Analysis of Congratulation Strategies by Swahili Speakers in Response to Happy Occasions on Facebook Status Updates

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Abstract: This study investigated congratulatory comments posted on Facebook pages in response to H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan's historic inauguration as the first female president of the United Republic of Tanzania, to determine strategies used by Kiswahili Facebook users to express their congratulations. Case study design was applied in this study. Data was collected through documentary review, where a sum of 200 congratulatory responses were extracted from selected Facebook accounts. The data were then coded based on Elwood's (2004) congratulatory framework to obtain frequency and percentage of each strategy. The results showed five strategies for expressing congratulations, arranged from the most frequent to the least frequent: Illocutionary force indicating devices, religious expressions, offers of good wishes, speakers' expression of their faith to the addressee and expressing encouragement. It is recommended that speakers should be familiar with how to express their congratulations to others based on the addressee's cultural context as utterances used to express congratulations may differ from one culture to another. Failure to congratulate other people when they have delightful occasion is interpreted as being jealous and uncooperative.

Keywords: Congratulation; speech act; Swahili speakers; strategies; Facebook; Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Introduction

Language as a means of communication plays a vital role in human life. It is used to express feelings between one person and another, to transmit information, to ask questions, to establish and develop social relationships and to express opinions and ideas (Banga, 2015). Language is also used to convey congratulations to others in joyful and happy occasions in life. The happy events include birthdays, promotions, winning elections, weddings, graduation, getting a grant, getting awards as well as public and religious holidays. These and other good and joyful occasions demand congratulations. Failure to offer congratulation in the context where one's colleague has delightful occasion is interpreted as being jealous and uncooperative to others (Allami & Nekouzadeh, 2011).

Al-Hour (2019) argues that most speakers find difficult to express their positive feelings to other people, specifically on delightful occasions like birthday while he regarded others as more expressive and cooperative when the opportunities arise. In this case, speakers need to be aware of the

fact that developing and maintaining social relationships among the interlocutors requires the ability to share emotions with others in situations that people experience in their lives such as when they receive good news. In this context, it is important for speakers to be familiar with how to express congratulations to others based on the addressee's cultural context since the ways and utterances used to express congratulations differ from one culture to another (Liao 2000; Grossi, 2009). Failure to consider these cultural differences in cross-cultural congratulations can damage interpersonal relationships among the interlocutors. Chaplin (2015) emphasized that preferences for particular language expressions to perform certain speech act are determined by the language and social norms of a particular society.

As a speech act, congratulation was first categorized by Austin (1962) under behabitives speech acts in which a speaker expresses his/her reaction to the behavior and feelings of the hearer. Later, Searle (1975) re-classified it under expressive speech acts in which a speaker conveys his/her emotions and feelings to the listener (s). In this case, when speakers express congratulations, they share in, the pleasure or joy of the recipient. To effectively congratulate someone, speakers should consider four rules pointed out by Searle (1969): first, there should be an event that is related to the listener; second, the event should be in the listener's interest and the speaker should be aware about the event; third, the speaker should be delighted at the event, and lastly, the speaker should offer an expression of joy at the event to show his/her pleasure.

Scholars have identified different strategies of expressing congratulations in different cultures. Most of the identified congratulation strategies appeared to be shared across the studied languages while others seemed to be unique to a particular culture. The investigated congratulatory strategies encompass a range of elements, such as illocutionary force indicating devices, expressions of happiness, requests for information, validation expressions, self-related comments, offers of good wishes, words of encouragement, jokes, displays of affection, suggestions to celebrate, expressions of gratitude to God, offers of assistanc and statements assessing the situation negatively (Elwood, 2004; Allami & Nekouzadeh, 2011; Al-Shboul & Huwari, 2016). However, most strategies seem common across studied languages, but their uses vary from one culture to another. Most congratulatory strategies appeared to be more frequently employed in one language and less in another. Thus, to effectively convey congratulatory messages depend on appropriate use of strategies based on the addressee's cultural context.

In terms of politeness, congratulation has been related to face and positive politeness which aims at saving and enhancing hearer's face. By congratulating, the speaker appreciates, admires and supports the addressee's self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Since congratulations are considered as positive politeness strategies, linguists have been interested in exploring types of positive politeness strategies depicted in the respondents' congratulatory responses. These strategies include among others, noticing or responding to listener's interests, needs, wants and goods; exaggerating and intensifying the listener's interest, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, raising and asserting common ground, joking, asserting or presupposing, offering or promising, being optimistic, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, assuming or asserting reciprocity and giving gifts to a listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Congratulatory speech act is one of the understudied speech acts in different languages worldwide (Stadler, 2013; Wardat & Alkhateeb, 2020). Most of the existing literature focuses on other types of speech acts like apologies, refusals, greetings, requests, complaints and others with little concentration on the speech act of congratulation (Allami & Nekouzadeh 2011; Banikalef, 2021). This provides an opportunity for more studies to be conducted in those languages, including Kiswahili, in which the speech act of congratulation has not yet been addressed. Among the previous contributions offered in Kiswahili speech acts is the one that addressed strategies used to offer condolences (Bayo, 2021). This shows that there is deficiency of information concerning the speech act of congratulation. Therefore, this study examined congratulatory strategies used by Kiswahili speakers in response to happy occasions on Facebook status updates.

Literature Review
Theoretical Framework
This study was conducted within the scope of politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Politeness theory plays a very crucial role in investigating speech acts (Hobbs, 2003). This theory

comprises three basic ideas: one is the concept of face, second is the notion of face threatening acts and third is the idea of politeness strategies. These three basic concepts are considered central tenets or core of the politeness theory. The authors defined the notion of face as a public self - image that a person desires to maintain in a conversation with others. They maintained that the concept of face is divided into two parts: positive face and negative face.Positive face is considered the need for one's self-image to be admired, approved of, and supported by other members within the community. On the other hand, negative politeness is related to a person's desire to be free from other interlocutors' imposition and obliteration (Brown & Levinson 1987).

Face threatening acts are communicative acts that affect one's anticipation concerning his/her self – image (Yule, 1996). They are considered as acts that intrinsically affect speaker's or addressee's self-image. Brown and Levinson (1987) identified acts that naturally impact the speaker's positive or negative face, such as confessions, apologies, expressing gratitude, and accepting thanks. On the other hand, acts that potentially threaten the addressee's negative or positive self-image include offers, criticisms, accusations, promises, and complaints. The notion of politeness strategies was developed because most of the speech acts depicted by the authors are inherently threat to either speaker or addressee's positive or negative self – image. To redress those acts that threaten either speakers or addressee's face, Brown and Levinson developed three categories of politeness strategies: positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies and both positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies are concerned with enhancing and supporting the listener's positive self – image while negative politeness strategies are associated with mitigating the listener's negative self – image to maintain his or her freedom of action.

Based on the politeness theory, congratulation is related to positive politeness strategies. By addressing the listener's self–image as someone to be admired, the listener's positive face is enhanced and supported by the speaker. Therefore, conveying the suitable and accepted congratulatory messages is regarded as a polite way of sharing hearer's joy or happiness.

Empirical Review

This section presents empirical studies conducted on the congratulatory speech act in different languages, including cross-cultural studies that aimed to identify similarities and differences in the production and comprehension of congratulatory speech among speakers of various languages. Additionally, it covers studies that specifically focused on the congratulatory speech act within a particular language.

Elwood (2004) conducted a cross-cultural study of congratulatory speech act between Americans and Japanese, using 135 respondents who completed the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Fort-five Japanese respondents completed the DCT in English, another 45 Japanese respondents completed the test in Japanese while the remaining 45 American respondents completed the test in English. Data was collected from three different happy occasions: the context related to marriage, promotion and getting grant. The results revealed that the respondents from both groups employed fourteen congratulatory strategies which included illocutionary force indicating devices, expressions of happiness, requests for information, expressions of validation, self-related comments, expressions of surprise, offers of good wishes, encouragement, joking, expressions of affections, suggestions to celebrate, thanking God, offers of help, and statements assessing the situation negatively. The study concluded that there were significant differences in the frequency of response forms of congratulatory strategies.

Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) investigated congratulatory and positive politeness strategies in the Iranian context using 50 Iranian Persian respondents. Data was collected through discourse completion test that consisted of nine occasions related to happy news. The findings revealed fourteen congratulatory strategies employed by the respondents. The three most preferred strategies were Illocutionary force indicating devices, offers of good wishes and expressions of happiness.

Banikalef (2021) explored congratulatory responses expressed on Facebook among the Jordanian Arabics in birthday situations. Eight hundred and fifty-five birthday congratulatory comments were extracted from Facebook as a platform which allows people to share comments across the globe. The results indicated three major congratulatory strategies used by the respondents including

illocutionary force indicating devices, Quotations and Poetic Verses (QPV and Emotional Statements (ES). Furthermore, the results showed that the use of the Jordanian congratulatory speech act and pragmatic norms is governed by the social values and Islamic religious norms of the Jordanian Arabic speakers.

Alem et al. (2021) conducted a cross-cultural study on the realization of English and Persian congratulatory strategies in a computer-mediated social network using 298 respondents: 200 Iranian native speakers, 50 American native speakers and 48 Iranian speakers of English. The respondents were asked to respond to a post and to congratulate on the birthday event on Instagram. On the one hand, the analysis revealed eight types of congratulatory strategies used by Iranian native speakers of Persian with statements of congratulation being the most frequently employed strategy. On the other hand, the findings depicted that the Iranian speakers of English adopted seven types of congratulation strategies with the statement of congratulations being the most frequently used. The findings also showed that the American native speakers of English used nine types of congratulatory strategies, with the use of address terms being the most preferred strategy.

Lastly, Malik et al. (2021) conducted a pragmatic study of congratulatory strategies of Pakistani ESL learners and British English speakers. The study involved 120 participants: 30 British native speakers of English, 30 Pakistani advanced speakers of English, 30 Pakistani speakers of English in the middle class and the 30 Pakistani English speakers in the lower class. Data was collected through Discourse Completion Test (DCT) comprising six situations related to happy events. The findings revealed eight congratulatory strategies that were frequently employed by the respondents from the groups. These strategies included illocutionary force indicating device, combination of two strategies, expressions of happiness, offers of a good wishes, requests for information, suggestions of celebration, expressions of surprises and encouragement. The analysis further revealed the prevalence of both negative and positive pragmatic transfer on the congratulatory responses of Pakistani English learners.

Methodology
This section describes the method and procedures used in this study. It begins with the research design, followed by population and sampling considerations, data collection procedures and concludes with data analysis.

Design
This study used a case study design which allows for the collection of natural data from the investigated phenomenon in a particular social context within a given time. It involves in-depth investigation and analysis of a person, a group, an organization, a system, an even or a phenomenon within its real context (Walliman, 2006; Yin, 2014). This design was useful as it guided the general process of data collection, analysis, interpretation and selection of a case under investigation. Through a case study research design, the data was collected from the previous event of congratulatory comments posted on Facebook pages as a result of H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan becoming the first female president of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Population and Sampling
This study employed purposive sampling as a technique or method of sample selection. Purposive sampling involves selecting a sample based on unique characteristics, cases or criteria that are relevant to the research questions (Singh 2006). Additionally, Patton (2015) refers to it as a method of recruiting individuals, cases or groups that are beneficial to provide useful and relevant information for a study. In this study, the researchers purposively selected the congratulatory comments conveyed in Kiswahili in response to H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan who became the first female president of the United Republic of Tanzania. Based on this method, the researchers collected a sample of 200 congratulatory comments by obtaining 100 comments from individuals with names typically associated with males and another 100 comments from individuals with names typically associated with females.

Data Collection Procedures
This study used documents as sources of data. The required documents were downloaded from Facebook accounts that contained congratulatory comments expressed in response to H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan. Then, the researchers reviewed the downloaded documents since they were regarded to contain congratulatory comments in written forms. The researchers chose Facebook as a platform because it is considered to be amongst the chief social media platforms in terms of users in Tanzania. In 2012, the statistics revealed that there

were about 682,000 Facebook users in Tanzania, with a predicted increase of 56,580 users after every half of the year (Pfeiffer et al., 2014).

Recently, data revealed that there are about 12.4 million social media users in Tanzania. Out of 12.4 million users of social media, an estimated 5,223,000 use Facebook (World Bank, 2020). Furthermore, the data depicts that youth between the ages of 15 and 30 are the major Facebook users within the country. The findings further revealed that the use of Facebook is gender- based, with 71% of male users and 29% of female users (Pfeiffer et al., 2014).

Data Analysis
The analysis for this study utilized the congratulatory framework provided by Elwood (2004). Then, the data was analyzed thematically based on the framework. Data coding was performed in accordance with Neuman's (2014) approach for coding qualitative data to ensure alignment with the framework.

To code the data, the researchers began by carefully reading the data to gain an understanding of the content. The researchers, then re-read the comments and partially assigned initial sets of codes. Thereafter, the researchers read again the collected congratulatory comments while assigning detailed codes. Moreover, the researchers grouped similar types of congratulatory comments based on the Elwood's modified congratulatory framework. In the initial analysis, they identified and ranked themes of congratulatory responses in order of frequency. The analysis revealed six major categories: Illocutionary force indicating device, offer of good wishes, encouragement, thanking God, praying for God's guidance, strength and wisdom and showing faith to the addressee. The analysis further revealed three prevalent types of positive politeness strategies in the responses: giving gift to a listener, including the speaker and hearer in the activity and noticing and attending to hearer's interests, wants and needs.

To confirm the validity of data analysis, the researchers enlisted an independent linguist to assign codes to the given data in order to verify that they fit within the Elwood's (2004) modified congratulation framework. The requested linguist had experience in coding qualitative data. His analysis depicted some minor variations from the earlier analysis which were addressed through discussion and consensus. The agreed-upon analysis had five major categories of congratulatory strategies: Illocutionary force indicating device, religious expressions, offer of good wishes, showing faith to the addressee and encouragement. The frequency and percentage for each strategy is presented in Table 1.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents the frequency and percentage at which verbal responses, specifically referred to as congratulatory strategies that were utilized, following the order of the research questions posed in the study.

Research Question 1: What are the linguistics strategies do Kiswahili speakers use to express congratulations in response to happy event status updates on Facebook?

This question sought to establish congratulatory strategies used by Kiwahili Facebook users in response to H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan, who became the first female president of the United Republic of Tanzania after the death of Dr. John pombe Joseph Magufuli. The study further explored positive politeness strategies depicted in the respondents' congratulatory comments posted on Facebook pages by Kiwahili-speaking Facebook users. The findings regarding the first question are arranged in table 1 in order from the most to least frequently use.

Table 1: Strategies used in expressing congratulations

strategy	frequency	percentage
Illocutionary Force Indicating Device	102	51
Religious Expressions	80	40
Offer of Good Wishes	8	4
Expressing their Faith to the Addressee	8	4
Expressing Encouragement	2	1
Total	**200**	**100**

Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFID)

Table 1, shows that IFID is the most commonly used among the five strategies for expressing congratulations by Kiswahili-speaking Facebook users, accounting for 51% of all the responses. The IFID strategy involves using statements that directly convey speakers' intention of congratulating the hearer. Among other statements, *hongera sana mama yetu* (congratulations to our mother was the most dominant expression under this strategy. Other congratulatory responses under this strategy reveal the respondents' feelings of joy and happiness in response to happy news that they had received as depicted in the response *hongera sana mama, tunafurahia wewe kuwa Rais wetu* (Congratulations, mama! we are delighted to have you as our President).

The responses provided by the responded under IFID strategy shows that congratulating others is considered a good manner and is deeply ingrained in Swahili culture. It is seen as a polite and respectful way to acknowledge and validate someone's accomplishments or positive life events. Offering congratulations demonstrates that one is paying attention, is involved and is supportive of the person's endeavors. As part of Swahili culture, people often directly congratulate others as a way to express their joy, appreciation and support for the achievements or positive events in someone's life. It is a social norm and a common way of showing happiness and encouragement This finding is similar to the findings of Elwood (2004) who revealed that the most straightforward method of expressing the speech act of congratulation in English would be to say congratulation or congrats. This means that in English language congratulation is conveyed directly (by using the word congratulation) by the speakers in the context where the recipient has delight occasion which was also observed in the current study in Swahili language where respondents used the Swahili word *hongera* (congratulation) during Samia's inauguration to become the President of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Religious Expressions

According to Table 1, religious expressions ranked the second among the five strategies for conveying congratulations, with 40% of all responses. The respondents' religious expressions were categorized into two groups. The first group thanked God for the pleasant event that had occurred. In this case, the respondents attributed happy events or news to

God. The most commonly used expressions in this group of religious expressions were *"Mungu tunashukuru kwa kutupa mwanamke jasiri, mwenye hekima, na mwenye amani tele" (*We thank *you* God for giving us a brave, wise and peaceful woman), *Alhamdulilah Allah amemchagua* (thanks to Allah, He has chosen her*)*. The given responses revealed the respondents joy as a result of the happy event in which H.E. Samia Suluhu Hassan became the President of the United Republic of Tanzania. The respondents associated God for her success in becoming the President and for endowing her with the required presidential attributes which they thought would help her to lead the nation successfully. To this end, they decided to offer their expression of thanks to God.

The second group of religious expressions offers the expressions of prayers to God. These responses show that the respondents pray for God to guide, protect and provides wisdom for H.E Samia to manage and succeed in her current position. Most of the recursive statements in this group include: *"Tunakuombea Mwenyezi Mungu akupe ujasiri katika kutekeleza majukumu yako mapya"* (We pray that the Almighty God gives you courage to carry out your new responsibilities), *Mama yetu Mungu akujalie nguvu ya kuliongoza taifa* (Our mother, may God grant you strength to lead the nation). These congratulatory responses show the respondents' belief in God's ability for one to succeed in life.

The use of religious expressions as a strategy is related to participants' belief in either Christian or Islamic religion. This finding is consistent with the finding by Banikalef (2021) who found the use of religious expressions among the Jordanian Arabic Facebook users in response to happy birthday's status updates on Facebook. The use of this strategy among Jordanian Arabic Facebook users was rooted in the Islamic religion, given that the majority (92%) of the people in Jordan are Muslim (Al-Shboul and Maros, 2013).

Offer of Good Wishes

As shown in Table 1, offer of good wishes appears the third among the five strategies of conveying congratulations and it accounted for 4% of the general congratulatory responses. In this context, good wishes are considered as kind words or statements that express speaker's desire for a hearer to do better in his or her current responsibilities or statements that show that the speaker supports the hearer. Most of the explored

congratulatory comments posted on Facebook pages in response to H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan expressed good wishes for her to perform well in her new responsibilities. Among the most repetitive good wishes statements is *Kila la kheri mama yetu, Mungu akusimamie kwenye majukumu yako mapya ya Urais wa Jamhuri wa Muungano wa Tz* (All the best to you, our mother, may God guide you in your new responsibilities as the President of the United Republic of Tanzania). Therefore, good wishes are statements that show feelings of love and joy when others have delightful occasions as well as when we cooperate with them. These results correspond with the result by Allami and Nekouzadeh (2011) who observed that offering of good wishes is one of the commonly employed congratulatory strategies by Iranian Persian speakers.

Speakers' Expression of Faith to the Addressee
The statistics in Table 1 further show that demonstrating faith to the addressee ranked the fourth among the five strategies of conveying congratulation, with 8% of the total comments. The statements under this strategy depict the respondents' belief on the addressee's ability that she can manage her new roles. One statements that expresses that the respondents have faith in H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan is, *tunakuamini mama unaweza* (We believe in you, mom, you can). This response shows respondents' expression of belief in Samia's ability to lead the office as the President. This strategy was used by the respondents because of addressee's gender as she is the first female to hold the presidential position in the United Republic of Tanzania.

Expressing Encouragement
Based on Table 1, encouragement appears last out of five strategies of expressing congratulation in terms of frequency of its uses, with 1% of all the given congratulatory responses. *Tupo Pamoja mama yetu mzalendo* (We are with you, our patriotic mother) becomes the only expression of encouragement explored in this study. This response is an expression of respondents' support to H.E Samia Suluhu Hassan as the President of the United Republic of Tanzania. Encouragement as a strategy is used to influence or motivate the hearer to move or look forward to fulfil his or her goals in life. This finding is consistent with the finding by Al-Hour's (2019) who found the lesser use of encouragement as a congratulatory strategy among the Palestinians in situation three which is related to attaining a scientific degree.

Conclusion and Recommendations
This study underscores the presence of five different strategies of expressing congratulations observed among Kiwahili Facebook users when responding to happy occasions status update on Facebook, specifically during H. E Samia Suluhu Hassan's historic inauguration as the first female president of the united republic of Tanzania. These strategies encompass Illocutionary force indicating device, religious expressions, offer of good wishes, speakers' expression of their faith to the addressee and expressing encouragement. The understanding of these strategies do not only enlighten readers on the distinct ways in which congratulations are expressed but also highlights the significance of linguistic and cultural aspects in online communication within Swahili speech community. The study contributes to the field of knowledge as it will assist in the development of a universal congratulatory framework that can be applied in diverse contexts and languages. Furthermore, the study highlights the implications of cross-cultural differences in the use of the speech act of congratulating. This study recommends that speakers convey their congratulatory expressions whenever one's friends, colleagues, relatives or other people have delightful occasions.

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