

# Digital-Based Genuine Invitation Strategies of Najdi Arabic Speakers: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis

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## Abstract

The aim of the present study is to investigate the invitation-issuing strategies of Najdi Arabic speakers within the frameworks of speech act theory and politeness principles, highlighting the socio-pragmatic parameters of gender, social distance, and the in/formality of the speech event affecting strategy selection and modes of delivery. The data corpus consists of 112 instances of Najdi Arabic invitations extracted from informants' WhatsApp instant messaging and extended on formal and less formal occasions. Major findings indicate that the in/formality of the invitational situation predicts the way in which invitations are extended either textually or digitally, regardless of social distance and gender. As for gender, males use blessings, performatives, and mood derivable most frequently regardless of the in/formality of the occasion. Females use performatives for formal occasions, whereas they employ want statements and suggestory formulas for less formal situations. The results indicate that indirectness is not universally equated with politeness because Najdi Arabic speakers reveal a tendency toward directness and imposition to convey interest in and affiliation with the invitee.

**Keywords:** Arabic invitations, cross-cultural communication, politeness, socio-pragmatics, speech acts

## 1. Introduction

Extending an invitation is a recurrent social behavior that can occur among friends and relatives in daily encounters as well as among acquaintances and strangers in more formal settings. It is a cultural activity that is frequently used to create connections, promote social solidarity, consolidate interpersonal bonds among community members, and, sometimes, achieve institutional or inexplicit ends (Margutti & Galatolo, 2018). In the Arab culture, an invitation is a regular social activity defined by some cultural rituals and formulas as well as mutually shared values, making it intuitive for interlocutors to properly extend, perceive, and respond to invitations. Saudi Arabic speakers perceive invitation as a conventionally virtuous practice underpinned by religion that advocates generosity and hospitality and cultivates family ties, neighborliness and friendship.

As a typical speech act, invitations inevitably project a pending response from the addressee, triggering a series of actions in which both parties indulge in the process of mutually collaborative interaction. However, compared to other commonly studied social speech acts, extending an invitation requires higher levels of sociability, implications, and commitment (Bauler, 2022; Wolfson, Marmor, & Jones, 1989). That is, when speakers extend an invitation, they exert some social obligations in which they expect the recipients to accept and spare some time for the occasion. Several language measures are further considered, including formality, in/directness, social politeness, face management, and the gender of interlocutors, depending on whether the invitation is planned or spontaneous during the immediate interaction and based on the type of event, whether a casual gathering or a formal occasion. These constraints are communicated through distinct linguistic choices whose realizations vary from one society to another, considering the speech community's contextual features and sociocultural norms required for adequate language performance. To a certain degree, these variations violate the premise of universality in politeness strategies across cultures and advocate cultural diversity (Cohen, 2020).

Despite the increasing volume of research on the realizations and cross-cultural differences of speech acts over the past three decades, the speech act of invitation has been relatively overlooked, particularly in non-Western languages (Margutti & Galatolo, 2018). Because research on speech acts is affected by severe ethnocentricity (Bauler, 2022), there is a dearth of literature on invitations in Arabic (Abdelhady, 2015; Al-Ali, 2006; Al-Khatib, 2006; Naim, 2011; Nassar, Saad, & Nordin, 2020; Oraby, 2020), let alone invitations in Saudi Najdi Arabic, a comparatively less investigated context. This could be owing to several reasons. First, invitation exchange involves a sequence of turns between the inviter and the invitee, which makes data collection and organization more problematic, especially for natural observation methods (Margutti & Galatolo, 2018). Second, empirical evidence emerging from cross-cultural studies suggests that a particular community's sociocultural norms and expectations fundamentally affect both the inviters' linguistic behavior and the invitees' perceptions (Bauler, 2022). What is perceived as appropriate and polite behavior in one community may not be the same in another. As a community citizen, the speech act of invitation in Najdi Arabic is characterized by its nature of imposition, which contradicts the Western

conceptualizations of politeness, namely, “do not impose,” “give options,” and “make your receiver feel good” (Lakoff, 1973, p. 9). The study is focused on the Najdi dialect, which is spoken in and around the capital city of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, and it is the dialect of the royal family.

Consequently, this study’s authors seek to narrow this research gap by scrutinizing the genuine invitation practices in Saudi society within the frameworks of speech act theory and politeness principles. More specifically, they seek to uncover the genuine invitation-issuing strategies of Saudi Arabic speakers issued mainly via WhatsApp in relation to socio-pragmatic parameters of gender, social distance, and the type of speech act event affecting the users’ strategy selection, level of directness, and modes of delivery. The study draws attention to the nature of digital communication in the Arab world owing to technological advancements, the culture-specific use of language, and the applicability of some universal politeness principles, such as being indirect and avoiding imposition. The researchers attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Najdi Arabic speakers extend genuine invitations via WhatsApp?
2. What strategies do Najdi Arabic speakers use when issuing invitations via WhatsApp?
3. How do the socio-pragmatic factors relating to gender, social distance, and type of event influence participants’ invitational modes of delivery and strategy selection?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Speech Act Theory and Politeness in Linguistic Behavior*

Speech act theory and politeness principles are core issues in the field of pragmatics. Speech act theory assumes that a language is a form of behavior structured by a set of culture-specific rules of verbal communication (Searle, 1979). Politeness theory represents the social view of appropriate language behavior across languages and cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The speech act theory, advanced by Searle (1979) in response to Austin’s (1975) paradigm, is primarily concerned with the illocutionary force of the utterance that depicts the speaker’s intention of producing that utterance. The illocutionary force of the utterance is perceived by hearers through the linguistic gestures and contextual aspects that accompany the utterance. Thus, the linguistic realization of speech acts is dependent on two levels of language-specific constraints: the semantic (linguistic) formula and the sociocultural conventions for appropriate use. The former pertains to the syntactic and lexical selection taken in line with the established conventions of a speech community. The latter is related to the contextual aspects of the communication, including the event and the interlocutor’s age, gender, social status, and familiarity.

Philosophical viewpoints have been advanced in the literature, with authors discussing the strategies for performing and comprehending the illocutions of speech acts considering politeness principles and face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 2014) as well as the different sociocultural measures that influence their selection (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Bauler (2022) assumed that politeness in intercultural communication is reflected in how language communicates the interpersonal distance between individuals and their diverse social roles as well as how “face-wants” are enacted in a speech community, namely the endeavor to develop, preserve, and save face during the verbal exchange. Lakoff (1973) established some universal guidelines to pursue appropriate communication: (1) do not impose, (2) give options, and (3) be friendly. The most extensive model of politeness is Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework, which analyzes types of discourse in a communicative situation depending on the concept of “face.” They described “face” as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). They distinguished between positive face and negative face. The former refers to “the positive and consistent image people have of themselves, and their desire for approval,” whereas the latter relates to “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Although they acknowledged that the essence of face is culturally specific and sensitive to social interpretation, they believed that the two key face-wants that constitute it are universal. In short, politeness is centered around considering the interlocutor’s feelings, wants, and desires and helping them feel comfortable.

Linguistic politeness has also established a link between indirectness and politeness, classifying speech acts into direct and indirect strategies based on the mode of speech act production in different communicative settings. The former is achieved when speakers say something and literally mean what they say. The latter is performed when the speaker’s intended meaning is different from what they literally say. The audience must derive the hidden meaning via inference depending on the interlocutors’ mutually shared background knowledge. According to Leech (2014), indirect illocutionary acts are more polite than direct ones because they maximize the degree of optionality and decrease the level of imposition on the part of the addressee. A polite utterance is expected to lower the addressee’s risk and raise their rewards, whereas the exact opposite happens to the speaker. The speaker encounters a negative face, which must be resolved following Leech’s (2014) principle that proposes indirectness as the typical approach to achieve politeness because indirectness promotes the hearer’s degree of freedom and negotiability; thus, it decreases the level of face-threatening situations.

A significantly increased stream of researchers exploring the application of the politeness phenomena cross-culturally have found that politeness practices differ substantially across languages and cultures. That is, what is conceived as polite behavior in one language may not be realized in the same way in another owing to differences in social norms and intercultural appropriateness. Speakers worldwide employ a wide range of speech act strategies to achieve a specific effect, and these strategies are used to convey a polite behavior that may contravene those employed in other speech communities. For instance, English is deemed more polite than Arabic according to

Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, whereas Leech's (2014) framework contends that Arabic is more polite than English.

With reference to the act of invitation, an utterance may be taken as an invitation in one language, while its propositional content may be defined as a question. For example, English speakers can invite someone indirectly by merely asking a question using a variety of structures, such as: "Can you come to the party?" (informal but polite); "Would you (like to) come to the party?" (hypothetically formal and more polite); "Could you come to the party?" (hypothetically formal and more polite). In this way, speakers employ indirect strategies by producing a literal speech act to perform an indirect speech act to reduce the threat and avoid losing face in the invitation exchange. Understanding the illocutionary force of a question-formed invitation utterance depends on the hearer's background knowledge by either accepting or rejecting the invitation through responding "Yes" or "No" to the literal question. Comparatively, Arabic speakers often employ direct strategies, particularly mood derivable and declarative expressions, to demonstrate greater politeness in similar situations (Eshreth, 2014; Grainger, Kerkam, Mansor, & Mills, 2015; Qari, 2019). Extending an invitation using questions about the invitee's ability and willingness (as is the case in English and French) is often seen as insincere (ostensible) and less polite in the Arabic culture. As such, the claim that politeness is the most prevalent motive for indirectness is no longer supported, particularly in collectivist societies, such as the Arab world. Politeness is a sociocultural linguistic construct that is culturally distinctive, involving different social conceptions and degrees of politeness among speakers of diverse societies. Presumably, variations in politeness perceptions may result in miscommunications and conflicts in cross-cultural encounters (Grainger et al., 2015).

### 2.2 The Speech Act of Invitation

The speech act of invitation alludes to the illocutionary act of requesting or offering the invitee to enjoy a social activity with the inviter, happening immediately or in the future at a specific time and place (Austin, 1975). Invitations are classified as directive speech acts in which the addresser directs the addressee to engage in some type of action (Searle, 1979). To some extent, invitations are equivalent to requests, orders, and commands in the sense that they typically direct the addressee to do something; however, the invitee is directed to do something for their own advantage and not for the inviter's advantage, as is the case in commands, requests, and orders. Consequently, Hernández (2001) viewed the speech act of invitation as both commissive and directive because it not only directs the invitee to perform a specific function, it also commits the inviter to a future action that they have offered the invitee to take.

Researchers have further categorized invitations into two groups based on their authenticity and sincerity. According to Wolfson et al. (1989), an invitation that includes a reference to a specific time and a place, as well as a request for a response, is regarded as a genuine invitation, whereas extending an invitation without establishing these grounds is known as an ostensible or ambiguous invitation. These invitations are not intended to be treated literally. Alternatively, they aim to serve social, ritual, and communicative practices to construct harmonious interpersonal connections. A taxonomy for the speech act of invitation has been developed by several researchers (Al-Khatib, 2006; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Suzuki, 2015), distinguishing direct and indirect strategies. Direct invitations involve literal and explicit strategies, such as want statements, performatives, declaratives, and imperatives. Indirect invitations involve nonliteral strategies in which the invitation is inferred or interpreted, such as query preparatories, suggestive formulas, interrogatives, and blessings (Searle, 1979).

### 2.3 Previous Related Studies

A survey of the literature on studies examining the speech act of invitations in Arabic is scarcely reported. Very few attempts have been made to explore the linguistic patterns and formulaic expressions of invitations in the vernacular languages of Arab societies used for everyday speaking situations. The available studies can be classified as cross-cultural (Al-Darraj, Chow, Foo, Ismail, & Abdulah, 2013; Eshreth, 2014; Ghazzoul, 2019; Salih, 1996), examining the Arabic language in comparison to English and as intra-lingual (Abdelhady, 2015; Al-Ali, 2006; Al-Khatib, 2006; Dali Youcef, 2022; Naim, 2011; Nassar et al., 2020; Oraby, 2020) focusing exclusively on Arabic varieties.

Al-Darraj et al. (2013) conducted a cross-cultural analysis comparing the action of invitation between Iraqi Arabic and English and focusing mainly on directness, politeness, and linguistic strategy use. That study's findings indicate that whereas English invitations are distinguished by indirectness to avoid imposition and face-threatening situations, Arabic invitations are typically direct to express solidarity and interconnection. Linguistically, invitations in English are realized through questions; Arabic invitations are preferably extended through imperative forms accompanied by blessings. Eshreth (2014) explored the sociocultural parameters that affect invitation issuing, accepting, and responding in Palestinian Arabic and American English. Whereas English invitations are distinguished by indirectness to minimize imposition and face-threatening situations, Palestinian Arabic invitations are direct to indicate solidarity and intimacy, with females having a higher tendency for directness than males. This finding contradicts the concept of universal politeness traced back to Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, which equates politeness with indirectness. Ghazzoul (2019) investigated the cross-cultural polite strategies used in requests and invitations among 16 Syrian Arabic speakers from different cultural backgrounds. That study's data reveal that all the informants preferred conventionally direct strategies in invitations and requests to show politeness and hospitality. However, Syrian students who were citizens of the United Kingdom preferred to use more indirect strategies in various contexts despite the fact that this indirectness was deemed a lack of hospitality when extending invitations.

Al-Khatib (2006) pioneered the first intralingual study on invitation behavior in Jordanian society from a pragmatic viewpoint. This author explored the invitation exchange from three angles—invitation-issuing, accepting the invitation, and declining it—among 120 Jordanian Arabic speakers. The results demonstrate the Jordanians' preference for explicit strategies when issuing an invitation and culture-specific use of religious locutions, such as swearing and extending good wishes and blessings when inviting each other. These

speech act patterns can only be appropriately interpreted by people who share the same cultural and linguistic context. Gender and age variations were also found to be significantly manipulating factors when extending or accepting an invitation. Drawing on analytic frameworks, Al-Ali (2006) analyzed 200 Arabic written wedding invitations of Jordanians in terms of interconnected elements of culture, religion, and masculine hierarchy affecting the organizational specifics of the communicative act. The findings indicate that religious affiliation and masculine kinship power create and reinforce textual component selection and shade the linguistic decisions and labeling behaviors. Naim (2011) investigated the sociocultural factors that influence the occurrence of ostensible invitations versus genuine invitations in Moroccan Arabic. Results showed that ostensible invitations are extended to people who are not members of the invitee's immediate family or close friends. A culture-specific type of invitation was further proposed, called an ostensible reinforced invitation, in which an ostensible invitation is made genuine using intensifying devices, such as swearing. Unlike Western communities, the researcher claimed that surprise visits are welcomed and pervasive in the Moroccan context. Additionally, social parameters, such as age, gender, and social relationship, have significantly influenced how Moroccans extend or respond to invitations.

More recently, Abdelhady (2015) explored ostensible invitations as opposed to genuine invitations in Jordanian Arabic from a socio-pragmatic perspective. Considering theories of politeness and pragmatic elements over 120 invitation scenarios, the author found that Jordanians employ ostensible invitations as softening devices to maintain face and promote politeness in face-threatening occasions. Oraby (2020) investigated invitation practices in naturally occurring encounters among Jordanians. The researcher gathered data from various encounters including naturally occurring face-to-face, telephone, or WhatsApp conversations performed by people of various ages, genders, statuses, and relationships. Collected invitations were further classified into genuine invitations and ostensible invitations. Findings indicated that invitation sequences in Jordan often have a tripartite structure, where the inviter is expected to make three invitations to the invitee before one of them concedes to the other's desire. In addition, a typical invitation in Jordan is driven by strict social rubrics that are generally anticipated and governed by ritualized norms. Nassar et al. (2020) explored invitation refusal realization patterns among Iraqi Arabs compared to Iraqi Kurds who speak Arabic as a second language. Findings revealed that the indirectness category was a prominent pattern among both groups because they both used indirect refusals and adjuncts more than direct ones, irrespective of social distance. Dali Youcef (2022) examined the influence of religion on the communicative functions of invitations among Algerian speakers of Arabic. Using a qualitative approach, the findings revealed that incorporating religious expressions is a significant and common practice among Algerian speakers. Religious lexicons are used as a way to validate invitations, save the invitees' face, enhance the illocutionary force of the invitation, and affect the invitees to make them accept.

Although these investigations provide valuable insights for comprehending invitations in the Arab world and politeness issues in non-Western contexts, they indicate a dearth of rigorous and sociocultural research within Arabic-speaking populations where none is conducted on the Najdi variety of Saudi Arabic. In terms of sociolinguistics and pragma-linguistics, local colloquial varieties of Arabic vary from one region to another depending on the interactional context, gender, in/formality, and sociocultural values of the speech community. The aim of this study is to fill this research gap by exploring the genuine invitation practices in Saudi society in the light of speech act theory and politeness principles. The authors aim to uncover invitation-extending strategies of Najdi Arabic speakers issued mainly via WhatsApp in relation to socio-pragmatic parameters of gender, social distance, and the type of speech event affecting the users' strategy selection, level of directness, and modes of delivery.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Sample of Study*

A corpus of 112 genuine digital invitations was collected over a 6-month period for analysis. The selected invitations were extracted from informants' WhatsApp chats and transferred to the researcher with the help of three fieldworkers, a male and two females who were native speakers of Najdi Arabic. These invitations were obtained from family members, extended relatives, close friends, neighbors, and acquaintances living in the city of Alkharj, District of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at formal and informal events, using a random sampling approach. The demographics of informants were further noted across all invitation exchanges. The chain sample technique (Albirini, 2016) was used to recruit participants from the central province, namely Riyadh, and its environs such as Alkharj, which entailed selecting participants who were familiar with each other. Accordingly, the sample consisted of 54 females and 58 males, whose ages ranged from 24–55. In terms of education, 92 participants were highly educated (university graduates or had earned a master's or doctoral degree), and 20 participants were moderately educated (i.e., high school). They worked as teachers, administrators, technicians, engineers, lecturers, doctors, soldiers, and businesspeople. Given the unsystematic way in which the data were collected, social variables, such as social status and age, were overlooked in the study because they are usually left unreported in naturally occurring interactions.

#### *3.2 The Study Design*

The researcher used a mixed-methods quantitative and qualitative design, with a corpus of 112 invitation-issuing situations, collected from WhatsApp text messages. A total of 75 invitational situations were obtained as plain text messages, two as voice messages, and 35 invitations were digitally tailored using professionally designed templates, high-quality images, and graphics, sometimes combined with music and sound effects. Saudi invitations comprise a chain of exchanges between the inviter and the invitee: an opening that includes an address term and a greeting, a head act that indicates invitation, a supportive move, and a response to the invitation. Given the purpose of the study, only head acts are considered in the analysis. Table 1 displays the classification of events in which the invitation sequences were extended.

Table 1. Classification of events and modes of delivery in which the invitation speech act is extended

Category	Type of event	Total
Formal events	Planned dinners for recovery	5
	Planned dinners for moving to a new residence	3
	Planned dinners for retirement	4
	Engagement parties	3
	Weddings	17
	Graduation parties	7
	Baby receptions	7
Informal events	Total	46
	Casual gatherings	36
	Park gatherings	30
	Total	66
Total		112

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through taking screenshots of the invitation text messages and saving the voice messages and tailored digital invitations. Notes were further taken of the relevant contextual and socio-pragmatic details of the interlocutors, including education, age, gender, type of event, modes of delivery, and social distance. This approach enabled the researcher to obtain information on the determinants of invitation-extending strategies and linguistic formulas used. Because the invitation exchange contained several pieces of information, the main body was segmented into three possible sequences: opening, main body, and closing. Following Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), the main body of invitations was divided into head acts (invitation strategies) and supporting moves. Given the focus of the study, only head acts were taken into consideration.

Data were gathered through a template and transferred to an Excel sheet, and then coded based on the socio-pragmatic parameters examined in the study: males and females for gender; close and distant for social connection; formal and informal for the event; and tailored digital, text, or voice messaging invitation for modes of delivery. Quantitative analysis was used to check the frequencies of use. Qualitative analysis was employed for the themes and patterns of use. Table 2 summarizes the contextual variables in relation to the type of speech event and the interlocutors' social distance. The terms of data collection and purpose of the study were explained to all participants, and verbal consent was taken to use the data for the research purposes.

Table 2. Distribution of invitation-issuing situations based on social distance and type of speech event

Type of speech event	Social distance	Male	(%)	Female	(%)
Formal events	Socially close	10	17.2	8	14.8
	Socially distant	16	27.5	13	24
Informal events	Socially close	24	41.3	23	42.5
	Socially distant	8	13.7	10	18.5
Total		58	100	54	100%

Socially close connections included parents, siblings, and close friends; remote connections included extended family, colleagues, neighbors, and acquaintances. In terms of speech events, formal occasions included weddings, engagements, graduations, baby receptions, and preplanned dinners on the occasion of recovery, retirement, or moving to a new residence. Informal occasions included park gatherings and spontaneous casual gatherings for coffee or dinner either in or outside the house such as a particular friend's house.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used to analyze the data. Quantitatively, a descriptive analysis was run using SPSS software to determine the frequency of the different types of strategies used for extending invitations, highlighting the influence of the socio-pragmatic parameters on the employed strategies. Qualitatively, Najdi Arabic invitations were analyzed according to the speech act taxonomy of inviting based on earlier studies (such as Al-Khatib, 2006; Suzuki, 2015).

Direct invitations:

1. Performatives: invitation utterances that use the verb "invite" such as "atshrf by d3wtkw" (I am honored to invite you).
2. Declarative: invitations that include obligatory utterances, reflecting statement of fact, such as "3shakwm alylah 3ndy" (Your dinner is hosted at my house on Friday).
3. Want statements: invitation utterances in which the inviter communicates their wish or want for the invitee's attendance, such as "wdy tjwn 3ndy" (I want you to come).
4. Mood derivable: invitation utterances that include direct commands, such as syr (come over) and t3al (come).

Indirect invitations:

1. Blessing: invitations that include formulaic phrases with reference to God, such as "hyakm Allah" (May Allah greet you).
2. Suggestory formula: invitations in the form of interrogative questions, such as "wsh raykm tsyrwn 3ly alywm?" (what do you think of coming over my place today?).

- Query preparatory: invitation utterances that question the invitee’s availability to comply the invitation, such as “*bnjtm3 fy shalyh, i ða ynasbkm, Allah yhyykm*” (we will gather in a chalet. If it suits you, may Allah greet you).

These strategies were compared against the socio-pragmatic factors of gender, social distance, type of event affecting the informants’ strategy selection, level of directness, and modes of digital delivery. Given that invitations in Saudi Arabic, particularly the Najdi dialect, have not been investigated in the literature, a qualitative analysis is a well-established approach to gain insights into Saudi Arabic speech acts.

**4. Results and Discussion**

Descriptive statistics were computed to address the first research question on how Najdi Arabic speakers extend genuine invitations via WhatsApp. Table 3 indicates that most invitations issued for formal events (76% with 35 instances out of 46) were mainly distributed using professionally designed templates with high-quality images and graphics, which are sometimes accompanied by music and sound effects depending on the occasion. For weddings, females make special wedding templates with a different style from normal ones that identify the groom and the bride by their mothers to invite their guests who are exclusively females. For graduation parties and baby receptions, invitations are issued by females only, often delivered as a tailored-digital clip including the invitation sequence. These digital invitations were found to serve various functions such as indicating intensity of emotions, displaying enthusiasm and excitement about the event, and showing solidarity and insistence on attendance. On informal occasions, text messaging invitations exhibited 96% with 64 instances out of 66 for both genders. This conclusion suggests that the type of invitational situation is a key predictor for modes of delivery irrespective of social distance or gender.

Table 3. Classification of events and modes of delivery in which the invitation speech act is extended

Category	Type of event	Male	Modes of delivery	Female	Modes of delivery	Total
Formal events	Dinners for recovery	3	Text	2	Text	5
	Dinners for moving to a new residence	3	Text	0	-	3
	Ginners for retirement	3	Digital	1	Digital	4
	Engagement parties	2	Text	1	Text	3
	Weddings	10	Digital	7	Digital	17
	Graduation parties	0	-	7	Digital	7
	Baby receptions	0	-	7	Digital	7
	Total	21		25		46
Informal events	Casual gatherings	15	Text	19	Text	36
		2	Voice			
	Park gatherings	20	Text	10	Text	30
	Total	37		29		66
	Total	58		54		112

To address the second and third research questions, the descriptive statistics displayed in Table 4 demonstrate the overall tendency of invitation-issuing strategies in relation to the contextual variables of gender, social distance, and type of speech event affecting the informants’ strategy selection and level of directness. Although Najdi speakers utilized a range of strategies, a general preference toward directness was observed with 65% of the total strategies compared to indirect ones (34%). Direct strategies involved the use of explicit utterances that express the inviter’s intention to invite, whereas indirect strategies exploited implicit utterances in which the invitation is inferred. A focus on gender reveals that Saudi males engage in considerably more direct invitations than their female counterparts, at 67% and 62% of the total strategies, respectively.

Table 4. Distribution of invitation-issuing strategies in terms of gender and type of event

Level of directness	Invitation-issuing strategies	Male			Total	Female			Total		
		Formal events		Informal events		Formal events		Informal events			
		Freq.	%	Freq.		%	Freq.	%		Freq.	%
Direct	Mood derivable	2	7.6	12	37.5	24.1	1	4	5	11.11	10.3
	Want statements	0	0	1	3.1	1.7	0	0	10	18.5	18%
	Declaratives	0	0	9	28.1	15.5	0	0	0	0	0
	Performatives	13	50	2	6.2	25.8	18	72	0	0	33.3
	Total	15	57.6	24	75	67.24	19	90.4	15	45.4	62.9
Indirect	Blessings	11	42.3	6	18.7	29.3	2	8	3	9	9.2
	Query preparatory	0	0	1	3.1	1.7	0	0	6	18.1	11.1
	Suggestory formula	0	0	1	3.1	1.7	0	0	9	27.2	16.6
	Total	11	42.3	8	25	32.7	2	8	18	54.5	37%

Male direct invitations were issued in formal and less formal situations, 57% and 75% respectively, notably among close friends, social equals, and family members, whereas indirect invitations were used among people with more social distance and less solidarity, particularly in formal situations compared to less formal ones, 42% and 25% respectively. Likewise, Najdi-speaking females utilized

direct invitations more than indirect ones, 62% and 37% respectively. However, direct strategies are primarily deployed in formal events (90%), indicating a gender dissimilarity, whereas indirect strategies are employed in less formal situations (54%) such as casual and park gatherings. This finding indicates that social distance and type of event are key determinants of the invitation strategy used by Najdis. This conclusion corroborates Al-Khatib's (2006) study, in which it was reported that females are more considerate of family duties and cultural obligations, which prompts them to use indirect invitations. Similarly, Najdi-speaking females are culturally urged to check on their family's commitments, which may hinder the success of a friendly text invitation for a cup of coffee or a casual gathering. As a compensation, indirectness allows the invitee more space and makes the invitation less imposing. As for formal events, the success and sincerity of a digital invitation is pragmatically encoded in the syntactic structure and style of the invitation. Thus, Najdi speakers of both genders are more likely to use direct strategies for formal occasions as a means of emphasizing the invitation in a way that is culturally polite.

A closer inspection of the data reveals that Najdi-speaking males and females use different genuine invitation strategies depending on the in/formality of the event. Whereas "blessings" are the most indirect invitation strategy used among males (29.3%), they are the least used for females (9%). Blessing is a culture-specific invitation strategy tied to a regional dialect that reflects courtesy and saves the interlocutors' face. It is an expression associated with the religious realm of the speech community and expressed in different linguistic forms and speech acts (Dali Youcef, 2022). As a Muslim society, this strategy invoked the name of Allah in the speech act of invitation using the formulaic expressions: "*Allah yhyykm*" or "*hyakm Allah*" ("May Allah greet you") either before or after a supportive move that describes the event. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Yasmin, Naseem, and Sohail (2019) and Dali Youcef (2022), who reported a tendency for the inclination of religious symbolism, particularly invoking the name of Allah (God) in communicative acts in the Asian world in general and the Arab world in particular. Whereas the semantic interpretation is blessing, the pragmatic function is inviting. Therefore, it is assumed that lacking knowledge of intercultural norms of communicative functions will likely contribute to communication breakdown and a socio-pragmatic misunderstanding of the intended meaning (Alrefaee, Al-Ghamdi, & Almansoob, 2019; Yasmin et al., 2019). The use of this invitation strategy portrays the social gathering as a nonnegotiable task from a pragmatic perspective whose terms are unchangeable. That is, the inviter does not expect the invitees to refuse or negotiate the time and date. Instead, the invitees are expected to adjust their schedules according to the event. Pragmatically, the inviter is exerting a social obligation to be fulfilled; however, the invitees have the option to comply or not. This invitation is likely to be extended as a plain text message for formal occasions such as preplanned dinners after recovery or moving to a new residence among socially close relatives as well as extended ones as in examples (1–2). It is also used among close male friends in informal events (with six instances) such as park gatherings as in examples (3–4).

- (1) (A middle-aged man is inviting his siblings and brothers-in-law to have dinner on the occasion of moving to a newly owned residence):
  - "*Allah yhyykm 3la al3sha ywm aljom3h bymwnasbt albyt aljdyd. Allah yj3lh byt 3amr b ðkrh*"
  - "May Allah greet you for dinner on Friday on the occasion of the new house. May Allah make it a home filled with His remembrance"
- (2) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her siblings to have dinner on the occasion of her mother's recovery after surgery):
  - "*Allah yhyykm 3la al3sha ywm aljom3h bymwnasbt salamt alwaldah*"
  - "May Allah greet you for dinner on Friday on the occasion of my mother's recovery"
- (3) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friends to have dinner in the park):
  - "*hyakwm alylah. Nsaly al3sha fy alistyrakh w fqrt al3sha byr3ayt abw mhamd*"
  - "May Allah greet you. We will pray Alisha at the park and the dinner is hosted by Abu Muhammed"
- (4) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friends to have coffee in his park):
  - "*hyakm blistryakh. Fyh qahwah abykwm tjrwnha*"
  - "May Allah greet you in the park. There is a coffee that I want you to try"

Similarly, performative invitations were utilized most frequently by Najdi-speaking males and females, 25% and 33% respectively, constituting 29.4% of the total strategies, primarily on formal occasions such as weddings, baby receptions, retirements, and graduation parties among close and extended relatives as well as friends. These invitations are delivered through a professionally designed template including the invitation sequence such as wedding invitations or a videoclip with high-quality images and graphics along with sound effects and music, such as baby receptions, retirements, and graduation parties as in examples (5–6):

- (5) (Two middle-aged men are inviting their close friends and colleagues for dinner on behalf of the school to honor two colleagues after retirement):
  - "*ysr mnsby s3d bn m3að d3wtkw m lyhðawr hafl tkrym abw fahd w abw ahmd*"
  - "Saad bin Muaath School is pleased to invite you to attend the honoring ceremony for the teachers Abu Fahad and Abu Ahmed"
- (6) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her socially close and distant relatives to attend her daughter's wedding):

- “*atshrf by d3wtkw m lyhðawr zwaj ibnaty ywn alkhmys fy shalyh frhty*”
- “I have the honor to invite you to my daughter’s wedding on Thursday at Farhati chalet”

As a collectivist society, the structure of males’ invitations in formal occasions often emphasizes group sharing and emotional dependence through the use of the “we” consciousness as the inviter did in example (5) “*ysr mmswby s3d bn m3að*” or the pronoun “us” as in “*ysma*.” However, females prefer using “I” consciousness to signify individual initiative, pleasure seeking, and emotional independence. It is interesting to note that males do not receive invitations to baby receptions and graduation parties because these occasions are typically hosted and attended by females. Owing to religious restrictions and gender segregation norms, male siblings are not permitted to join such parties. That said, males may receive invitations for preplanned dinners on the 7th day after the baby’s birth among family members such as siblings and parents. Although this type of invitation is structurally direct, face-threatening, and deemed impolite, as in English-speaking contexts, leaving the invitee with no option and ignoring the invitee’s commitments and duties (Trosborg, 1995), it signifies closeness, friendliness, and respect from a Saudi pragmatic perspective.

On less formal occasions, Najdi-speaking males tend to use “mood derivable” and “declaratives,” 24% and 15% respectively, for casual and park gatherings for dinners or coffee among socially close friends and relatives compared to females who rarely employ these two strategies, 10% and 0% respectively. These invitations are textually written and spontaneously sent by the male inviter on the same day. Mood derivable invitations are structurally imperative and can be detected in a variety of Najdi Arabic expressions, such as *khawna* (come with us), *sayr* (come over), and *ta3l* (come) as in examples (7–10). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), direct speech acts such as mood derivable are considered less polite and more demanding in English-speaking contexts. For Najdis, however, mood derivable invitations display a strong desire on the part of the inviter to have the invitee as a guest to consume food or coffee. It is a pragmatic gesture of cultural politeness that reflects closeness, hospitality, and concern for the invitee’s presence particularly among socially close interlocutors. Males sometimes extend invitations on behalf of their friends as in examples (8–9), indicating a gender dissimilarity. This finding is consistent with the studies of Al-Oqaily and Tawalbeh (2012) and Grainger et al. (2015), who revealed that directness and imposition in Saudi Arabic are exploited to convey interest and affiliation as well as to verify that the invitee is aware of the invitation.

(7) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friend to have dinner with him in the camp together with a group of others):

- “*t3al m3na ly almwkhym*”
- “Come with us to the camp”

(8) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friend for a casual gathering at his other friend’s house):

- “*abzwr Fahd. T3al m3y*”
- “I will visit Fahad. Come with me”

(9) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friend for a coffee gathering at one of his friend’s park with a video of him brewing the coffee on the oven):

- “*salam. Wynk. Iða fdhy, t3al istyraht abw ibrahym*”
- “Hello. Where are you? If you are free, come to Abu Ibrahim’s park”

(10) (A young woman is inviting her brother for a casual gathering at their parents’ house because their uncles are present):

- “*khawaly 3ndna. T3al 3la alqhwah*”
- “My uncles are here. Come over for coffee”

In a declarative invitation, the inviter uses obligatory forms expressing their desire for the invitee to participate in a future event without considering the contextual circumstances of the invitee. Hence, the invitee is not expected to reject or discuss the timing, instead, the invitation is intended to be fulfilled. For males, declaratives reflect hospitality, connectedness, and optimize the speaker’s face. In contrast, females do not use declaratives owing to their considerate nature, taking the invitee’s duties and obligations into account prior to extending an invitation of this sort. Although declarative invitations are perceived as face-threatening acts in the English-speaking societies because they provide no preference for the invitee (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Trosborg, 1995), they correspond to the Saudi culture’s values of solidarity and collectivism over individualism. Sometimes, these invitations are combined with blessings as in examples (11–13):

(11) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friends for a park gathering that happens every week at a particular park):

- “*tal3t alylah fy istyraht alms3wd. hyakwm*”
- “Today’s gathering is at Almasaud park. May Allah greet you”

(12) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friends to have dinner at the park):

- “*3shakwm alylah 3ndy asa3h ts3*”
- “Your dinner is hosted by me at 9 o’clock”



(13) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friend to have coffee at the park):

- “*Ashahy blqa3yh al3sryh*”
- “Tea is ready at the Gaeyah park in the afternoon”

For females, the most common invitation-issuing behaviors in informal occasions are want statements (18%) followed by suggestory formulas (16%) and query preparatory (11%), compared to males who rarely use these strategies with 1.7% for each of the total strategies. These strategies are mainly found between close friends and relatives in casual and park gatherings and delivered through plain text messages. Want statements are utterances in which the inviter communicates their wish or want for the addressee's presence. They are typically formulated using two patterns: one with the verb, *wdy* (translated as would like) particularly between females as in examples (14–16), and the other is with the verb *aby* (translated as I want) or (the plural form *neby* translated as we want) particularly between males, as in example (17). The first is less imposing than the second. These structures are accompanied by verbs with meanings such as come, come over, join, and meet, preceded or followed by a supportive move that both accounts for and describes the event including the location of the gathering as in the examples (14–17):

(14) (A young woman is inviting her friends for a casual gathering on the weekend):

- “*wdna njtm3 ana w inty w sarah ywm alkhmys i ða ynasbkwm*”
- “We want to gather. I, you and Sarah on Thursday, if it suits you all”

(15) (A young woman is inviting her friends for a casual gathering on the weekend):

- “*halmah fyk. Wdy ashwfk ywm alkhmys. Khlyna njtm3 w ntfjil*”
- “I dreamed of you. I want to see you on Thursday. Let us gather and have a cup of coffee”

(16) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her siblings and parents for a park gathering on the weekend):

- “*wdna njtm3 w iyakm bkrah fy m3r3h fy alyamamh. Yalyt ily byshrifna yakd hdhwrh*”
- “We want to meet you tomorrow in the Yamamah farm. Kindly those who will honor us shall confirm their presence”

(17) (A middle-aged man is inviting his friend to accompany him for a casual gathering at one of his friends' house):

- “*msih blkhyr. I ða btwdi 3yalk, nby ntqhwa 3nd s3wd al3sr*”
- “Good evening. If you are going to take your family to their parents' house, we want to have a cup of coffee at Saud's house in the afternoon”

According to Trosborg (1995), using the verb “want” is considered less polite and demanding because it centers around the inviter's wishes and goals, rather than those of the invitee. In the Saudi culture, these invitations are perceived politely, and such perception is dependent on the social distance between the interlocutors in that close relationships in Najdi Arabic allow for this kind of imposition. This is evident in example (17) where a male friend is sending an invitation for coffee at his friend's house without informing the host beforehand, indicating closeness and harmony especially if the guest intends to give the host a gift or something that was requested earlier. This is not the case with females in which the invitation is assumed to be sent by the hostess, not by anyone else irrespective of the relationship, otherwise, the invitee will not attend.

Suggestory formulas are utterances in which the inviter suggests an invitation for a casual gathering. This strategy is textually realized using two structures: an interrogative as in examples (18 & 21) or a statement as in examples (19 & 20). The structure of statements includes the plural pronoun “na” translated as “us,” suggesting a third-party beneficiary, even though the inviter is a single individual, which expresses the inviter's interest in seeing the invitee encouraged to attend. This finding is consistent with the study of Oraby (2020), indicating that invitation strategies including a third-party beneficiary are regarded as more polite and soft.

(18) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her friends for a casual gathering at home on the weekend):

- “*wsh raykm tsyrwn 3ly alkhmys*”
- “What do you think of coming to my house on Thursday?”

(19) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her friend for coffee on the weekend):

- “*khlyna ntqabl ywm alkhmys b3d almghrb. 3ndy swalfk0yrh*”
- “Let us meet on the weekend. I have a lot of gossip for you”

(20) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her friend for a casual gathering on the weekend):

- “*khlyna nshwfk ywm alkhmys fy lafya*”
- “Let us see you on Thursday in Lafya”

(21) (A man is inviting his friend via voice message to have breakfast tomorrow somewhere in Alkharj and asking him to announce the same in the group if anyone would like to join):

- “*wsh rayk b ftawr bokrah fy ashdydah. Nb 3lyhm fy alghrbw*”

- “What do you think of having breakfast tomorrow at Alshedidah? Tell them in the group”

Similarly, query preparatory presents an inquiry concerning the invitee’s ability or willingness to join a casual gathering that is initiated in response to some recently established circumstances that have just arisen from prior discussion in the interactional context between close friends and relatives. These invitations may include an if-clause with the conditional word *i ʔa* (“if”) and followed by sending the location of the place as in examples (22–24):

(22) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her siblings for a park gathering on Friday):

- “*bnjtm3 fy shalyh, i ʔa ynasbkm, Allah yhyykm*”
- “We will gather in a chalet on Friday. If it suits you, may Allah greet you”

(23) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her friends for a casual gathering at a coffee shop):

- “*bnjtm3 ana w Norh fy coffee. i ʔa fadhyn, t3alw m3na*”
- “We will gather, I and Norah, in a coffee shop. If you are free, join us there”

(24) (A middle-aged woman is inviting her siblings for a park gathering on Friday):

- “*bokrah, insha Allah rah njtm3 fy istyraht alamwaj, i ʔa ynasbkm syr w 3lyna*”
- “Tomorrow, if God wills, we will gather in the Alamwaj park, come over if it suits you”

This conditionality structure is often used either to discuss timing between interlocutors or to check the invitee’s willingness to attend the gathering. Some conditional structures are culturally based because they use the religious expression “if God wills” to save the speaker’s face. According to Leech’s (2014) framework of linguistic politeness, conditionality is used to allow space for negotiation, and it is seen as a gesture indicating the tentativeness of the addresser who is providing the addressee with an option. This finding agrees with the study of Dali Youcef (2022) where the conditional structure “if God wills” was the most commonly used salient religious expression in informal invitations. Table 5 summarizes the distribution of frequencies and percentages of invitation-issuing strategies in descending order for males and females

Table 5. Distribution of frequencies and percentages of invitation-issuing strategies in descending order

Invitation-issuing strategies	Male		Invitation-issuing strategies	Female	
	Freq.	%		Freq.	%
Blessings	17	29.3%	Performatives	18	33.3%
Performatives	15	25.8%	Want statements	10	18.5%
Mood derivable	14	24.1%	Suggestory formula	9	16.6%
Declaratives	9	15.5%	Query preparatory	6	11.11%
Want statements	1	1.7%	Mood derivable	6	11.11%
Suggestory formula	1	1.7%	Blessings	5	9.2%
Query preparatory	1	1.7%	Declaratives	0	0
Total	58	100%	Total	54	100%

**5. Conclusion**

This study’s author sought to enrich the literature on Arabic speech acts through a qualitative analysis of invitation-issuing strategies of Najdi Arabic speakers considering the cultural values underlying these invitations in relation to the socio-pragmatic variables of gender, social distance, and the in/formality of speech event affecting strategy selection, modes of delivery, and level of directness. Major findings indicated that the in/formality of invitational situation predicts the way in which invitations are extended either textually or digitally regardless of social distance and gender. As for gender, males used blessings, performatives, and mood derivable most frequently regardless of the formality of the occasion, whereas females used performatives in formal events and want statements and suggestory formulas for less formal situations.

The author also uncovered some issues of directness and universal politeness, which play a decisive role in the realization of speech acts in cross-cultural communication. Unlike English, which equates indirectness to politeness, directness in Najdi Arabic is commonly linked with positive politeness that reflects the culture’s hospitality, courtesy, and collectivism. Using indirect strategies can be interpreted as a reticence on the part of the speaker to invite the recipient. Accordingly, politeness is an indefinable sociocultural linguistic behavior that varies culturally in terms of production and perception. The findings provide evidence for the complexity of establishing common politeness strategies across cultures when different sociocultural norms dictate the degree of politeness and appropriateness of the semantic formula. In short, it is difficult to establish whether Saudi invitations are primarily direct or indirect because the selection of one strategy over another is controlled by the formality of the event, the social bonds, and gender.

The current study has significant limitations, which may provide new avenues for future research. First, the findings call into question the universality of speech act theory and revoke the relationship between politeness and indirectness in cross-cultural communication, calling for more research studies in the field to identify and tolerate cross-cultural differences. Second, the study is focused on extending invitations within one ethnic group in the central province of Saudi Arabia. A more in-depth discussion and comparison of other ethnically

distinct Saudi Arabian groups who hold different values may contribute to divergent results. Third, the study was confined to three socio-pragmatic parameters: gender, social distance, and formality of the event. Future researchers may investigate different variables, such as age, social status, and level of imposition.

In sum, this study may be potentially beneficial for drawing attention to the nature of communication in the Arab world in comparison to Western countries with a culture based in the English language. It may also promote innovative communicative methods for instructing politeness behaviors for English as a foreign language learners and pragmatic competence.

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### Appendix A

#### Transliteration

Taken from Ghazzoul (2019).

English Letters	Arabic Letters
a	أ
i	إ
b	ب
t	ت/ة
θ	ث
j	ج
h	ح
kh	خ
d	د
ð	ذ
r	ر
z	ز
s	س
sh	ش
Ṣ	ص
dh	ض
ta	ط
ṭa	ظ
3	ع
gh	غ
f	ف
q	ق
k	ك
l	ل
m	م
n	ن
h	ه
w	و
y	ي

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