishing the baby a bright future. In this section, these categories will be defined, exemplified and discussed in terms of frequency and implication in congratulatory messages in this research.

(1) Wishing the baby a glorious upbringing: the congratulators pray for the child to be raised happily in the baby's parents' life, health and wealth. The prayer is formulaically expressed by the expressive speech act *yitrarabba bi-ʕizzkum* "may he be raised in your glory", and its variants like *yitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum wa dala:lkum* "may he grow up in your glory and nurturing", as in examples 9-10 below:

9. *al-ħamdulillah ʕa-sala:mtik wa ?alf muba:rak babi Omar, yitrabba: bi-ʕizzku❤.*

"Thank God for your safety (Mom), and warmest congratulations baby Omar. May he grow up in your glory❤".

10. *?alf ?alf muba:rak ħabi:bit qalbi: Sara: yitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum wa dala:lkum wa rabbna: yijʕaluh min asˤ-sˤaliħi:n al-ba:ri:n wa ?alf il-hadulillah ʕala: sala:mtik*

"Warmest congratulations my darling Sara, and may he grow up in your glory and nurturing. May God make him a good person and an honor to his parents; a thousand thanks to God for your safety."

According to Cuesta (2017, 180), the expression *yitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum* "may he grow up in your glory" in examples 9-10 above is a prayer that "the baby will be raised safely in the hands of the parents". Through the utilization of SCK, co(n)text, and SSK, the pract of this formula is praying, wherein well-wishers implore the divine power to bestow splendor and pride upon the lives of both the child and their parents.

(2) Wishing for the baby to be virtuous offspring: This strategy is usually represented by the formulaic expression *yijʕaluh* (min) *að-ðurrjih asˤ-sˤa:liħa:* " May God make the newborn child virtuous

offspring", which is an expressive speech act, particularly used for birth congratulations. The following are examples:

11. *?alf muba:rak Allah jiħmi:h wi yijʕaluh ðurrjih sʕa:liħa: wa yitrabba: bi-ʕiz kum inʃa:llah*

"Warmest congratulations! May God protect him and make him a good offspring. May he grow up in your glory, God willing".

12. *muba:rak sʕadi:qi: Allah yijʕalha: min að-ðurrjih asʕ-sʕaliħa:* "Congratulations my friend. May God make her a good offspring".

As shown in examples 11-12 above, *yijʕaluh ðurrjih sʕaliħa* "May God make her a good offspring" is included in congratulatory comments to pray for God to make the newborn virtuous and obedient to parents. This truthful prayer also serves to enhance the overall warmth of the congratulatory message.

It is worth noting that this particular wish can only be realized thanks to the parents' efforts of raising the child properly. Thus, it can also be considered as a piece of advice, encouraging the parents to assume their social roles as expected. Therefore, applying SSK, SCK and co(n)text, the practs of this formulaic expression is praying, wishing, advising, and congratulating. This aligns with Kochovska's (2013) observation that certain expressions of well-wishing, when employed within an appropriate context, function as expressions of congratulations through their illocutionary force.

(3) Wishing the baby a bright future: In this strategy, the people offering congratulations wish the new baby a hopeful future such as success, prosperity, wellness, and long life, as illustrated in the following examples:

13. *?alf ?alf mabru:k wa Allah yijʕalha min a sʕ-sʕa:li ħa:t ya: rabb wi tʃu:fha: duktorah gad id-dini:a*

"Warmest congratulations! May God make her a virtuous person, oh God. Wishing you to see her the best doctor in the world".

14. *?alf mabru:k ħabi:bi:* wa inʃa:llah bi-tifraħ fi:ha: "Warmest congratulations my darling! And you will see her a bride, *inshallah*".

In example 13 above, the speaker expresses her hope for the baby girl to become a highly proficient doctor, using the expression *tʃu:fha: duktorah gad id-dini:a* "wishing you to see her a highly proficient doctor". In this formula, the metaphor *gad id-dinya*, literally denoting "the size of the world" is utilized to imply "highly proficient". This hyperbolic description of the baby's probable career highlights the positivity surrounding the arrival of the newborn child. In example 14 above, the congratulator expresses her wish that the baby girl finds happiness in her future marriage through the formulaic expression *btifraħ fi:ha:* "May you experience joy when she gets married". This profound wish also underscores the positive atmosphere adjoining the birth of the baby girl. In the Pragmeme model, the well-wishing formulas in the above examples are expressive speech acts that need to be considered in the light of SCK and SRK, and co(n)text. The practs of these good wishes are wishing the baby a promising future and congratulating the parents on the newly-born child. These good wishes also perform the pract of predicting in which they serve as "a positive prediction" (Badarneh et al. 2021, 10) of the prospects of the newborn. As indicated in Table 2 above, the strategy of expressing good wishes emerges as the second most frequently employed strategy, including 31.62% of the datasets. Within this category, a significant majority

(23.46%) wishes the newborn to be raised in pride, using the traditional phrase "*yitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum* "may he grow up in your glory." This widespread usage highlights the importance attributed by those extending well-wishes to the realization of a life characterized by dignity and happiness. Furthermore, the recurrence (7.23%) of *wishes for the newborn to become a virtuous offspring* is consistent with the general inclination in Jordan to incorporate Islamic principles and teachings into various aspects of life.

The trend of expressing good wishes also finds affirmation in various research works including Badarneh et al.'s (2021) investigation of Jordanian Arabic, Al-Ghazo et al.'s (2021) contrastive analysis of Jordanian Arabic and Kabyle, Mahzari's (2017) study involving Saudi Facebook users, and Allami and Nekouzadeh's (2011) examination of Iranian culture. These studies reveal that, given the prevalent Islamic religion in these cultures, most of the well-wishing expressions recognized in the datasets are religious invocations. These prayers have acquired a congratulatory sense due to their frequent use in these contexts. Therefore, offering good wishes is a widespread strategy for conveying congratulations in cultural contexts in which Islam is the people's major religion. The use of good wishes in congratulations is psychologically explained in Al-Ghazo et al.'s (2021) investigation of congratulation in Jordanian Arabic and Kabyle. Specifically, being the second most predominant in their data, the commonness of this strategy was attributed to human nature, where those offering congratulations tended to manifest their well-wishing from the outset.

5.3. Expressing happiness

This strategy refers to the act of conveying pleasure, satisfaction or positive emotion when congratulating the parents on their newly-born children. This strategy is divided into two main aspects: (1) expressing happiness for safe delivery and (2) expressing satisfaction for the newborn. These categories will be further discussed in the following section:

(1) Expressing happiness for safe delivery: In the first type, the main formula used is the stative speech act *al-ħamdulillah ʕala: as-sala:mih* "thank God for the safety (of the mother and the child)", along with its variants *al-ħamdulillah ʕala: sala:mitkum* "thank God for your safety", *al-hadulillah ʕala: sala:mtik* "thank God for your (the mother's) safety", etc., The following are three examples of this formula.

15. *ʔalf mabru:k wa al-ħamdulillah ʕala: as-sala:mih*

"Warmest congratulations! Thank God for your safety".

16. *alħamdulillah ʕala: sala:mitkum wa muba:rak inʃa:llah jitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum wayijʕaluh min al-ba:ri:n asˤ-sˤaliħi:n*

"Thank God for their safety, and congratulations, God willing. May he (the baby boy) grow up in your glory, and may God make him a good person".

17. *muba:rak wa al-ħamdulillah ʕala: sala:mtik yitrabba: bi-ʕizzkum*

"Congratulations! Thank God for your safety, and may he grow up in your glory"

In examples 15-17 above, the expression *al-ħamdulillah ʕala: as-sala:mih* "thank God for your safety" incorporates *al-ħamdulillah* "thank God", which is a Quranic verse that basically means "praise be to God". It has pragmatically developed a sense of satisfaction due to its recurrence in this context. Thus,

this expression does not only mean the divine will, but it also expresses the speaker's gladness with the well-being of the mother and the child, intensifying the force of the congratulation. This utilization of a religious expression to congratulate is in agreement with a finding by Cuesta (2017) who argues that some congratulating phrases are considered formulaic expressions specific to a country and uncommon to others.

Within Jordanian culture, it is pragmatically more appropriate to congratulate parents by praising God for the safety of the mother and the child; the non-use of such language could indicate that the speaker is a social outsider who spoke in an unexpected way (Yule 1996, 4-5). By applying Pragmeme theory features such as SRK, SCK, SSK and co(n)text, the pract of this formula, namely *al-ḥamdulillah ʕala: as-sala:mih* "thank God for the safety of the newborn and his\her mother", is expressing satisfaction regarding the well-being of both the mother and baby with respect to the medical and physical complications associated with child delivery.

(2) Expressing satisfaction for the newborn: In this category, the congratulators thank God for the parents' being blessed by a newborn child. In addition to *al-ḥamdulillah* 'thank God (for His bestowing)', the people offering congratulations may use the formulaic expression *ʃakart al-wa:hib* "I thank the Endower." Although this formula is not attested in religious Islamic sources like Quran and hadith, it incorporates religion in the expression of satisfaction through attributing the bestowal of the child to *alwa:hib* "the Endower, i.e. God".:

18. *al-ḥamdulillah ʕala sala:mtik anti: wil-babi: ya ʕumri:al-ḥamdulillah*

rabb ʕa:la:mi:n

"Darling, thank God for the safety of both of you and the baby   ❤. Thanks to God".

19. *ʔalf al-ḥamdulillah … yitraba: bi-ʕizzkum inʃa:llah*

"A thousand thanks to God, and may he grow up in your glory, God willing 🧕."

20. *ba:raka Allah fi al-mawhu:b wa ʃakarta al-wa:hib wa balaɣa aʃuddahu wa razaqta birrahu ductu:r abu Hashem al-ɣa:li:*

"May God bless you with His gift to you, may you thank the giver, and may you be granted his good deeds, my dear Dr. Abu Hashem".

In examples 18-20 above, the congratulator does not only use *al-ḥamdulillah* "praise be to God" to praise God, but he also expresses his satisfaction about the newborn child via this formula. As in the case of *the congratulation act* in section 4.1 above, this formula can be premodified by the numeral *ʔalf* "one thousand" to boost the satisfaction act as shown in example 19 above. In example 20, it is God who has blessed the parents with the newborn, and so the speaker uses the expression *ʃakarta al-wahib* "I thank the Endower" to thank God. Based on SSK and SCK and co(n)text, the practs of this thanking- God expressions is both praising God and expressing satisfaction about his bestowal.

When both aspects of 'expressing happiness' are examined in terms of frequency, they have occurred in 8.87% of the birth congratulating comments, making this strategy the third most frequent in the data. This widespread usage of expressing happiness reflects people's joy about the safety of the

mother and newborn child, which is indicative of the strong relationship between the interlocutors. In Elwood's (2004) investigation of congratulation in American and Japanese cultures, *expressing happiness* was found to be the second most frequently used strategy in all the situations of the discourse-completion tasks. In some cultures, the act of expressing happiness is referred to as 'praise' (Unceta Gómez 2016; Mahzari 2017). According to Mahzari (2017), praise is repeatedly conveyed during congratulations on childbirth through religious expressions like *ma:ʃallah* "the grace of God be upon" and *ma:ʃallah taba:rakallah* "the grace of God be upon/God bless". Therefore, as in the case of the previous congratulation strategies, those extending congratulations in cross-cultural settings typically incorporate well-wishing expressions in their utterances in both offline and online interactions.

5.4. Complimenting

In this strategy, those offering congratulations often compliment the parents regarding the newborn. This is consistent with Vanderveken's (2001, 248) observation that when extending congratulations to someone, it is often necessary to "offer compliments, praise, and occasionally even acclaim" to the recipient. According to Searle (1975), the speech act of complimenting is considered an expressive speech act in which the speaker expresses their positive feelings about the hearer. It is defined as "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually, the person addressed, for some good (position, characteristic, skills, etc.), which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer" (Holmes 1986, 485). Compliments are generally focused on four topics: appearance, personality, possessions and skills.

In the data, the compliments on the newborn children fit in compliments on "possessions" as children are possessed by the parents. They can also be understood as compliments on "appearance" and compliments on "personality" to the extent that they involve the parents' personal traits and features of appearance. The compliments are either directly expressed through the use of positive semantic carriers or indirectly understood by using the inferential meaning of expressions embedded in traditional Arab culture, as in the following examples:

21. *ʔaħla Hashem wa Abu-Hashem bid-dinja: retuh ʔalf mabru:k wi yitrabba: bi-ʕizzk wa dala:lak*

"The best Hashem and Abu-Hashem in the world. Warmest congratulation! May he grow up in your glory and pampering".

22. *retuh ʔalf ʔalf ʔalf mabru:k ya: ʔħla: um Salma: bid-dinja: al-ħamdulillah ʕala: sala:mit-kum wi titrabba: bi-ʕizzkum wa dala:lkum* ❤❤❤

"Warmest congratulations to the most beautiful mother (i.e., Salma's mother) in the world! Thank God for your safety, and may he grow up in your glory and pampering ❤❤❤".

23. *sˤurti: ʔum!!! inʃa:llah ʔalf mabru:k miss Dania yirba: bi-ʕizzkum wa dala:lku: yisʕid Allah ʕaki:d biʃbah ʔumuh bi-tˤayyir al-ʕagil* ☺

"You have become a mother!!! Warmest congratulations miss Dania, God willing. May he grow up in your glory and nurturing. May God make you happy! Sure the baby looks like you. How cute!☺".

24. *muba:rak ya: galbi: ʕiʃit wa ʃuftak ʔbb* ❤❤

"Congratulations, my heart! I have lived to see you Dad, ❤❤".

In these examples, parents receive compliments on their newly born children, using positively affective language. This strategy enhances the congratulation message, making it more impactful. In example 21 above, prior to stating the congratulation act, the speaker pays a compliment on the new baby's appearance and his dad's, further boosting the congratulation message. The compliment includes the superlative adjective *ʔaħla:* (the most beautiful), which reflects exaggerated admiration about the child. Similarly, the congratulator, in example 22 above, pays a compliment to the child's mother describing her as the most beautiful. Such preference of hyperbolic adjectives in compliments is observed to be a major component of straightforward compliments as discussed by Farenkia (2012, 458). According to Khatatbeh and Al-abed Al-Haq (2018), the meaning of exaggerating expressions in congratulations needs to be taken figuratively rather than literally. Furthermore, in examples 23-24 above, the congratulators indirectly compliment the parents by expressing their joy to see them in their roles as "a mother" and "a father". In Jordanian culture, parenthood is often associated with steadfastness, making these descriptions equivalent to compliments on their personality. By employing SSK, SCK and co(n)text, both direct and indirect compliments combine to achieve the practs of complimenting and congratulating.

Utilized in 5.15% of the dataset, the recurrent application of complimenting is confirmed by the studies conducted by Badarneh et al. (2021) on graduation congratulations, Khatatbeh and Al-abed Al-Haq (2018) in their investigation of congratulations within everyday life situations, and Mahzari (2017) in his examination of congratulations used by Saudis on Facebook. This indicates that complimenting is a prevalent practice in Arabic congratulations, whether in online or offline interactions.

5.5. Using protection formulas

In 3% of the congratulatory formulas identified, the people conveying congratulations use invocations to protect the child from harm and "the evil eye". According to Spooner (1976, 77-78), the evil eye refers to "the fear of envy in the eye of the beholder" and is most dangerous to children, wealth, and health, possibly leading to the loss of these things. The notion of the "evil eye" can also be understood in the light of Islamic religious beliefs (Qur'an 114, 3; Sahih Muslim 1998, 422) which emphasize the negative effects of the evil eye when a person casts his eyes to the graces of other people. In Jordanian culture, the belief is that expressing admiration or gazing at one's possessions without using protective invocations such as *ma:ʃallah* "the grace of God be upon you" and *ʔismallah* "the name of God be upon you" may have a disruptive effect on the addressee. Comparable to English ''knock on wood,'' these invocations count as protective formulas which petition divine support against the evil eye. Thus, they communicate the pragmatic implicature of "May God protect *x*.'', as illustrated by the following examples:

25*. ma:ʃallah muba:rak muba:rak titrabba:: bi-ʕizz-kum*

"The Grace of God be upon you. Congratulations, congratulations, and may she grow up in your glory".

26*. ma:ʃallah taba:rakallah God yiħfaðˤkum wa ʔalf ʔalf mabru:k ya: rabb yitrabba: bi-ʕizzak ʔabu: ʕon*

"The Grace of God be upon you. May God protect you. Warmest congratulations! May he (the child) grow up in your glory".

27. *ʔalf mabru:k ya ʕumri: allah yiħmi:lik iyya:ha: wa yiba:rik fi:h* ❤

"Warmest congratulations my life. May God protect him and bless you😳 🕯 ❤".

28. *ʔalf mabru:k Allh yiħfaðˤha: wi yiħmi:ha: wa yijʕalha: min al-ʔbna:ʔ asˤ-sˤa:liħi:n wa qurat ʕayn laka wa li-wa:lidatiha:*

"Warmest congratulations! May God protect her, make her a virtuous person, and may God make her a sweetheart for you and her mother".

29. *ʔalf mabru:k ya: rabb Allh yixli:l-kum iyya:h ya: rabb wa jiħfaðˤuh*

"Warmest congratulations of God! May God protect him".

In examples 25-29 above, various religious prayers are included into the congratulatory messages with the intention of invoking God's protection for the newborn child against the malicious influences of the evil eye or jealousy. For instance, the protective phrase *ma:ʃallah* "the grace of God be upon you" in comment 25 above is used to protect the newborn child from the malevolent effect of the evil eye, further strengthening the congratulation message. In example 26, *ma:ʃallah* "the grace of God be upon you" and *taba:rakallah* "God blesses" are used to enhance the potency of the protective prayer. This use of *ma:ʃallah* "the grace of God be upon you" for protection is also noted by scholars such as Migdadi et al. (2010), Migdadi (2021), Cuesta (2017), and Mahzari (2017, 115), who argue that this expression is directly interpreted as a safety measure against the evil eye and indirectly serves as a compliment

In examples 27-29 above, phrases like Allah *yiħmi:lik iyyaha* "May God protect him," "*Allah yiħfaðˤha: wa yiħmi:ha:* "May God protect her," and *Allah yixli:l-kum iyya:h ya: rabb wa yiħfaðˤuh*" meaning "May God keep him for you and protect her" are employed respectively to shield the newborn children from the harmful effects of the evil eye. As noted by Migdadi et al. (2010, 498), the use of such protective expressions in Jordanian culture serves as an indicator of "belongingness", "communicating to the listener that the speaker shares an understanding of what is socially appropriate and right and how the world works."

Applying the concepts of SSK, SRK, SCK and co(n) text, the practs of using these protective expressions is essentially a form of prayer in which the complimenter implores God to shield the newborn from the adverse effects of the evil eye. Additionally, other practs of the protection formulas are complimenting the newborn and congratulating the parents on the being blessed by a child.

5.6. Using non-verbal language

This strategy occurs when congratulators use non-linguistic elements, such as stickers and emojis, to express congratulations to the parents of a newborn child, as shown in examples 30-31 below:

30. *nawwart id-dinia: ʔaħla: ʕamu:rah😊 al-ħamdulillah ʕala: sala:mit-kum wa Allah yiħfaðˤuh wa yiba:rik fi:h wa bitʃu:fi:h ʔħsan an-na:s ya: rabb* ❤❤

"You have illuminated the world with your arrival, Amu:rah, who is the most beautiful ☺. We thank God for your safe delivery and pray for His blessings to beupon you. May you grow up to be the finest among people, dear child ❤❤."

31. *ʔalf mabru:k.. in ʃa:llah min asˤ-sˤa:liħa:t wa tˤawi:la:t al-aˤma:r*   ❤

"Warmest congratulations! Wish the baby to be a good person and to live long".

In this study, non-verbal language never occurs independently; instead, it is constantly incorporated into verbal congratulatory expressions. Using computer-mediated knowledge (CMK) and co(n)text, non-verbal language primarily serves to boost the congratulation effect. In addition, with the use of SSK, various other practices are achieved depending on the specific emojis employed. For example, the pract of "endearment" is often associated with emojis like flowers, stars, hearts, and toys, coupled with congratulatory words such as "congratulations," "welcome baby," "it's a boy," "it's a girl," and emojis like praying hands and a smiling face with smiling eyes. Emojis such as a smiling face, red flower, red heart, party hat, thumbs up, smiling face with heart eyes, and a face blowing a kiss also have the pragmatic function of celebrating the child. Welcoming the baby is likewise conveyed through emojis such as thumbs up, smiling face with heart eyes, and phrases like 'welcome baby,' 'it's a boy,' and 'it's a girl.' Lastly, indicating the baby's gender is accomplished when blue represents a baby boy and pink signifies a baby girl.

The pragmatic functions of endearment, celebration, and intensification mentioned above are also identified and achieved through similar types of emojis in Mahzari's (2017, 234-237) research on congratulatory expressions as used by Saudi Facebook users. This suggests that Arab Facebook users find non-verbal language to be an effective means of expressing their positive emotions in congratulatory contexts. The effectiveness of this type of communication is placed in its ability to convey abundant information through these stickers and emojis. As is the case in earlier research findings (Derks et al. 2008, Mahzari 2017, 234-237), the repeated use (1.26%) of this strategy in the present research highlights the significance of emojis and stickers as a new mode of non-verbal communication, especially in the absence of physical interaction.

5.7. Welcoming the newborn

In this strategy, congratulatory messages include greeting expressions directed to the newborn child. The use of greetings in birth congratulations can be understood within the context of Arab-Islamic culture, where greetings serve not only as social expressions but also as acts of worshiping God. In the Quran, Muslims are promised rewards for delivering greetings to fellow Muslims, and they are encouraged to respond to greetings with even better ones (see Quran ch.4, verse 86). Additionally, although greetings are considered individual speech acts, they are used as a way to express the congratulator's joy at the arrival of the baby. Two methods of welcoming the newborn baby into the world have occurred in the data, as illustrated in the following examples:

32. *welcome. ḥamdulillah ʕala: sala:mit um Salma mabru:k al-mawlu:dah wa   ahlan   wa   sahlan   bi-salma*

"Welcome. Thank God for Um Salma's safety. Congratulations on the new baby, and a warm welcome to baby Salma."

33. *wallah wa nawwarat ad-dinia: bi-Salma. Al-ḥamdulillah ʕala: sala:mtik ya: ʕumri: wa inʃa:llah bi-titrabba: bi-ʕizzkum wa dala:lkum* ❤ *Ɂhla: Um Salma: bil-   ʕa:lam*☺

"Salma, you have illuminated the world with your arrival. Thank God for your   safety. May she (Salma) grow up in your honor and care. ❤ The most beautiful Um Salma in the world."

In Example 32 above, the adjacency pair *ahlan wa sahlan* "most welcome" is considered "the standard greeting in Jordan" (Hazaymeh et al. 2012, 423). In Example 33 above, welcoming is expressed metaphorically, comparing the birth of the baby to bringing light to a dark place. Through the use of SCK, SRK, MPH and co(n)text, the practs of using greeting formulas are welcoming the newborn to the world, expressing happiness for the newborn's arrival, and congratulating the parents for being blessed by the newborn. While this strategy is attested in only a small portion of congratulatory comments (0.59%), it is expected to be regularly utilized by well-wishers, given the focus of the study on birth congratulations. In particular, it is likely that people offering congratulations will boost these expressions by warmly welcoming the newborn children.

6. Conclusion

The previous study tackled congratulation messages conveyed in comments on birth announcements on Facebook in Jordan. It primarily investigated the pragmatic acts accomplished by the congratulating formulas and strategies employed. It was revealed that a congratulatory comment could include as many as seven strategies of which the most essential is the congratulation act. In addition to performing the act of congratulation, this strategy invokes God to bless the newborn and their family. The other congratulation strategies, namely, expressing good wishes, expressing happiness, complimenting, using protection formulas, using nonverbal language, and welcoming, play various supportive roles in the birth congratulation messages. According to pragmeme theory, the congratulatory comments achieved various pragmatic acts, including blessing, wishing, expressing satisfaction, invocation, advising, complimenting the parents, expressing emotions and feelings, thanking and praising, and greetings. These pragmatic functions result from the application contextual features including shared religious knowledge, shared cultural knowledge, shared religious knowledge, and as computer-mediated knowledge.

This study has also demonstrated how different cultural concepts play a fundamental role in how congratulatory formulas are interpreted in different contexts. For example, the notion of Islamic-religious beliefs such as praising God, *barakah* "blessing" and virtuousness are found to be embedded in many birth congratulatory formulas. Additionally, the Arab-cultural customs and norms with respect to marriage and parenthood are relevant to how Jordanians convey congratulations on newly-born children. Moreover, the Jordanian social value of *alqiya:m bilwa:jib* " performing social" duties is

pertinent to the widespread use of the congratulatory IFID, where the congratulation is announced explicitly.

While this research focuses on online congratulation in Jordanian culture, further studies are needed to examine this electronic phenomenon in other Arab communities such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq to identify the similarities and differences in using congratulations in these cultures. Researchers are also encouraged to explore the strategies of congratulations on important Islamic events such as Ramadan and Eid occasions. Such analysis would reveal the extent to which the congratulating behavior in Islamic cultures is similar to or different from that in other cultural contexts. In addition, it is recommended that further work on birth congratulations focus on social variables such as gender, age, and level of education.

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رسائل التهنئة بالولادة على الفيسبوك في الأردن: دراسة اجتماعيّة تداوليّة

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الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة رسائل التهنئة بالولادة كما وردت في تعليقات مستخدمي الفيسبوك على إعلانات الولادة في الأردن مع التركيز على استقصاء استراتيجيات التهنئة ووظائفها التداوليّة ضمن سياقات متنوعة. ولتحقيق هذه الغاية درسنا ما مجموعه 1206 تعليقات على ستة إعلانات ولادة في إطار نظريّة الوظيفة التداوليّة التي اقترحها جيكوب مي سنة 2001. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن رسائل التهنئة يمكن تصنيفها ضمن سبع استراتيجيات مختلفة، مع كون فعل التهنئة هو الناقل الأساسي للتهنئة. وتشمل الاستراتيجيات الداعمة الأخرى التعبير عن التمنيات الطيّبة، والتعبير عن السعادة، والمجاملة، واستخدام صيغ التحصين، واستخدام اللغة غير اللفظيّة، والترحيب بالمولود الجديد. وعند دراسة هذه الاستراتيجيات ضمن المعايير السياقيّة والاجتماعيّة والثقافيّة فإنها تقوم بأدوار تداوليّة مختلفة مثل المباركة والدعاء ولأمنيات الطيّبة والنصح والثناء والترحيب. وتخلص هذه الدراسة إلى أن تهاني الولادة التي تقدم عبرالفيسبوك في الأردن تتأثر عادة بالدين والتقاليد والأعراف الاجتماعيّة والثقافيّة.

الكلمات المفتاحيّة: تهنئة، مولود جديد، سياق، اللغة التداوليّة، استراتيجيّة.

</div>

Endnotes

[1] This is a screen shot of the original comment in Arabic.

محمدوديان ابومعاويه وديان
الف الف مبارك و الحمدلّه على
سلامتهم ربنا يحفظها ويبارك بعمرها
وتكون من الصالحات والبارات
وفرحكم فيها

23w   Like   Reply

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