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Gender-Based Communication Strategies in Expressing Gratitude in Najdi Arabic: An Investigation Into Differences in the Production and Perception of Thanking

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***Abstract*—The current study explores how speech acts of thanking were expressed and perceived in Najdi Arabic (NA). It also considers if there were any gender differences in how NA speakers expressed and perceived the speech act of gratitude. To gather the relevant data, naturally occurring tokens of gratitude, an oral discourse-completion task (DCT), and interviews were used. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were employed to analyze the data. Al-Zubaidi's (2012) scheme of gratitude and Creswell's (2009) thematic model of data analysis were used as the research framework. The analysis of the naturally occurring speech act data revealed that a total of 18 gratitude strategies were employed. The DCT findings on NA speakers' realizations of speech acts of gratitude revealed that they used a total of 27 gratitude strategies. Additionally, the results showed that particular gratitude strategies were associated with one gender group more frequently than the other. The naturally occurring speech data highlighted statistical differences in the length of speech acts used to express gratitude between NA-speaking males and females. However, the participants' perceptions of how gratitude should be expressed in response to the DCT situations revealed no statistical gender-based differences in the length of speech used to express gratitude. Overall, the findings confirmed that the collectivistic nature and religious values of the Najdi region strongly influence their gratitude behaviors. The findings also illustrated new gratitude strategies.**

***Index Terms*—gratitude, gender, thanking, pragmatics, culture**

I. Introduction

Pragmatics, which represents one of the most complicated aspects of linguistics to investigate, is intimately related to speech act theory (Wijana, 2021). Speech acts are performed by a speaker to express an utterance; such acts can be classified into three categories: (i) locutionary, (ii) illocutionary, and (iii) perlocutionary acts, which concern the acts of saying something, doing something, and affecting someone, respectively (Austin, 1962). Speech acts involve performing certain linguistic actions, such as apologizing—via the use of specific utterances. Speech acts "all the acts we perform through speaking, and all the things we do when we speak" (Schmidt & Richards, 1980, p. 129).

In daily life, the speech act of thanking is one of the most commonly used acts in many cultures (Yusefi et al., 2015). Due to the importance of such thanking expressions and their ubiquity in daily life, many researchers have sought to investigate the nuances of this significant speech act (e.g., Albalawi, 2018; Yusefi et al., 2015). Previous studies on the speech act of thanking have examined and analyzed it from various perspectives and across a variety of contexts. The expressions of thanking have been examined (i) across languages (e.g., Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013a), (ii) within the same language (e.g., Alrousan, 2018), and (iii) in relation to various factors such as age (e.g., Yusefi et al., 2015). Various studies have investigated the performance of thanking expressions where they investigate naturally occurring data (e.g., Albalawi, 2018). A few others have focused on the perceptions of this speech act where the analyzed data rely on what participants believe should be uttered in such situations (e.g., Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013a).

In the context of Arabic dialects, the speech act of thanking has not been adequately discussed (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013a). Some studies have focused on the production of thanking and the strategies used to express gratitude (e.g., Morsi, 2010). Meanwhile, a few others have considered the perception of thanking expressions and their relationship with factors such as gender and age (e.g., Albalawi, 2018; Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013b). Despite these various documented studies, far too little is known about how thanking expressions are used and perceived in Saudi Arabic (SA) dialects (Albalawi, 2018), particularly NA.

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Additionally, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no research has been conducted on how SA-speaking males and females, particularly NA speakers, express gratitude in face-to-face communication. The literature also lacks studies on how thanking is perceived (i.e., participants' responses of gratitude in made-up situations and their thoughts of what should be said in such situations) in SA culture, particularly in the NA context. Similarly, studies analyzing the relationship between gender and the production and perception of thanking in Saudi dialects appear to be missing. Therefore, the current research aims to fill these gaps.

The study's significance revolves around five aspects. First, it aims to address the gap in the literature, namely, how NA male and female speakers produce and perceive gratitude in face-to-face communication. Second, it contributes to the existing (yet scant) literature (Yusefi et al., 2015). Third, since differences in how "polite" a speech act is realized can result in communication complexities (Gass & Neu, 2006), the current study seeks to offer insights by investigating such differences objectively. Fourth, it is hoped that this research project will serve as a reference point for others interested in the cross-cultural realization of thanking speech act. Finally, investigating not only how gratitude is expressed but also realized in NA is significant since the act of thanking is both socially and religiously significant for NA speakers. Such importance is emphasized by the teachings of the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) as narrated by Abu Hurairah "Whoever is not grateful to the people, he is not grateful to Allah" (At-Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 61).

The researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the thanking strategies used to express gratitude in the NA dialect?
2. What differences, if any, exist between males and females in terms of how they express thanking?
3. How do NA speakers perceive the speech act of thanking?
4. What differences, if any, exist between male and female participants in terms of how they perceive thanking?

II. Literature Review

A. The Speech Act of Thanking

Thanking can be defined as an expression of gratitude used by a speaker to show appreciation in various contexts after receiving a compliment, gift, or favor. Expressing thanks can serve various functions, such as showing gratitude—the focus of this study—or closing/opening a conversation. For the sake of simplicity, this study uses the terms thanking and gratitude synonymously.

Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize thanking expressions as face-threatening acts where the speaker acknowledges a certain debt to the hearer— "thus threatening the speaker's negative face" (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993, p. 65). Brown and Levinson (1987) define the concept of face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects [positive face and negative face]" (p. 61). Positive face involves the desire to be appreciated and valued, whereas negative face embodies the need to be free from any imposition imposed by another (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this sense, expressing thanks can be perceived as acknowledging a debt, which therefore threatens the speaker's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

B. Non-Arabic Thanking Studies

A large amount of research on the speech act of thanking focuses on non-Arabic languages, with some researchers investigating gratitude interlingually (across different languages or dialects) and others adopting an intralingual (within a single dialect/language) perspective. An intralingual study by Cheng (2010) on the speech act of thanking in English. The results highlighted six major strategies: thanking (e.g., Thanks), appreciation (e.g., I really appreciate that), non-gratitude (e.g., Thank goodness), combinations (e.g., Thank you, very kind of you), thanking a third person (e.g., Thanks to Sara for lots of hard work), and formal speech (e.g., I thank you for your hard work). The most-frequently used strategies were thanking and non-gratitude, respectively.

Yoosefvand and Rasekh (2014a) conducted an interlingual study to examine the speech act of thanking as realized by native speakers of Persian and native speakers of English. Using a DCT, the researchers elicited gratitude expressions from first language (L1) Persian undergraduate and graduate students and used a secondary source (Cheng, 2005) to gather gratitude expressions from L1 English graduate students. The findings indicated that both L1 groups (Persian and English) most frequently used the strategy of thanking (e.g., Thank you). However, the Chi-square test results showed significant differences between the two groups based on the gratitude strategies used. The Persian-speaking participants used the strategy of repayment (e.g., I owe you one) most frequently after thanking. Meanwhile, English-speaking participants most often used strategies such as repayment and alerters (e.g., Oh my God). The other category was relatively small in both groups, including strategies like joking (e.g., Pay again next time).

In terms of intralingual research, Yoosefvand and Rasekh (2014b) investigated the gratitude strategies employed by Persian speakers. The researchers collected data by presenting various scenarios to 60 participants using a DCT. The analysis showed that the most common Persian thanking strategies were thanking, repayment, and alerters, respectively. The frequencies and Chi-square tests revealed gender-based differences in participants' strategies. For example, the female participants conveyed their gratitude more frequently than the male participants. The findings also revealed that females used the strategies of thanking, appreciation, positive feeling, and repayment more frequently than males. The use of other strategies (e.g., imposition, alerters) did not differ significantly between the male and female participants.

Similarly, Yusefi et al. (2015) examined the speech act of thanking intralingually, in Ilami Kurdish, by exploring the most frequently used gratitude strategies based on age and gender. Using a DCT method, the researchers presented various scenarios to 117 participants and asked them to write down the terms they would use to thank an interlocutor in such situations. The analysis revealed that the strategies of thanking, positive feeling, and appreciation were the most frequently used strategies among the male participants, respectively. Meanwhile, only thanking and positive feeling strategies were evident among the female participants. The analysis also indicated that the female group expressed their gratitude more than the male group did. However, t-test results showed no significant difference between the participants' gender and their choice of thanking strategy.

C. Arabic Thanking Studies

Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013a) explored perceptions of the speech act of thanking interlingually via an empirical study that examined how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic and British English perceive gratitude expressions. The findings contradicted Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim of thanking as a face-threatening act, which "intrinsically threatens the speaker's negative face because it involves overt acceptance of an imposition on the speaker" (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013a, p. 231). Instead, the findings indicated that thanking was perceived as a means of establishing a friendly atmosphere and maintaining social relationships, which supports Leech's (1983) view. The findings also revealed that both groups noted the importance of expressing gratitude to show appreciation for others' kindness, with the degree of gratitude correlating with the favor.

However, Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013a) detected some variation between the two groups. Unlike the English participants, the Jordanian participants reported employing diverse strategies, such as thanking, complimenting, benediction, and address terms along with the use of repetition to show the extent of their appreciation. The Jordanian participants also added that thanking is strongly emphasized in their culture, deriving from religious beliefs. Additionally, the findings revealed that the English participants preferred simple direct gratitude expressions, whereas the Jordanians favored complex direct (e.g., Thanks) and indirect (e.g., We bothered you) expressions.

As for intralingual research, Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013b) investigated the realization of gratitude expressions to explore how Jordanian Arabic speakers perceive the speech act of thanking. The results showed that gender substantially influences thanking performance and perception, with Jordanian female participants appearing to value shows of gratitude more than male participants. When communicating with members of the same gender, the female participants expressed their gratitude more than their male counterparts. The analysis also revealed various factors affecting the reception and production of gratitude expressions, including the degree of familiarity between interlocutors, status differences, and the degree of obligation.

Albalawi (2018) examined thanking strategies intralingually, in SA, by exploring how Saudi males and females express gratitude. The researcher collected data from naturally occurring settings using an academic Facebook group, compiling and analyzing 200 tokens of thanking. The results indicated variations in the type and frequency of strategy use between Saudi males and females, with Saudi males employing more strategies per thanking situation than Saudi females. Meanwhile, the male participants used certain strategies more than their female counterparts, such as thanking and stating the favor and address terms. The complimenting strategy was the least-used approach among both males and females, whereas the most frequently used strategies were thanking and benediction, respectively.

As for gratitude research in relation to various factors, Morsi (2010) examined the speech act of thanking based on age, gender, and social distance in Egyptian Arabic. The study explored thanking expressions as performed by male and female Egyptian participants living in the United States. The results revealed that appreciation of benefit was the most-used function. The analysis showed that the most common Egyptian Arabic thanking strategies were repetition (e.g., Thank you, thank you), blessings (e.g., Bless your heart), routine formulaic expressions (e.g., Thanks a million), and non-religious formulas, including apology or well-wishing phrases (e.g., I am sorry, good luck). Moreover, the analysis revealed that the strategies used by Egyptian speakers often involved lengthy forms of thanking (i.e., using multiple strategies to express their appreciation in the single instance of thanking). The thanking strategies were also analyzed by gender, with the results indicating that female participants used lengthier forms of thanking than males.

Al-Zubaidi (2012) examined the speech act of thanking as realized by native speakers of Iraqi Arabic, native speakers of American English, and Iraqi English as foreign language (EFL) learners. Data analysis indicated nine main strategies: thanking, complimenting, expressing benediction, acknowledging the imposition, reciprocating, apologizing, expressing intimacy, alerting and others. Al-Zubaidi's (2012) findings align with Cheng's (2005) claim that languages have a similar set of strategies available for expressing a given speech act, but the choice of one strategy over another seems to be culture-specific. Al-Zubaidi (2012) points out that the strategies used to perform gratitude in Iraqi Arabic and American English are relatively different. Although thanking was the most used strategy by all the groups, some cultural and religious norms affected the use of the other strategies. The findings indicated that Iraqi Arabic speakers prefer strategies containing various religious references after thanking (e.g., expressions of oath, benediction).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection Methods

The current study used naturally occurring data to analyze thanking expressions produced in NA (to answer RQ 1 and RQ 2) while "[assuring] the internal validity of the study since it represents spontaneous, authentic speech as it really is" (Qari, 2017, p. 117). To do so, the researchers recorded naturally occurring interactions in low-imposition favors (e.g., providing required information, helping in small tasks, and gift-giving situations) that were likely to contain thanking speech act performance. In terms of venue, these recordings of interactions occurred at colleges. If participants gave their consent, the interactions were audio-recorded. If not, the researchers and the assigned trained assistants relied on field notes. In such notes, the researchers and assigned assistants recorded the venue, situation, verbatim expressions of gratitude, interlocutors' gender, and approximate ages. These recordings (i.e., audio and field notes) were transcribed for further analysis.

To investigate the perceptions of this speech act (RQ 3 and RQ 4), the researchers employed oral DCTs followed by semi-structured interviews. Golato (2003) asserts that a DCT is metapragmatic: "[it] explicitly requires participants not to conversationally interact, but to articulate what they believe would be situationally appropriate responses within possible, yet imaginary, interactional settings" (p. 92). Hence, the method is most certainly suited for exploring the perceptions of gratitude in NA.

Because this study aims to investigate NA, the researchers conducted both methods (oral DCTs and interviews) by asking the participants in NA and instructing them to respond in their native dialect. The researchers chose the oral form of DCT over the written DCT "due to the diglossic situation in Arabic, where people write in one variety [Modern Standard Arabic] and speak in another [NA in this case]" (Alrashoodi, 2020, p. 30).

As the researchers aimed to elicit responses from the participants in their native language (i.e., NA), the DCT scenarios and the interview questions were translated into NA before the pilot testing and administration. The researchers then asked the participants (in NA) to respond to the situations and then questioned them about their responses. The interviews were held face-to-face.

B. Participants

This study primarily focuses on native NA speakers from the central region of Saudi Arabia, particularly in Qassim. The study focuses on this area to control for the possible involvement of other elements (e.g., contact with varying dialects as in capital cities). In the case of observing naturally occurring interactions to analyze the performance of the speech act of thanking, the target data are tokens (N=80) of thanking expressed by undergraduate monolingual native NA-speaking students aged 18 to 23, 40 tokens expressed by males and 40 expressed by females.

To control for the possible impact of educational level and age on this study, the researchers used colleges as venues for collecting instances of gratitude. However, colleges with programs taught in other languages were avoided to prevent the influence of second language transfer on the data collection. The study follows random sampling, in which "the researcher selects participants (or units) for the sample so that any individual has an equal probability of being selected from the population" (Creswell, 2012, p. 143). Prior to data collection, the participants were informed that their conversations were being monitored if recording was needed and asked for their consent to record. However, they were not informed about the research focus at this point to ensure natural, spontaneous, and consistent interactions.

In the case of conducting oral DCTs and interviews to collect data on the participants' perceptions, the researchers sought to recruit 20 monolingual native speakers of NA (male: n=10; female: n=10) aged 18–23. Participants were selected using convenience sampling: the researchers chose "participants because they [were] willing and available to be studied" (Creswell, 2012, p. 146). To recruit participants, the researchers used calls, messages, and emails; potential participants were given information about the research to gauge their availability and willingness to participate.

C. Data Analysis

To answer the study's research questions, the data analysis process followed five steps. First, to identify the most frequently used gratitude strategies in NA, the researchers analyzed natural speech data gathered based on Al-Zubaidi's (2012) taxonomy of gratitude and calculated the frequency and percentage of each strategy using SPSS Statistics (Version 20). Second, the researchers examined the naturally occurring data to identify gender differences in the production of gratitude strategies by comparing male and female instances of gratitude using frequency and t-test analyses. Third, the researchers examined the DCT data using Al-Zubaidi's (2012) taxonomy and identified the frequencies of the realized gratitude strategies. Fourth, gender differences were analyzed in the participants' perceptions of gratitude using the strategies evident in the DCT responses. Fifth, the researchers analyzed the data gathered from the follow-up interviews using Creswell's (2009) thematic model of data analysis.

IV. Results and Discussion of Gratitude Production

A. Gratitude Strategies Used in NA

The data gathered from the naturally occurring interactions were analyzed by type to highlight the most frequently used gratitude strategies in the entire dataset. Table 1 below presents the distribution of the gratitude strategy types.

TABLE 1
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF STRATEGY OCCURRENCE FOR EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Strategy Type	Gratitude Strategy	*F*	*Per.*
A.Thanking	A1.Bald thanking	39	26.2%
	A2.Thanking and stating the favor	3	2.0%
	A3.Thanking and stating the imposition	0	0.0%
B.Complimenting	B1.Complimenting the thankee	11	7.4%
	B2.Complimenting the thanking act	2	1.3%
C.Expressing benediction	C1.Explicit benediction	29	19.5%
	C2.Implicit benediction	19	12.8%
D.Apologizing	D1.Expressing apology	0	0.0%
	D2.Expressing embarrassment	0	0.0%
	D3.Expressing self-denigration	0	0.0%
E.Acknowledging the imposition	E1.Recognizing the imposition	0	0.0%
	E2.Expressing the unnecessity of the favor	0	0.0%
	E3.Expressing the need for the favor	2	1.3%
F.Reciprocating	F1.Expressing indebtedness	0	0.0%
	F2.Expressing repayment	2	1.3%
	F3.Offering service, invitation, money, gift or food	0	0.0%
G.Expressing intimacy	G1.Body-part term	1	0.7%
	G2.Endearment term	9	6.0%
	G3.Kinship term	0	0.0%
H.Alerting	H1.Attention getter	16	10.7%
	H2.Address terms	4	2.7%
I.Positive feeling	I1.Expressing liking	1	0.7%
	I2.Expressing happiness	4	2.7%
	I3.Expressing affection	1	0.7%
J.Other	J1.Swearing	3	2.0%
	J2.Opting-out	1	0.7%
	J3.Non-verbal communication	0	0.0%
	J4.Refusal	0	0.0%
	J5.Stating results	2	1.3%
	J6.Expressing an inability to articulate feeling	0	0.0%

Note. F=Frequency Count; *Per.*=Percentage.

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of the ten main gratitude strategies collected from naturally occurring interactions among NA speakers. Moreover, the most frequently used strategy type was expressing benediction (32.2%), followed by thanking (28.2%). These two strategy types represent more than half (60.4%) of the collected data. This result concurs with the literature: thanking is the most direct gratitude strategy used in many languages (cf. Albalawi, 2018 for SA; Al-Zubaidi, 2012 for Iraqi Arabic and American English; Cheng, 2005 for Chinese; Cheng, 2010 for British and American English; Yusefi et al., 2015 for Ilami Kurdish). However, the use of the benediction strategy to express thanks is uncommon in many western cultures/languages (Albalawi, 2018). For example, Al-Zubaidi (2012) found that Iraqi Arabic speakers invoked God in their expression of gratitude in 282 instances, whereas American English speakers did not (zero instances). These findings indicate the far-reaching effect of religious norms on Arabic speakers' gratitude expression preferences.

Other studies examining gratitude in Arabic dialects (cf. Albalawi, 2018 for SA; Al-Zubaidi, 2012 for Iraqi Arabic) reported that the most frequently used gratitude strategies were thanking, followed by benediction. The current study indicated that the expressing benediction strategy was by far the most prevalent gratitude strategy used by NA speakers. The native NA speakers in the present study preferred to use prayers and blessings to express their gratitude to others. The popularity of the benediction strategy type likely results from the cultural and religious norms of NA society: prayers and blessings are prominent features of most social interactions in NA, with speakers tending to refer to God.

B. Gratitude Strategies by Gender

Table 2 below illustrates the distribution of each gratitude strategy in the male and female responses.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF STRATEGY OCCURRENCE FOR EXPRESSING GRATITUDE IN MALE AND FEMALE SAMPLES

Strategy Type	Gratitude Strategy	Male			Female		
		Per.	Total		*Per.*	Total	
			F	*Per.*		*F*	*Per.*
A.Thanking	A1.Bald thanking	20.0%	13	20.0%	31.0%	29	34.5%
	A2.Thanking and stating the favour	0.0%			3.6%		
	A3.Thanking and stating the imposition	0.0%			0.0%		
B.Complimenting	B1.Complimenting the thankee	9.2%	6	9.2%	6.0%	7	8.3%
	B2.Complimenting the thanking act	0.0%			2.4%		
C.Expressing benediction	C1.Explicit benediction	27.7%	31	47.7%	13.1%	17	20.2%
	C2.Implicit benediction	20.0%			7.1%		
D.Apologizing	D1.Expressing apology	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%
	D2.Expressing embarrassment	0.0%			0.0%		
	D3.Expressing self-denigration	0.0%			0.0%		
E.Acknowledging the imposition	E1.Recognizing the imposition	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	2	2.4%
	E2.Expressing the unnecessity of the favour	0.0%			0.0%		
	E3.Expressing the need for the favour	0.0%			2.4%		
F.Reciprocating	F1.Expressing indebtedness	0.0%	2	3.1%	0.0%	0	0.0%
	F2.Expressing repayment	3.1%			0.0%		
	F3.Offering service, invitation, money, gift or food	0.0%			0.0%		
G.Expressing intimacy	G1.Body-part term	0.0%	4	6.2%	1.2%	6	7.1%
	G2.Endearment term	6.2%			6.0%		
	G3.Kinship term	0.0%			0.0%		
H.Alerting	H1.Attention getter	7.7%	8	12.3%	13.1%	12	14.3%
	H2.Address terms	4.6%			1.2%		
I.Positive feeling	I1.Expressing liking	0.0%	0	0.0%	1.2%	6	7.1%
	I2.Expressing happiness	0.0%			4.8%		
	I3.Expressing affection	0.0%			1.2%		
J.Other	J1.Swearing	1.5%	1	1.5%	2.4%	5	6.0%
	J2.Opting-out	0.0%			1.2%		
	J3.Non-verbal communication	0.0%			0.0%		
	J4.Refusal	0.0%			0.0%		
	J5.Stating results	0.0%			2.4%		
	J6.Expressing an inability to articulate feeling	0.0%			0.0%		

Note. F=Frequency Count; *Per.*=Percentage.

This table illustrates the use of nine main gratitude categories: *thanking, complimenting, expressing benediction, acknowledging the imposition, reciprocating, expressing intimacy, alerters, positive feelings,* and *other*. Neither of the two groups used the apologizing strategy. It also reveals that some of the gratitude strategies were used by one gender group more frequently than the other gender group. For example, the male NA speakers employed the following strategies more frequently than the female speakers: complimenting the thankee, explicit benediction, implicit benediction, expressing repayment, and address terms. In contrast, the female group used the following strategies more frequently than their male counterparts: bald thanking, thanking and stating the favor, complimenting the thanking act, expressing the need for the favor, attention getter, expressing happiness, and stating results.

Further analysis indicated that particular gratitude strategies were associated more with one group's interactions. For example, males' gratitude interactions were marked by the use of explicit and implicit benediction in shows of gratitude. This could be because it is a routinized cultural expression in most Arabic dialects (Albalawi, 2018). Therefore, it is employed relatively often when expressing thanks in speech. Male's high frequency of use for this strategy could indicate that NA-speaking males are more inclined to express their cultural identities and norms than females. It could also indicate males' tendency to use traditional formal strategies to show gratitude, whereas females' thanks are likely to be informal expressions revealing their emotions (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013b).

The address terms strategy was also used more by NA-speaking males than females. This result aligns with Albalawi's (2018) study. As noted in Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac's (2013b) study, the use of this strategy by men represents a formal way to show respect towards the favor-giver by referring to their name or title; meanwhile, women tend to use intimacy expressions, such as using "my heart" to address the favor-giver.

The current study's findings also revealed how female speakers employed particular gratitude expression strategies more often than male speakers, namely, bald thanking and thanking and stating the favor. This result agrees with Yoosefvand and Rasekh's (2014b) study, which found gender-based differences between the responses of male and female Persian speakers in terms of thanking strategy. Yoosefvand and Rasekh (2014b) offered a potential explanation for this finding, suggesting that female speakers tend to express their gratitude using thanking as a direct strategy in every gratitude interaction to ensure that they observe politeness norms.

Females also used the following gratitude strategies more frequently than males: expressing the need for the favor, attention getter, expressing happiness, and stating results. What all these strategies have in common is an open display of the speakers' emotions or needs. The low frequency of use for these strategies in men's speech could reflect men's

unwillingness to express emotions to avoid vulnerability (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013b). Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013b) highlighted that males regarded displays of emotions as signs of weakness.

C. Overall Length of Speech

In terms of gender-based differences, length of speech while using gratitude strategies also represents an interesting factor to consider. Cheng (2005) outlined two ways to measure length of speech: by counting the number of words in the utterance or by considering the content, that is, the number of strategies contained in a single gratitude utterance. In the current study, length of speech was measured using the number of strategies contained in a single gratitude utterance in order to compare the differences between male and female NA speakers.

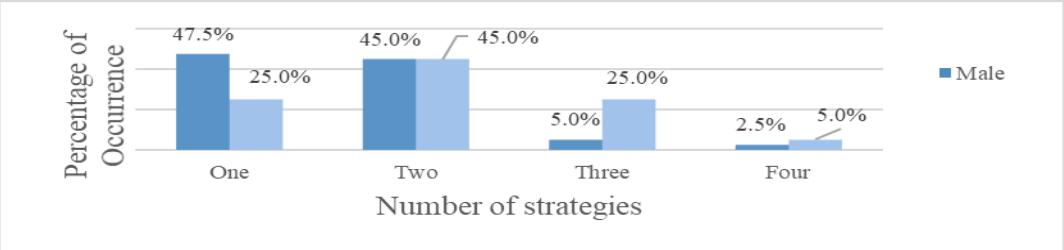

Figure 1. Number of Strategies for Each Gratitude Event According to Gender

Figure 1 illustrates the number of strategies used by both males and females. It also shows that female NA speakers used more strategies in their gratitude expressions than their male counterparts. Males tended to use a single strategy to express gratitude, whereas a total of two strategies were frequently employed in female gratitude interactions.

An additional analysis considered the length of the thanking utterances in the two groups via descriptive statistics (see Table 3) and an independent samples t-test analysis (see Table 4). Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for the number of strategies used in the gratitude utterances by male and female NA speakers. On average, male speakers used 1.63 strategies (SD=0.71; N=40), whereas female speakers used 2.10 strategies (SD=0.84; N=40).

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON THE NUMBER OF STRATEGIES IN MALE AND FEMALE SAMPLES

Gender			Statistic	Bootstrap [a] BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Number of strategies	Male	N	40		
		Mean	1.63	1.86	1.41
		Std. Deviation	0.705	0.899	0.504
	Female	N	40		
		Mean	2.10	2.36	1.84
		Std. Deviation	0.841	0.986	0.664

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 10000 bootstrap samples.

The independent samples t-test was conducted to statistically investigate gender-based differences in the length of speech during thanking utterances. The results are summarized in Table 4 and discussed in the following subsections.

TABLE 4
BOOTSTRAP FOR INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST ON THE NUMBER OF STRATEGIES USED IN MALE AND FEMALE SAMPLES

	Mean difference	Bootstrap [a] Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	BCa 95% Confidence Interval Upper	Lower
Number of strategies	0.475	0.002	0.174	.008*	0.809	0.129

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 10000 bootstrap samples.
* $p < .05$

Using a percentile bootstrapping method, the independent samples t-test analysis showed a statistical mean difference of 0.48 between the males and females. The 95% BCa CI for the mean difference between the two groups was [0.13, 0.81], highlighting that there was at least a 0.13-point difference between them. This CI indicates that the mean difference between the two groups, with 95% confidence, lies within this interval. Since the CI range does not contain zero, this difference is considered statistically significant. A Cohen's d effect size for this comparison was 0.7 (using the SD of the male group as a standardizer), and it represents a statistically medium effect size (Plonsky & Oswald, 2014).

This t-test analysis shows that male and female employed a significantly different number of strategies when expressing their gratitude; namely, females used lengthier gratitude expressions than their male counterparts. This difference is highlighted in Figure 1, which shows that 75% of the gratitude expressions used by females can be regarded as a speech act set (i.e., a composite), and only 25% of the gratitude tokens used a single strategy. Meanwhile, 47.5% of the gratitude expressions used by males employed a single strategy. To illustrate, male speakers favored

expressing their gratitude using a single strategy of thanking (e.g., Thank you), whereas the females tended to use other expressions or strategies (e.g., Cute, a complimenting strategy) in addition to the simple function of saying thanks.

This finding aligns with Yusefi et al.'s (2015) and Yoosefvand and Rasekh's (2014b) results who indicated that females expressed gratitude more than males. Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013b) also highlighted the influence of gender and pointed out that female participants appeared to show gratitude more often than male participants. Additionally, Morsi's (2010) study indicated that female participants used lengthier forms of thanking than males.

One explanation might be that females tend to use more elaborate expressions and utterances (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013b). Another potential explanation is that females enjoy using language to establish personal relationships, whereas males consider language as a tool for communicating information (Yoosefvand & Rasekh, 2014b).

The current study's findings, however, contradicted those of Albalawi (2018), indicating that male Saudi speakers used more strategies than female Saudi speakers. This result in Albalawi's (2018) study was likely affected by the types of gratitude situations studied. That is, the analysis only contained instances of thanking expressed in an information-seeking context as the speech data were drawn from a CMC context (an academic Facebook group). Thus, results from such platforms might not resemble data that are collected from naturally occurring face-to-face interactions.

V. Results and Discussion of Gratitude Perceptions

A. Gratitude Strategies in DCT Situations

The DCT dataset was analyzed to highlight the NA-speaking participants' perceptions of gratitude interactions. Table 5 presents the distribution of gratitude strategies identified in the participants' DCT responses.

TABLE 5
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF GRATITUDE STRATEGIES IN THE DCT DATASET

Strategy Type	Gratitude Strategy	*F*	*Per.*	Total	
				F	*Per.*
A.Thanking	A1.Bald thanking	46	13.3%	66	19.0%
	A2.Thanking and stating the favor	10	2.9%		
	A3.Thanking and stating the imposition	10	2.9%		
B.Complimenting	B1.Complimenting the thankee	32	9.2%	33	9.5%
	B2.Complimenting the thanking act	1	0.3%		
C.Expressing benediction	C1.Explicit benediction	64	18.4%	74	21.3%
	C2.Implicit benediction	10	2.9%		
D.Apologizing	D1 Expressing apology	6	1.7%	11	3.2%
	D2.Expressing embarrassment	4	1.2%		
	D3.Expressing self-denigration	1	0.3%		
E.Acknowledging the imposition	E1.Recognizing the imposition	29	8.4%	50	14.4%
	E2.Expressing the unnecessity of the favor	3	0.9%		
	E3.Expressing the need for the favor	18	5.2%		
F.Reciprocating	F1.Expressing indebtedness	5	1.4%	47	13.5%
	F2.Expressing repayment	17	4.9%		
	F3.Offering service, invitation, money, gift or food	25	7.2%		
G.Expressing intimacy	G1.Body-part term	1	0.3%	4	1.2%
	G2.Endearment term	2	0.6%		
	G3.Kinship term	1	0.3%		
H.Alerting	H1.Attention getter	2	0.6%	2	0.6%
	H2.Address terms	0	0.0%		
I.Positive feeling	I1.Expressing liking	0	0.0%	14	4.0%
	I2.Expressing happiness	11	3.2%		
	I3.Expressing affection	3	0.9%		
J.Other	J1.Swearing	7	2.0%	46	13.3%
	J2.Opting-out	0	0.0%		
	J3.Non-verbal communication	14	4.0%		
	J4.Refusal	9	2.6%		
	J5.Stating results	9	2.6%		
	J6.Expressing an inability to articulate feeling	7	2.0%		

As illustrated in Table 5, the NA participants identified an assortment of gratitude strategies when asked how they would show their gratitude in various DCT situations. The data reveal a total of 10 main gratitude strategies and 27 sub-strategies. The most frequently used strategy type was expressing benediction (21.3%), followed by thanking (19.0%). This result aligned with the results on NA speakers' gratitude preferences in the natural speech dataset.

Additionally, the data indicated that the third most frequently used strategy type was acknowledging the imposition (14.4%), followed by reciprocating (13.5%), and others (13.3%). These strategy types were among NA speakers' least used gratitude strategies in the natural speech dataset. The least used gratitude strategy type in the DCT responses was alerters (0.6%), which was the third most frequently used strategy type (13.4%) in the natural speech dataset.

These differences between the gratitude strategies apparent in the natural speech act dataset and the DCT dataset can be due to the difference in the length of speech in the former compared to the latter. In the natural speech dataset, the

length of speech used to express gratitude ranged from a minimum of one strategy to a maximum of four strategies in a single token of gratitude. In contrast, the length of speech employed in the responses to the DCT situations ranged from one to nine strategies in a single token of gratitude. Thus, in the natural speech act dataset, the participants tended to respond by employing the most commonly used gratitude strategies, whereas, in the DCT responses, the participants used more elaborate expressions and lengthy utterances. The participants in the DCT situations expressed what they thought should be said by using the most common strategies in addition to an assortment of other gratitude strategies.

As for the alerters strategy type, its relatively high percentage of use in the natural speech act dataset (13.4%) compared to the DCT dataset (0.6%) can be explained by presenting some examples of this strategy. The alerters strategy type consists of attention getters, such as "Wow" and address terms, such as "Doctor." Such strategies commonly occurred in the natural speech act dataset and not in the DCT dataset, where participants were required to respond to a written or spoken prompt and offer their perception of how gratitude should appropriately be expressed.

B. Gratitude Strategies in DCT Situations: Gender Differences

Table 6 below illustrates the distribution of gratitude strategies by gender in the DCT responses.

TABLE 6
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF GRATITUDE STRATEGY TYPES IN MALE AND FEMALE DCT RESPONSES

Strategy Type	*Male*		*Female*	
	F	*Per.*	*F*	*Per.*
A.Thanking	30	17.1%	36	20.9%
B.Complimenting	19	10.8%	14	8.1%
C.Expressing benediction	47	26.9%	27	15.7%
D.Apologizing	8	4.6%	3	1.7%
E.Acknowledging the imposition	23	13.1%	27	15.7%
F.Reciprocating	26	14.9%	21	12.2%
G.Expressing intimacy	4	2.3%	0	0.0%
H.Alerting	0	0.0%	2	1.2%
I.Positive feeling	3	1.7%	11	6.4%
J.Other	15	8.6%	31	18.0%

Note. F=Frequency Count; *Per.*=Percentage

Table 6 reveals that some gratitude strategies were used by one gender group more frequently than the other. For example, the male participants employed the expressing benediction strategy type more frequently than the female speakers when asked how they would show their gratitude in various situations. In contrast, the female group used the following gratitude strategy types in their DCT responses more frequently than their male counterparts: thanking, positive feeling, and other, aligning with the results of Yoosefvand and Rasekh's (2014b) study. There was minimal difference between the male and female participants in their preferences for the remaining gratitude strategies; therefore, these strategies are omitted from the remaining discussion.

Further analysis indicated that males used the expressing benediction strategy more frequently (47.7%) in the natural speech act data than females (20%). By comparison, the females' gratitude interactions in the naturally occurring data were marked by their use of thanking, positive feeling, and other strategies. These results from the natural speech act data resemble the differences between the males' and females' use of gratitude strategies in the DCT dataset. However, the percentage of use of these gratitude strategies in the natural speech act data differed from those in the DCT dataset. In the natural speech dataset, both genders responded by focusing on the most commonly used gratitude strategies rather than what they felt they should say; thus, the percentage of the most commonly used strategies for each gender mentioned above was relatively high compared to other strategies in the same dataset. Meanwhile, in the DCT, both male and female participants used more elaborate gratitude expressions, including the most common strategies as well as an assortment of other gratitude strategies; therefore, the percentages of the above-mentioned gratitude strategies in the DCT dataset were relatively similar to the other strategies in the same dataset.

C. Overall Length of Speech in DCT Responses

Length of speech was measured using the number of strategies contained in a single gratitude utterance and assisted in identifying the differences between male and female participants. Figure 2 below illustrates the number of used strategies, ranging in length from a single strategy to nine. Figure 2 also shows that male and female participants used a relatively similar number of gratitude strategies in their DCT responses.

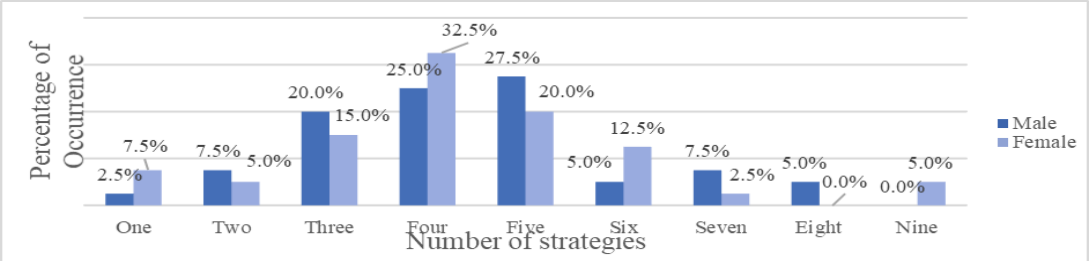

Figure 2. Number of Gratitude Strategies Used in Every DCT Response by Gender

Additional analyses considered the length of the thanking utterances used by males and females via descriptive statistics (see Table 7) and an independent samples t-test analysis (see Table 8). Table 7 shows the means and standard deviations for the number of strategies used in the gratitude DCT responses of male and female participants. On average, males used 4.37 strategies (SD=1.61; N=40), whereas females used 4.30 strategies (SD=1.78; N=40).

TABLE 7
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON THE NUMBER OF STRATEGIES USED BY MALE AND FEMALE PARTICIPANTS IN DCT RESPONSES

Gender			Statistic	Bootstrap [a]	
				BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
				Upper	Lower
Number of strategies	Male	N	40		
		Mean	4.37	4.88	3.88
		Std. Deviation	1.61	1.92	1.22
	Female	N	40		
		Mean	4.30	4.85	3.75
		Std. Deviation	1.78	2.2**0**	1.26

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 10000 bootstrap samples

An independent samples t-test was conducted to statistically investigate gender-based differences in the length of speech employed in the DCT responses. The results are summarized in Table 8.

TABLE 8
BOOTSTRAP FOR INDEPENDENT SAMPLES TEST OF THE NUMBER OF STRATEGIES USED BY PARTICIPANTS IN DCT RESPONSES

	Mean difference	Bootstrap [a]				
		Bias	Std. Error	Sig. (2-tailed)	BCa 95% Confidence Interval	
					Upper	Lower
Number of strategies	0.075	0.001	0.378	.847*	0.814	-0.674

a. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 10000 bootstrap samples.
* p > .05

Using a percentile bootstrapping method, the independent samples t-test results showed no evidence of a mean difference (0.075) between the length of speech to express gratitude in the DCT responses of male participants (mean=4.37; N=40) and female participants (mean=4.30; N=40). The 95% BCa CI for the mean difference between the two groups was [-0.67, 0.81]. This CI indicates that the mean difference between the two groups, with 95% confidence, lies within this interval. Since the CI range goes through zero, this result indicated that there was no statistical difference in the length of speech used to express gratitude between these groups in the DCT responses.

The above result, however, contradicted those of Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac (2013b) and Yoosefvand and Rasekh (2014b), who reported that gender had a substantial influence on the performance of gratitude, with females tending to express gratitude more often than males. Nonetheless, these studies based their findings on analyses using frequencies without statistical tests to confirm findings.

Furthermore, the statistical testing conducted on the natural speech act dataset highlighted a statistical difference between the length of gratitude expressions by gender; namely, females tended to use lengthier gratitude expressions. The mean difference between the number of gratitude strategies used by the two genders was 0.48, with an average of one/two strategies per token of thanking. In contrast, in the DCT (responding to imaginary situations by expressing gratitude according to what they perceived as appropriate), the lengths of the gratitude expressions used by males and females were relatively similar (i.e., there was no statistical difference between them). In this case, the mean difference between the two groups was 0.08, with an average of four strategies per token of thanking.

Interestingly, in the gratitude responses in the natural speech act data, females used longer speech acts to express gratitude than males. Meanwhile, in the DCT dataset, males and females used gratitude speech acts of similar length. Three possible reasons may account for these differences. The first reason might be because the natural speech situations featured low-imposition favors while the DCT situations featured high-imposition favors. Therefore, participants felt a greater degree of indebtedness towards the interlocutor granting the high-imposition favor than the one giving the low-imposition favor (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013b). This result might indicate that females tend to

express gratitude to others in every situation (with low/high imposition) to observe the rules of politeness (Yoosefvand & Rasekh, 2014b). This finding was also highlighted in the interview data, where male interviewers asserted that females express their thanks for the slightest thing.

Another possible explanation is that the DCT data tends to generate somewhat artificial language that does not approximate actual linguistic performance (Golato, 2003). Brown and Levinson (1987) point out that, because DCT-based situations are hypothetical, the responses that participants claim they would give in these situations are not necessarily what they would say in real life; in DCTs, their expressions likely represent their idealized opinions on what they think they should say in such situations to conform to the politeness norms of the speech community in question.

A third explanation lies in social-emotional differences between males and females. In the DCT, when males were asked how they perceived that gratitude should be expressed, they used gratitude tokens of similar length to those of females. However, in the natural speech dataset, males tended to use shorter gratitude expressions. These differences between the natural speech dataset and the DCT dataset were further highlighted in the interview data. Specifically, the interview analysis underlined that males asserted often feeling unable to adequately articulate their feelings of gratitude for favors granted to them when actually faced with such situations. This feeling is likely due to a sense among males that freely expressing their gratitude (i.e., emotions/feelings) may undermine their autonomy (Yusefi et al., 2015).

D. Follow-Up Interview Analysis

(a). The Importance of Gratitude

When the interviewees were asked if they believe that expressing gratitude is important, all participants responded positively. When asked to elaborate, three male interviewees noted that expressing gratitude is important as it reflects a person's manners and upbringing. Meanwhile, five of the 10 male interviewees emphasized that expressing gratitude is essential. Another four male interviewees agreed that gratitude is the least a person can do in response to being granted a favor. Finally, four males noted that expressing gratitude is important as it reflects appreciation and feelings.

Meanwhile, when the females were asked to elaborate on why they agreed that expressing gratitude is important, they mentioned the following reasons: it reflects a person's manners and upbringing, it gains and shows respect, it is the least a person can do after receiving a favor, it has religious significance, citing a saying of the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) in their responses: "Whoever is not grateful to the people, he is not grateful to Allah" (At-Tirmidhi, 2007, p. 61), and it reflects the thanker's appreciation and feelings.

Overall, these findings revealed the participants' views on gratitude importance in NA. The results aligned with Al-Khawaldeh and Zegarac's (2013a) study, in which Jordanian participants highlighted that thanking is strongly emphasized in their culture, deriving from religious beliefs. Such views in the current study, irrespective of gender, highlight the influence of religious norms on the NA speech community in terms of how they perceive gratitude. These views also reflect the collectivist nature of the Najd region, where people value maintaining social harmony.

(b). The Effect of Gratitude

All agreed that expressing gratitude has a significant impact. The male interviewees stressed that gratitude strengthens relationships between interlocutors, produces positive feelings, such as having a positive impression on the thankee while facilitating happiness and optimism. and helps reinforce good deeds and habits. Similarly, the female interviewees confirmed that gratitude strengthens relationships between interlocutors, causes positive feelings like self-satisfaction and happiness, reinforces good deeds and habits, and encourages others to do the same. Finally, some interviewees stressed that lengthy, repetitive thanking might result in repulsion and negative feelings.

Taken together, these findings on the participants' perceptions of the effect of gratitude contradicted Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim of thanking as a face-threatening act, which "intrinsically threatens the speaker's negative face because it involves overt acceptance of an imposition on the speaker" (Al-Khawaldeh & Zegarac, 2013a, p. 231). Instead, the findings indicated that thanking was perceived as a means of establishing a friendly atmosphere and maintaining social relationships, which supports Leech's (1983) view.

(c). Factors Influencing Gratitude Behavior

The male interviewees listed some factors that they believed could guide and affect thanking behavior. These factors are: the gratitude recipient's age, the gender of the thankee, the relationship between the thanker and the thankee, the thanker's gender, their inability to articulate their feelings when faced with a situation that required them to express gratitude, the thanker's age, and thankers' experience.

Additionally, the participants highlighted several situational factors that they believed affect expressions of gratitude; for example, the role of the thanker's mood and living conditions, the surrounding environment, the influence of regional origin, the effect of the particular situation, and cultural customs.

Similarly, female interviewees mentioned an assortment of factors. For instance, the age of the gratitude recipient, the gender of the thankee, the relationship between the thanker and the thankee, the thanker's gender, the thanker's age, and the thanker's experience.

Female participants also discussed a range of situational factors that affect gratitude expressions; which are: the thanker's mood and living conditions, the surrounding environment, the effect of regional differences, the gratitude situation, and the effect of customs.

(d). Determinants of Gratitude Expression Choices

Lastly, the participants provided four factors that determined their preference for particular ways of expressing gratitude over others, which are: their relationship with the thankee, the situation itself, that their choices of gratitude expressions are habits, and choosing their gratitude expressions is based on feelings.

VI. Conclusion

The findings revealed that the participants used an assortment of strategies to express gratitude. Analysis of the natural speech data revealed that a total of 18 gratitude strategies were employed. These strategies, in order of the most frequently used, were expressing benediction, thanking, and alerting. Additionally, the findings indicated that there were gender differences in how the participants employed gratitude strategies. Some of the gratitude strategies were used by one gender group more frequently than the other. Further, the natural speech data highlighted that females tended to use lengthier gratitude expressions than their male counterparts.

The current study's findings also revealed insights into NA speakers' perceptions of how they would express gratitude. The analysis of the DCT data revealed that the participants used a total of 27 gratitude strategies; of these, the most frequently identified strategies in order of frequency were expressing benediction, thanking, and acknowledging the imposition. Furthermore, the results indicated that some gratitude strategies were associated with one gender group more frequently than the other. Despite such differences, the DCT data showed no statistical differences in the length of speech acts used to express gratitude between the male and female participants.

When comparing the participants' use of gratitude in the natural speech data with their perceptions of how gratitude should be expressed in DCT situations, the findings revealed both similarities and differences. In both the natural speech data and the DCTs, the strategy of expressing benediction was the most frequently used, followed by thanking. However, the results indicated differences between the two datasets in the less-used gratitude strategies. Gender-based differences were also detected in the length of the gratitude speech acts gathered from the natural speech data.

Additionally, the findings revealed the influence of interesting cultural values in terms of how NA speakers perceive the speech act of thanking. The findings underscored the importance of expressing gratitude for NA participants and how they realized this in speech. The results also revealed the participants' perceptions of the factors influencing their gratitude behaviors and the rationale behind their gratitude expression choices.

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