A Pragmatic Analysis of Criticism Strategies against Government Policies on Social Media in Jordan: A Gender-Based Investigation

Sumaya Alshakhanbeh, Sharif Alghazo*
Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Jordan, Jordan

Received on: 16-11-2020 Accepted on: 26-1-2021

Abstract

This study presents a pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticism as used on Facebook and Twitter against government policies in Jordan. It examines the effect of gender on the participants’ choice of criticism strategies. The data obtained comprises 300 public posts, comments, and tweets. An adapted version of Nguyen’s (2005) framework of criticism strategies is used to analyse the data. The results reveal that the most frequently used strategies by the writers of the posts, comments, and tweets are sarcasm, identification of a problem, grievance/complaint to God, and negative evaluation, respectively. The results also showcase that men and women use some criticism strategies differently: Men tend to make more use of expression of uncertainty and asking/presupposing while women tend to use grievance/complaint to Allah and emojis/pictures. The study shows how language used on social media is a strong indicator of the distrust in the government-citizen relationship evident in the writers’ expression of uncertainty about the government’s decisions.

Keywords: Speech Act of Criticism, Media Discourse, Socio-Pragmatics, Government.

Introduction

Social media platforms have become an easily-accessible source of information and an avenue through which individuals’ opinions and ideas are expressed. This has made these platforms a rich source of data for research in areas of psychology (e.g., Heese & Baloria 2018), sociology (e.g., Kim & Yang 2017), and linguistics (Pitt et al. 2019; Hamdan 2021; Al-Haj Eid 2021), to mention just a few areas. These platforms are also reflective of the virtual lives of people through which they can meet with one another, exchange ideas, discuss issues and express their views in the forms of complaints and criticism. These and other uses of social media platforms have been accelerated by more recent advances in technology that made it possible for people to access social media on their smartphones and tablets (Katz 2008). The easy access to these forms of news motivates people to interact with them by supporting or criticising (Papacharissi 2004). Suhay et al. (2017) explained that “[t]here are many online spaces where people encounter political criticism in casual conversation” (108) and that “online political discussion is still a relatively new phenomenon” (109); therefore, they call for “more efforts to understand its effects on
participants across the globe, with an eye toward improving civic culture as well as democratic deliberation and outcomes” (109).

This study responds to this call by observing such political participation and analysing media discourse so as to find the use of the speech act of criticism against government decisions in Jordan. Written media discourse is the core focus in this study which aims to identify the linguistic and pragmatic aspects of interaction on Facebook and Twitter. Criticism is a form of interaction, and it is the second main focus of this study. Daily observations of social media use tell us that criticism is found extensively on the most popular social media platforms. Al-Momani (2016) examined change in media discourse in Jordanian political advertisements and found that, since 2011, criticizing the government on social media has become more popular in Jordan, particularly after the Arab Spring. She argued that these changes have manifested discourse and lexical choice, particularly lexis that was previously considered inappropriate or even banned.

The present study aims to explore criticism strategies used on Facebook and Twitter against government policies in Jordan. It particularly seeks to answer the following research questions:
1. What are the criticism strategies used on Facebook and Twitter against government policies in Jordan?
2. To what extent does gender affect the use of criticism strategies on Facebook and Twitter?

**Speech Act of Criticism**

Criticism is a speech act that is contextually expressed in different ways using a number of linguistic forms. Thus, understanding the illocutionary force of the speech act of criticism is necessary for successful communication in both spoken and written modes. DeClerck and Holtzman (2018) assert that criticism is related to passive judgements that come from people in the surrounding environment. Criticism can be personal or impersonal. In the present study, criticism is studied against government policies which show that it is not a personal endeavour. It should also be realised that since government policies and decisions affect a wide range of individuals, they represent a rich resource for discussion and criticism. Yet, criticism is, as Raghuramaraju (2009) notes, a kind of healthy engagement in democracy.

Some may confuse criticism and complaint as speech acts. There is a slight difference between them. Nguyen (2005), for example, found that, as yet, there is no consensus as to the nature of criticism and complaint, but Sauer (2000) had earlier found that criticism is a more powerful act compared to complaint. Deveci (2015) treated criticism and complaint as different speech acts in his study, while DeCapua (1988, as cited in Al Hammuri, 2011) classified criticism as one of the many complaining strategies. In a similar vein, Al-Shorman (2016) found that criticism is a complaint strategy that is categorized as an offensive act. Based on the foregoing, it seems that criticism is a very broad term that may work differently according to different factors. However, in our present study, criticism (mainly negative) and complaints are used to refer to the same thing because they both lead to the same purpose, especially because people may complain about the government as a service provider, and here the relationship between the two parties govern the use of the speech act.
Literature Review

Research on the speech act of criticism abounds across languages in different forms of discourse. For example, Tracy and Eisenberg (1990) investigated workplace roles and gender influences on speaker goals when offering criticism and found that work role differences were not significant when men offered criticism but were significant for women. Nguyen (2005) showed how Vietnamese learners of English as Foreign Language (EFL) criticize and respond to criticisms in English. The study identified that participants with a higher proficiency level tended to mitigate their criticism more than less proficient participants. In a more recent study, Nguyen (2013) examined native and non-native English speakers criticize in normal situations. The participants were five native English speakers from New Zealand and five ESL learners from different first language backgrounds. The researcher used role-plays to elicit data. The results showed that there are significant differences in the ways the two groups used criticism strategies. In particular, the native speakers used all strategies while the ESL learners used direct criticism and request for change predominantly.

In a similar vein, Hoa (2007) highlighted three main differences between Americans and Vietnamese when offering criticism: age of the hearer, social status of the listener, and the purpose of criticism while gender was considered as the least important in this context. Conversely, Egyptians use more indirect criticism than Americans do despite the main preference and tendency to the direct criticism overall (Abdullah 2013).

Therefore, criticism is governed by many different factors such as culture, social status, work role, gender and age. These factors determine the use of direct or indirect criticism strategies within many different contexts. Context works as a main moderator of the selected criticism strategies (Al-shra, 2013; Purnanto and Jauhari, 2016). Cultural factors work as important and main indicator in elucidating data during studying speech act of criticism especially within various languages and cultures (Itakura, & Tsui, 2011). Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015) emphasized that indirect strategies and mitigating devices (politeness) of participants were driven by their culture and their tendency to save the face of their interlocutors. Javanese community in Indonesia demonstrate a clear tendency towards using indirect criticism and this use is governed by Social distance (Jauhari, Djatmika, & Santosa 2020).

In the Jordanian context, Abu Taleb (1995) found that Jordanian students use different criticism strategies such as expressing anger, negative judgment, expressing annoyance, and expressing dissatisfaction. In more recent comparative study, Al Kayed (2018) explained that Jordanian participants use strategies such as emphasizing consequences, identification of problems, and negative evaluations. In contrast, British English speakers showed a tendency to use identification of problem and negative evaluation and consequences. As for indirect criticism, the British participants used asking/presupposing most frequently while Jordanians tended to use suggestions for change at most.

As for gender differences, Mulac, Seibold and Farris, (2000) suggested that men use more direct criticism than women but that women were more direct when they were in higher positions at work. Tracy and Eisenberg (1990) analyzed workplace criticism and found that women are more direct when
they take superior roles in their relationships when compared to more subordinate positions. In contrast, El-Dakhs et al. (2019) pointed to the absence of gender effect in their study on the use of criticism by university teachers; the researchers attribute that to the academic context where people tend to be more professional.

Upon reviewing previous studies on the speech act of criticism, it is obvious that only two studies examined the speech act of criticism as used by Jordanians. It should be noted that both previous studies examined criticism strategies used by Jordanian students using a DCT and questionnaires while the current study uses authentic data that were gathered from actual and natural online interactions. Unlike previous studies, while the other two studies approached only the traditional face-to-face interaction, this study is characterized by approaching the virtual interaction. These distinctions may lead us to reach different and more reliable results.

Method

Data Collection

The data were collected from publicly published posts, comments and tweets found on Facebook and Twitter. The researchers used the search engine of both platforms to search pages, posts and people based on particular keywords and hashtags representing topics trending in Jordan within two different government periods, each one governed by a different Prime Minister (PM) (Hani Al-Mulqi and Omar al-Razzaz). These keywords and hashtags pertain to three pre-determined areas: social (School curriculum changes, Cancelling the free treatment of cancer patients/exemptions reactivation, General amnesty, Student support fund regulations, and Code of ethics and conduct), political (Jordanian gas agreement with the ‘Zionist occupying entity’, Jordanian Electronic Crimes Law, Issues of corruption, Terrorism, Jordanian nationality regulations, and Al-Baqurah land repossession) and economic (High prices, Taxation law, and Low salaries).

After searching for a particular keyword within the same topic, a screenshot was taken of the results presented to the researchers on both platforms and then printed out as a hard copy. This technique was applied to all three topics (social, political, and economic). The search resulted in 112 tweets and 188 posts and comments. Regarding the difference in the total number of texts from each platform, it should be noted that this study does not give any particular value to comparing between those two platforms. Therefore, there was no special significance equating the total number of the collected data from Facebook and Twitter. As for gender differences, it should be noted that the number of females and males varied in each platform, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Number of Facebook and Twitter participants for each topic in terms of gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Platform</th>
<th>Political Males</th>
<th>Political Females</th>
<th>Social Males</th>
<th>Social Females</th>
<th>Economic Males</th>
<th>Economic Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

266
As shown in Table 1 above, the main concern for the researchers was to extract 50 texts by males and 50 texts by females on each topic regardless of the platform used. This is because the number of texts by males and females was not the same in Facebook and Twitter, as noted above. This may have been a limitation if a comparison between the two platforms had been an aim of this study but this comparison was beyond its scope.

Data Analysis

This study employs the framework of Nguyen (2005) for criticism strategies and their semantic formulae. It may be recollected that Nguyen (2005) classifies criticism strategies into two main categories: direct and indirect. In the analysis of the 300 posts, comments, and tweets, coding was essential in arranging the texts according to the topics selected. Each text was read multiple times to allow deep understanding of both the semantic and discourse meanings communicated by the writer. All 16 criticism strategies were coded with numbers ranging from one to 16 and any form of emojis or pictures expressed were coded with the number 17 to easily identify all strategies used in the collected sample. Repeated strategies in any one text were excluded. As previously mentioned, careful attention was paid to the length of the text as Facebook and Twitter differ in terms of the space provided for comments; therefore, lengthy texts were excluded to avoid this limitation. Because face-to-face communication is different from online communication where people utilize pictures and emojis to express themselves, the researchers included non-verbal forms that contain Emojis and Pictures under the item “Other Hints”. Some studies argue that these non-verbal expressions (including memes) could function as speech acts (Grundlingh 2018). Despite this, the current study does not calculate the frequencies of emojis and pictures with the final strategies’ count which was only 54 instances out of 542 occurrences of all counted criticism strategies including emojis and pictures. In this case, only 488 occurrences of criticism strategies were used in the analysis. The researchers also made two main changes to Nguyen’s original framework (2005). First, “Sarcasm” was used as a main strategy in the current study instead of being only marginally included under “Other Hints” in the original framework. Second, a new main strategy - “Grievance to God (Allah)” - was added to the framework. This new strategy is defined as religious statements used as awareness to government or a kind of prayer which reflects their feeling of weakness. Additionally, users usually use some parts from the Quran as reminder of the Judgment Day. Table 2 below shows the classification of criticism strategies which the study utilizes in the coding process:
Table 2: Categorization of criticism strategies as adapted from Nguyen (2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct Criticism</th>
<th>Indirect Criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Negative evaluation</td>
<td>a. Correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Disapproval</td>
<td>b. Indicating standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Expression of disagreement</td>
<td>c. Preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Identification of the problem</td>
<td>d. Demand for change - Request for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Statement of difficulties</td>
<td>e. Advice about change - Suggestion for change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Consequences</td>
<td>f. Expression of uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>g. Asking/ presupposing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h. Grievance to God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Sarcasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>j. Other hints: Emoji/picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results and Discussion

This section presents the criticism strategies used by the Jordanian participants on Facebook and Twitter. It also shows the correlation between gender and criticism on social media by highlighting the main differences between males and females in relation to their use of criticism strategies. Data analysis showed that Jordanians use various criticism strategies. Table 3 below illustrates the frequencies and percentages according to the type of criticism (direct/indirect).

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of criticism strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Negative evaluation</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Disapproval</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Expression of disagreement</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Identification of the problem</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Statement of difficulties</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Consequences</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>186</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect Strategies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Correction</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Indicating standard</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Preaching</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Demand for change - Request for change</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Advice about change - Suggestion for change</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Expression of uncertainty</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m) Asking/ presupposing</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n) Grievance to Allah</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o) Sarcasm</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>302</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of Direct and Indirect Strategies</strong></td>
<td>488</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p) Other hints: Emoji/picture</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 demonstrates that there were 488 criticism strategies produced by the selected participants. Results revealed that sarcasm and identification of a problem are the most frequently used strategies on Facebook and Twitter, with 72 and 71 occurrences, respectively. Some strategies were highly used while others appeared in lower percentages, such as expression of disagreement, statement of difficulties, and preaching. The following sections illustrate these strategies in details.
A Pragmatic Analysis of Criticism Strategies against Government Policies on Social Media in Jordan: A Gender-Based Investigation

Direct Strategies

The analysis revealed that there are six criticism strategies used on Facebook and Twitter against government policies in Jordan. These strategies—ordered from the most-used strategy to the least-used strategy—are: Identification of the problem (14.5%), Negative evaluation (10.5%), Disapproval (5.7%), Consequences (4.3%), Expression of disagreement (1.8%), and Statement of difficulties (1.2%). The following subsections discuss these direct strategies with respect to the previous literature.

1. Identification of a Problem

Nguyen (2005) presented Identification of a Problem as a direct strategy for criticism; it is a way of defining the problem in the government’s decision. Facebook and Twitter users utilize this strategy to criticize the government by stating the problem and sharing it with other friends and followers. In the current sample, the analysis revealed that the identification of a problem strategy was produced 71 times by the participants (14.5%). This point is explained in Example (1) below:

“Changing school curricula not only in Jordan and in more than one Arab country is a war on religion and morals.” (Context: Changing School Curricula)

Changing school curricula resonated strongly amongst the participants. The example above demonstrates how the citizen expressed his criticism by identifying the problem from his own perspective, by considering these changes as a problem that might affect people’s religion and morals. Social media—particularly Facebook and Twitter—is not considered a direct communication medium as people are not communicating face-to-face. Consequently, issues must be clarified for followers and the public in order to build better communication. Identification of a Problem has been ordered as the second most frequently utilized strategy, with 71 occurrences in the current study sample. In the same vein, Al Kayed (2018) also illustrated a high use of this strategy among both the Jordanians and the British.

2. Negative Evaluation

Negative evaluation is a direct criticism strategy used by the participants to evaluate government decisions in a negative way. The analysis indicated that the participants used this strategy 51 times (10.5% of the sample). Example (2) introduces the use of this strategy in public discourse:

“(This is) the climax of rudeness and dirtiness ... merely a group of thieves.”
(\textit{Context: High Prices})

The above example is a representation of negative evaluations where impolite words and expressions are sometimes employed to convey bad opinions about the government. When people are not completely satisfied with the government’s performance, the government will always face this negative evaluation. Negative evaluation ranked the fourth strategy used by the participants in the current sample, although Al-Shra (2013) ranked this strategy as the most frequently used strategy in his findings. Conversely, Abu
Taleb (1995) concluded her findings by stating that “criticism can be carried out indirectly through strategies that do not include negative evaluation” (96). Al Kayed (2018) found that Jordanians use negative evaluation most frequently after the identification of a problem. His results also indicated that Jordanians use negative evaluation more than the British. As a result, the previous literature varies in its evaluation of this strategy due to the fact that the context plays an essential role in deciding the nature of communication and which strategy should be used in terms of criticism. The current study provides a different context towards a unique entity; thus, it should be compared to a similar case under similar conditions to make a fair comparison.

3. Disapproval

Nguyen (2005) classified this strategy as a direct criticism strategy to describe user attitude towards government choices or decisions. The analysis revealed that 5.7% of the sample showed disapproval on Facebook and Twitter platforms. The sentence below is an example used by a Jordanian citizen to express his disapproval:

والله صدمتنا، أصلا الموت اريح من هيك حياة (3)

“To be honest, you have shocked us. Death is better than such a life”

(Context: Taxation Law)

The example above is a reflection of the participant’s attitude who is showing his refusal of the revised tax law which was submitted by the government. By investigating the whole sample, we find hidden disapproval in each sentence. People, for the most part, criticize each other because of their disapproval in others’ choices and actions, and similarly is the case with the government. Thus, this overlap between strategies is understood because of the nature of the speech act of criticism. Disapproval as a direct criticism strategy is used by Persians (Farnia and Abdul Sattar 2015) and by Jordanians more than by Britons (Al Kayed 2018), and is the main reason for criticism in Nguyen (2005).

4. Consequences

According to Nguyen (2005), the threat of undesired consequences mainly leads people to perform criticism. Warning governments about the negative or bad implications of their actions and decisions is also a criticism strategy used online by the Jordanian participants. The analysis revealed that 4.3% of the sample criticized the government by highlighting the undesired effects of some government decisions and choices. Example (4) below illustrates the use of this strategy where one of the participants explains that the government decision will generate disaster that will also affect the citizens:

القرارات الجائزة سينتج عنها كوارث ستؤثر بالمواطنين حيث الانفجار الذي لا ندري إلى أين سيفضي (4)

“Unjust decisions [by the government] will result in catastrophes that will take the people to an explosion which we do not know where will lead”.

(Context: Cancelling the Free Treatment of Cancer Patients/Exemptions Reactivation)

It is a form of criticism to show the negative side of any decision or action. In the previous example, the citizen highlights the bad impact of these government decisions, which are described as unfair with a
need to be reconsidered. Interestingly, this strategy ranked as the highest-used direct criticism strategy amongst the Jordanian participants in Al Kayed’s (2018) study. His study found that this strategy is influenced by the social distance between communicators, and it is used more between people with a higher level of familiarity. This review has been adapted to fill the gap between the aforementioned study and our present case, where fewer frequencies of ‘consequences’ were recorded. The social distance between the government and the citizens is particularly high, although communication via an electronic medium offers a different environment from a face-to-face context. Providing an explanation of these consequences occurs when critics think that they are a part of the decision, in which they are able to give an opinion that may change the course of events.

5. Expression of Disagreement

This direct strategy uses particular structures such as ‘No’ or ‘I do not agree.’ The current sample demonstrated that only 1.8% of the whole sample incorporated this strategy as expressing criticism towards government. Example (5) provides a clear perception of the use of this strategy:

أرفض قانون الضريبة (5)

“I refuse the tax law.”

(Context: Taxation Law)

Disagreement and criticism are connected as both are ‘face threatening acts,’ and each of them is also used to express the other. For example, the Japanese use intensive criticism to express their disagreement, particularly when they are speaking to those of lower-status (Beebe and Takahashi, 1989). In a similar vein, Hamdan (2018) classified criticism as confrontational strategies for disagreement that are used by native speakers of Jordanian Arabic. Disagreement as a criticism strategy was used significantly in Al Kayed’s (2018) study which pointed out that the Jordanians participants use expressions of disagreement more than the British participants when they perform the act of criticism. The present study did not show a high frequency of use in this strategy, and that may refer to the citizens’ feelings of being not involved in the decision-making process. Since this communication is not direct, this strategy may lose its importance as the government did not first ask the citizenry about their opinion. This criticism within this context is only the start of the lightning rod for their dissatisfaction.

6. Statement of Difficulties

Nguyen (2005) connected statement of difficulties with a nuanced understanding as her study emphasized the inter-language pragmatic development of Vietnamese EFL learners compared to Australian native speakers. In this context, statement of difficulties as a criticism strategy has a specific dimension that is connected to the nature of this study. The current study, which was conducted in a different context, showed low frequencies for the use of this strategy. Only 1.2% of the sample express criticism by stating the difficulty of understanding some government decisions. The example below is one of the few examples that have been found in the selected sample:
The Jordanian people really wishes to understand the formula through which the price [of gas] is calculated every month! Never mind the whole [Jordanian] people. I myself wish to understand [this pricing formula], so I tried to take some random figures but I felt that even if Pythagoras himself rose from his grave, and with all the technology available, he would never be able to figure out this magical formula.”

(Context: Price Rises)

This example shows a Jordanian citizen expressing her dissatisfaction by indicating the difficulty of understanding the pricing law. This indication is a kind of criticism to raise attention about the government manipulation of pricing products. Current results fall in line with Al Kayed’s (2018) study, where this strategy was only used seven times in Jordanian Arabic and six times in British English. Interestingly, Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015) noted zero uses for this strategy in all the examined situations of Persian native speakers.

Indirect Strategies

The analysis revealed that Facebook and Twitter users in the current data use many different indirect criticism strategies against government policies in Jordan. These strategies are: Sarcasm (14.7%), Grievance to Allah (12%), Asking/ presupposing (9.6%), Expression of uncertainty (8.6%), Indicating standard (5.7%), Demand and request for change (4.3%), Advice and suggestion for change (3%), Correction (2.8%) and finally Preaching (1%). The following subsections discuss these indirect strategies in the light of the previous literature.

1. Correction

In some cases, the sender of a message corrects the other party by providing what he/she claims to be the correct information, or giving alternatives or solutions, for the basic problem. The analysis of the present study exhibited that 2.8 % of the selected sample contains correction. In a reply to a post quoting the government spokesperson’s saying that the new taxation law will not financially affect the citizens, a citizen said:

“Misleading after misleading after misleading …The new law raises tax on the banks, and the banks will definitely collect it from the citizens.”

(Context: Taxation Law)

In the example above, the citizen presents a correction of what was announced by the government, by giving a clear explanation of this issue to prevent any misunderstanding. Correction typically requires
information and evidence, or at least an expert, to perform the explanation. In the previous example, the citizen who posted the statement above provided the readers with a copy of the Jordanian Tax Law Amendment Bill to strengthen his view. This may illustrate the limited use of this strategy towards the government where the issues are complicated and demand a significant effort to refute or correct the content. This strategy showed zero occurrences in the study of Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015), which analysed the speech act of criticism among Persian native speakers.

2. Indicating Standard

This strategy was defined by Nguyen (2005) as a “collective obligation rather than an obligation for hearer personally or as a rule which sender thinks is commonly agreed upon and applied to all” (113). The analysis showed that 5.7% of the collected sample utilizes this strategy to criticize the government publicly. Example (8) below is an indication of this strategy as it appears in the sample:

كافة الأمم والشعوب الحرة تسعى لتحرير ارادتها الوطنية في حين أن الحكومة الأردنية تعمد إلى تكبيل الارادة الوطنية للأردنيين. (8)

“All free nations strive to liberate their national will. The Jordanian government, however, seeks to restrict it severely.”

(Context: Jordanian Electronic Crimes Law)

In the previous example, the citizen provides a comparison between the public standard which is followed by all nations and the local situation where the government practices the opposite. This comparison exhibits that criticism in an indirect way, to show the other party their mistake when they encroached on the common public standard. Al Kayed (2018) clarified in his study that Jordanians use this strategy by “giving evidence from the Holy Quran and Hadith Sharif, i.e. the messenger’s sayings” (p. 72) while Britons use this strategy by using well-known proverbs or by referring to general rules. Nguyen (2005) explained that people use this strategy as a form of politeness and to avoid any negative confrontation.

3. Preaching

According to Nguyen (2005), this strategy is used when the first party thinks that the second party is not able to decide and make an appropriate decision. In this case, the sender provides some advice to work as instruction for the message recipient. This advice implies some criticism in an indirect way for the hearer to highlight their inability in making correct decisions. Nguyen (2005) clarified the difference between this strategy and advice about change strategy by stating that advice about change is “usually expressed via the performative: I advise you” (113). The current sample indicated that only 1% of the analysed sample contains preaching. Example (9) is a perception of how this strategy was used in the selected data:

الأساس أن تكون مواقف الحكومة خاصة في السياسة الخارجية متسامحة مع مصالح الوطن والمواطن. وفي هذه الحالة يجب على الحكومة أن تبني مواقفها على مبدأ حساب الربح والخسارة فالسياسة كما يقولون هي فن الممكن. (9)
"Initially, the government should build its stands, especially in foreign policy, on the interests of the state and citizens. In fact, it should think on the profit-loss bottom line; politics is the art of the possible."

(Context: Jordanian Gas Agreement with the ‘Zionist Occupying Entity’)

The previous example explains how criticism is conducted in a polite manner by preaching the government about how it should be. This strategy was classified as the least frequented strategy in this sample. On the other hand, this strategy has a notable presence in Al Kayed’s (2018) study which also found that Jordanian participants prefer to use religious statements to preach while Briton participants prefer to offer guidelines. Overlapping in speech acts and strategies still overshadows non-intersection in each used strategy. For example, preaching is considered a strategy of threat in the Holy Quran as found by Alhassan (2012). By contrast, Darweesh (2011) classified this strategy as a soft criticism in his study of Modern Standard Arabic. Preaching needs friendly ears to achieve change in the end, while our case study produces no proof that this is really applicable in dealing with such an entity.

4. Demand for Change/Request for Change

The analysis indicates that 4.3% of Jordanian participants’ critiques seek to gain the attention of the government by asking it to change its decisions, actions, members or programs. The original coding schema had this strategy separated into two main strategies: Demand for Change and Request for change. The present study has chosen to integrate both strategies into one, in order to build a wider umbrella for this strategy that fits the new context. This strategy is illustrated in the example below:

We appeal to officials at the Ministry of Education to withdraw the modifications on the curricula.

(Context: Changing School Curricula)

In the previous example, the poster / writer appeals the officers in the government to reconsider their changing of school curriculum. This strategy was only used 21 times (4.3%) in the current study. In contrast, Al-Shra (2013) found that the most frequent indirect strategy used by the Arab participants in one argumentative TV program is demand for change. Request for change was highly used by Jordanians and Britons as stated by Al Kayed (2018). These differences in the previous literature are understood within the nature of the Speech Act Theory, where context is imperative to interpret meaning. The two aforementioned studies utilized thoroughly different varieties of data, which also differs from the data used in the current study. At another level, using different theoretical frameworks in terms of speech act studies leads to incomplete answers in some cases (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper, 1989), and this may be applied to other studies which have used different frameworks and revealed different results.

5. Advice and Suggestions for Change

As some people request and demand change as a form of criticism, others use a different formula to achieve the same goal through advising change or making a suggestion. The analysis of the current sample revealed that 3% of the used criticism strategies offer advice and suggestions to the government as a method of criticism. What differentiates this strategy from the request and demand for change strategy
A Pragmatic Analysis of Criticism Strategies against Government Policies on Social Media in Jordan: A Gender-Based Investigation

is the linguistic formula. This strategy seems to provide a politer and gentler way of expressing criticism when compared to a request and demand for change. The statement below provides an example of how this strategy is utilized by the Jordanian participants:

أنا بقترح بسحبون من كل واحد رصيده بالبنك بالملليين أو المليارات مليونيْن من كل وزير ومن كل نائب حالي وسابق ألّه شهري بسدو المديونية مو من الشعب المتنفل (11)

“I suggest that withdrawing JD 1 million from every affluent citizen, and withdrawing JD 1,000 a month from every current and former minister and deputy, will not affect them. The rich, rather than the impoverished people, make up the budget deficit.”
(Context: Increase in the National Debt in Jordan)

The above example gives the government a suggestion by one of the Jordanian citizens to the problem of high debt, by relying on wealthy people to pay the receivables bill. It is clear from the analysis that the Jordanian participants do not pay much attention to this strategy to use towards the government as a criticism technique. Contrarily, this strategy was found to be highly used by Jordanian and Britons in Al Kayed’s (2018) study, particularly considering the low solidarity between participants. In the case of online communication, information is floating in cyberspace where it is not necessarily intended for this criticism to reach the government directly. Consequently, this may encourage the use of some strategies more than others depending on the context, social distance, and power (Fairclough 1989; Darweesh 2011; Al Kayed 2018).

6. Expression of Uncertainty

The analysis revealed that the Jordanian participants were uncertain about the government’s decisions, and this has been shown in 8.6 % of the selected sample. They express their uncertainty as a criticism strategy which carries a message about the inadequacy of these government decisions. Uncertainty can be expressed in different ways, such as:

جبر على ورق... شكليات فقط لا ولن تنفذ. (12)

“Ink on paper, it will never be fulfilled.”
(Context: Code of Ethics and Conduct)

The Jordanian government announced the code of conduct and ethical standards for public officials and employees and pledged as government to follow this code. In Example (12) above the citizen expressed his uncertainty by describing this decision as nonsense and a mere formality. This type of strategy relies on the nature of the relationship between the two parties. Government reliability is at stake and citizens are the judges who decree this on Facebook and Twitter platforms by criticizing the government. Al Kayed (2018) stated that Jordanians and Britons use this strategy more with strangers or when the social distance between each other is high. The current case reflects a complicated relationship that wholly varies from normal relationships between people in daily lives. In the current case, there is not a personal relationship between government and the citizens, and still, citizens may criticize a person in
the government that he/she has never met before. This kind of communication serves as an ice-breaker and provides more convenience and openness in the process of criticism.

7. Asking/Presupposing

The analysis revealed that Facebook and Twitter users ask questions in a rhetorical way to indirectly criticize some government decisions or choices. These questions are understood as a message, more than a question, to express the inappropriateness of these decisions. This strategy was used 47 times (9.6%) and below is an illustrative example:

"PM Omar Al-Razaz: Is this the Jordan of freedoms and parliamentary governments you are talking about? Is this the social protection you promise?"

In the previous example, the citizen directs his rhetorical question to the PM Dr Omar Al-Razaz by tagging him in his comment as reply to a news item stating that government prevented a group of youth from gathering to discuss the new taxation law. This citizen is asking the PM if this is the country of freedom that he calls for. The citizen expressed his censure of this decision by raising those two questions in the example above. Asking/presupposing is the most frequently used strategy in British English regarding criticism (Al Kayed 2018) and it is rarely used by Persian native speakers (Farnia and Abdul Sattar 2015) and Indonesian students (Suharno 2015). These studies relate their results to the degrees of power, rank and social distance. These factors are highly connected to many speech acts and they are imperative in order to understand the Illocutionary act of utterances.

8. Sarcasm

Sarcasm is an indirect strategy which can be defined as the use of ironic language to mock the subject (in this case, the government) and is usually applied by writing something to mean the opposite of what is literally stated, specifically within the current context. 14.7% rate of sarcasm was utilized by the Jordanian participants to express their opinion about the government’s decisions. Example (14) below demonstrates how participants criticize the government in ironic ways to express their dissatisfaction with such decisions:

“I shall devote more time to read about the insect world, especially the Flies Chapter, Section ‘How to Get Rid of Flies’. NB: If the cybercrimes bill is ratified, flies may sue me for insult, degradation, and incitement to murder. The question is: Who will call a truce with flies?”

(Context: Electronic Crimes Law)
In the example above, the citizen explained his disapproval of the Electronic Crimes Law in a humorous way which reflects his opinion without being explicitly direct. Discussing insects is not the target of this post; the government is the main target in this context. The previous Example (14) is an obvious model of sarcasm as the main strategy for the criticism speech act. Sarcasm can be used to express many different speech acts and similarly many different strategies, as in our present case. Analysis of the current sample indicates a wide integration of this strategy in partnership with various other strategies. Suharno (2015) characterized these integrated strategies as “combined strategies”, which were used 26.4% of the time in his study. Meanwhile, participants in the current study used sarcasm to express other strategies such as disapproval, uncertainty, or to explain consequences.

9. Grievance/Complaint to Allah

Expressing grievances or complaining to Allah is a prevalent behaviour among Arab people, and it is used to raise awareness within the government or as a type of prayer which reflects their feelings of powerlessness and inability to create change, using some well-known religious statements. These statements are mostly parts of the Islamic Noble book – the Quran – as a reminder to the other party of judgment day. The findings showed that this strategy appeared in 58 statements (12%). Example (16) shows one of the most common statements that the participants used to criticize the government in this context:

حسبي الله ونعم الوكيل. (16)  

“Allah is my suffice, and the best deputy.”
(Context: Cancelation of Free Treatment for Cancer Patients)

Example (16) shows a reply to one of the critical issues announced by the government: the cancelation of free treatment for cancer patients in the King Hussein Cancer Centre. The post writer seems as if he has no choice or action in regards to this, but to assign this problem to Allah who will alleviate it for us. These statements are very common in Facebook and Twitter platforms as a short and brief reply to issues which touch people’s heart. From a religious standpoint, these statements provide people with some level of comfort so that they can deal with these problems. It can also be seen as a threat to the government as it reminds them of God's punishment and the Judgment Day. It should be noted here that this strategy has been added by the researcher within the Arab-Jordanian context, where people use similar utterances to critique others.

10. Other Hints: Emojis/Pictures

Developments in technology have brought the use of emojis and pictures to another level, especially in social media. Emojis and pictures can be a source of knowledge and a way to express individuals’ feelings without having to put them into words (Highfield and Leaver 2016; Pavalanathan and Eisenstein 2016). Due to this, and because of the particularity of the study context, this new form was added under “other hints” to meet the participants’ needs when criticizing via social media, as an alternative for facial and body expressions. The analysis revealed that this form appeared 54 times as emojis were utilized to
enhance speech, or as pictures that reflect citizens’ opinions or adopt their ideas. Figure (1) provides some emojis that were used by citizens to express their feeling towards the government.

Figure 1: Some emojis used by Jordanian participants (generated by iEmoji.com)

Example (17) below illustrates how some emojis play a linguistic role by replacing words and conveying meaning.

“Time passes and the government is 😢.”

(Context: Al-Baqrah Land Repossession)

In the previous example, the used emoji reflects the silence of the government from the citizens’ point of view, and we can explain its use in this manner as an acronym or reluctance to state it directly. Stark and Crawford (2015) argue that “emoji[s] can act as an emotional coping strategy and a novel form of creative expression” (1).

Pictures also function as emojis in cyber communication contexts. Figure 2 is showing a picture that has been posted by one of the participants in the current sample. It reflects how this citizen understands the relationship between the government and the citizen. In this picture, the man represents the government while the woman who is sitting close to him represents citizen. From the participant’s point of view, the government betrays the citizen with the corruption (the woman holding the man's hand in the picture). This example is only a metaphorical portrayal to say that the government is a well-versed entity in corruption while the announced government love towards citizen is only fake love.

Figure 2: Posted picture by one of the Facebook users

Using this type of content is easier for those who cannot express their opinion in written discourse especially in some issues that need a special kind of knowledge and abilities.
**Gender and Criticism Strategies**

The present study suggests that there is a correlation between the citizen’s gender and the criticism strategies used on Facebook and Twitter platforms. Table 4 below demonstrates the strategies used and the frequency and percentage for both genders:

**Table 4: Frequency and percentage of criticism strategies in terms of gender.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>freq.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Evaluation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproval</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of Disagreement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of Problem</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Difficulties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicating Standard</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preaching</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demand and Request for Change</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice and Suggestion for Change</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of Uncertainty</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking/Presupposing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcasm</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievance /Complain to Allah</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hints (Emoji/Pictures)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By investigating the table above, we notice that females use specific strategies more than males while males also tend to use some strategies more than their counterparts. These differences were only found in six strategies, by drawing on the number of frequencies. The highlighted strategies in Table 4 above (Identification of a Problem, Expression of Uncertainty, Asking/Presupposing, Sarcasm, Other Hints, and Grievance/Complain to Allah) were used differently according to the citizen’s gender. For example, the Grievance/Complain to Allah strategy was used by women more than men in the selected sample from 3.9% for males to 20% for females. The analysis showed that grievance/complaint to Allah is used more in criticizing social issues when compared to political and economic topics. The results also indicated that Grievance and Complaint to Allah were highly used by women more than men and it appeared more frequently regarding social issues. This strategy is the most emotional strategy, where people refer to Allah to hear their complaints. Joiner et al. (2016) described women as more emotional than their counterparts in replying to Facebook posts while Jones et al. (2008) pointed out that social issues are more likely to draw the attention of women rather than men. This may explain why Jordanian women participants used this strategy more than men with a large frequency for the same religious statement: ‘Allah is my suffice, and the best deputy.’

The current study revealed that emojis and pictures are also used more by the Jordanian women compared to men. This study gives high consideration to this form of expression as it is connected to
specific genres to express people’s feelings as well as meaning. Danesi (2016) pointed to emojis as “meaning-enhancing devices” (15) and this importance of emojis has translated into many different studies (Stark and Crawford 2015; Vidal, Ares and Jaeger 2016; Riordan 2017). Pictures are no less important than emojis, where there are some social platforms that are specialized in photo sharing such as Snapchat and Instagram. Junco (2013) found that females tag and post photos more often than men, while Shepherd (2016) concluded that “many women may be making visual arguments with their photos” (22). Sharing photos and emojis is an easy process, and a fast way to express an idea. In the current case, most of the photos and emojis were used to express explicit or implicit meaning towards the Jordanian government. We cannot, however, conclude that Jordanian women prefer to take the shorter route to express their opinion, although there appears to be a tendency towards visual communication by using emojis and pictures. Analysis revealed that using pictures and emojis was found more when criticizing political and economic issues on Facebook and Twitter platforms.

The analysis also found that Jordanian males were more uncertain about the government’s decisions, and expressed this more than their female peers. According to the current sample, Jordanian men showed less confidence in the government by criticizing government attempts to distract the local citizens by using fake news. This tendency is found at a minimal level in the female sample, where the same was found regarding the use of Asking/Presupposing strategy. Results indicated that men participants also criticize via asking and presupposing more than women participants. These two strategies (asking/presupposing and expression uncertainty) need a good amount of reliable information to face the facts, and they cannot be used arbitrarily. Those two strategies appeared in a proximate ratio in the main three topics without any noticeable difference in using them according to the particular criticism subject. Current findings also demonstrated a rate of men using sarcasm in their online criticism with relatively close percentages to females. This is in consistent with Dress, Kreuz, Link, and Caucci (2008) and Drucker, Fein, Bergerbest, and Giora (2014), who reported in two separate studies that men use more sarcasm in their speech compared to their female peers. Interestingly, women’s language has been described as powerless forty-six years ago by Robin Lakoff, who also pointed out that women tend to use more indirect speech than men do. Present literature still gives the issue of power noticeable attention in criticism speech act studies (e.g., Al Kayed 2018) as well as sarcastic speech studies (e.g., Drucker et al. 2014). It is interesting to note that the sarcasm strategy was used more while criticizing economic and political issues in comparison to social issues. This may refer to the nature of some social issues, as they addressed sensitive topics such as cancelling the free treatment of cancer patients, which would not absorb any irony. The last strategy that contains a difference in terms of gender is identification of a problem. The analysis showed that male participants (14.6%) trump female participants (11.6%) in the usage of this strategy in their online written discourse. Men appeared to state the main problem in their comments and posts to highlight the errors which need to be criticized. This strategy was used more to criticize political and economic decisions and actions applied by the Jordanian government.

All the remaining strategies have recorded no difference between Jordanian women participants and Jordanian men participants in the use of criticism strategies on Facebook and Twitter platforms.
Differences were only found in some specific strategies as was explained above. This clearly answers the second research question about whether there is any correlation between gender and criticism on Facebook and Twitter platforms. Concerning the criticism topics, further analysis is needed to study this relation by giving the criticism topic a major interest, which is not found in this study where the topics were only used to understand minor differences. Finally, it is valuable to mention that the researcher spent more time searching for females' posts and tweets regarding political issues compared to men. It also was easier to find female participants regarding social issues, without any difficulties compared to other subjects.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the current study reveal that many Jordanians are involved in public life by expressing their views and feelings publicly on Facebook and Twitter platforms. Since the government is responsible for structuring the public life and organizing all legislative and service sectors, citizens are in a standoff with this entity as observers and service receivers alike. This relationship makes the speech act of criticism an inevitable outcome under this context of communication.

This study has added one new strategy to the speech act of criticism to adapt to the local Arabic context. This new strategy is Grievance/Complaint to Allah. Furthermore, sarcasm was considered as a minor strategy in the original framework while our current study has considered it as a major strategy for the speech act of criticism. Most previous research concentrated on actual communication in terms of criticism, while this study approached this speech act in a new context regarding the government-citizen relationship within virtual medium. Due to this new cyber context, a high percentage of frequencies have been recorded for the use of emojis and pictures as form of expressing criticism. This study also highlighted the issue of gender in using criticism by suggesting that females use different criticism strategies which vary from those used by males. Findings indicated that men and women participants do use some criticism strategies differently. These differences were explained in previous literature, which aligns with the current study’s results as describing females’ discourse as more emotional, while men are more critical.
تحليل برامجي لاستراتيجيات النقد ضد سياسات الحكومة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي

في الأردن: دراسة على أساس النوع الاجتماعي

سمية الشيخ، شريف الغزو
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وأدابها، الجامعة الأردنية، الأردن

المخصص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلًا براغماتيًا لعمل النقد الكلامي كما هو مستخدم على social-media في الأردن. كما تدرس تأثير الجنس في اختيار المشاركين في استراتيجيات النقد. وتكون البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها من 300 مشاركًا تم استخدام نسخة معدة من إطار عمل Nguyen (2005) لاستراتيجيات النقد لتحليل البيانات. تظهر النتائج أن أكثر الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها ملحوظاً التدوينات والتعليقات والتغريدات هي السخرية وتحديد المشكلة والتنظيم / الشكوى إلى الله والتحقيق السلبي على التوالي. تظهر النتائج أيضًا أن الرجال والنساء يستخدمون بعض استراتيجيات النقد بشكل مختلف: يميل الرجال إلى زيادة استخدام التعبير عن عدم الاقتناع والسؤال / الاقتراض المسبق، في حين تميل النساء إلى استخدام التنظيم / الشكوى إلى الله والرموز التعبيرية / الصور. وتظهر الدراسة كيف تُعد اللغة المستخدمة على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي مؤشراً قوياً واضحاً على عدم الثقة في العلاقة بين الحكومة والمواطنين الواضح في تعبير الكتاب عن عدم الاقتناع بشأن قرارات الحكومة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النقد كفل كلامي، الخطاب الإعلامي، البرامجية الاجتماعية، الحكومي.
A Pragmatic Analysis of Criticism Strategies against Government Policies on Social Media in Jordan: A Gender-Based Investigation

Endnotes

1 As mentioned before, this item is not calculated with other strategies final count.
2 All Arabic statements were literally added without any grammatical or spelling correction to maintain text authenticity. However, many were not translated verbatim.
3 Note: some percentages are rounded.

References


Alshakhanbeh, Alghazo


A Pragmatic Analysis of Criticism Strategies against Government Policies on Social Media in Jordan: A Gender-Based Investigation


285

