

## **A Socio-pragmatic Analysis of Jordanian University Students' Status Updates**

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**Abstract:** Some new sources of communication such as Facebook, WhatsApp and others have contributed to the social and academic development of various individuals worldwide. This socio-pragmatic study aims to investigate types of speech acts and gender differences in language usage among university students, focusing on WhatsApp. WhatsApp is used for various purposes and allows for a wide range of vocabulary and linguistic structures in different expressive formats, including images and text. Specifically, the study purports to examine the increasing use of WhatsApp and understand its impact on social interactions and academic performance of Jordanian university students from three universities. A total of 100 WhatsApp status updates were collected to study the influence of the main factor, gender, on these updates. Subsequently, a questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 100 students to elicit their opinions regarding status updates. The study reveals that personal interests, values, and personalities exhibit significant variability, affecting how students choose to represent themselves through their status updates. Male students often emphasize their academic and professional accomplishments, while female students tend to prioritize social connections and personal experiences. Assertive, directive and expressive speech acts are found to be the most commonly used in our sample's status updates.

**Keywords:** academic achievement, gender differences, speech acts, university students, WhatsApp

### **1. Introduction**

The development of technology has become evident and powerful in recent times through the proliferation of smartphones and advanced computer devices. Their use has become essential and mandatory for various aspects of people's lives, whether social or academic. This development has introduced us to a set of essential smart applications such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These applications have become a source of information and communication that cannot be underestimated. WhatsApp is one of the most widely used applications due to its free version, which is accessible to everyone. Like other applications, WhatsApp has both positive and negative aspects, and the way people or students use it determines its impact. The present study focuses on examining types of speech acts, gender differences and language variations in WhatsApp status updates among students, due to ease of use and the significant popularity of the application.

Information and communication technologies are extensively utilized in nearly all aspects of individuals' lives, encompassing entertainment, education, decision-making, information retrieval, trading, and business, leading to time, effort, and cost savings in daily routines (Bartosik-Purgat, Filimon and Kiygi-Calli 2017). The

use of social media, particularly among higher education students, has seen a significant rise in the past decade, with varying effects on students' academic performance (Alahmar 2016).

Some studies related to Facebook status updates (e.g. Khalaf 2018; Bader and Ababneh 2023) recommended conducting research on WhatsApp status updates due to the scarcity of research targeting this application in the Arab World. There is a need to acquire more knowledge about gender-related Jordanian students' status updates as well as their semantic and pragmatic content, in order to comprehend the implications of social communication within the educational context. The study is worth carrying out because of its social and academic implications as it focuses on benefits of using WhatsApp and because it deals with important social and linguistic issues, i.e. gender and types of speech acts used. Thus, the questions dealt with in the study can be formulated as follows:

1. Does gender play a role in WhatsApp status updating?
2. How can college students WhatsApp status updates be classified within in the Speech Act Theory?
3. Does WhatsApp develop students' lexical ability and improve academic performance?

## 2. Framework and literature review

The theory of speech acts by Austin (1962) is based on important factors where language is used to accomplish actions. According to him, people do not only describe things with words, but they also do things with words. He identified three types of speech acts:

1. Locutionary act: It refers to the utterance of words or sentences.
2. Illocutionary act: It refers to the speaker's intent when making an utterance, such as making a promise, asking a question, inquiring, and so on.
3. Perlocutionary act: It relates to the actual impact of speech on the listeners through their reactions, aspects of emotional differences, and changes in their behavior.

John Searle is credited with developing the theory of speech acts. In his 1969 publication, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Searle delved into the multifaceted nature of language, demonstrating that it not only serves to describe or represent the world but also possesses the power to enact actions and elicit specific consequences within social and interpersonal contexts. Within his theory, Searle (1979) identified five primary categories of speech acts: assertives, directives, expressives, commissives and explanatory. He continued to refine and expand upon this theory in subsequent works. Searle's contributions have left a lasting impact on the fields of linguistics, philosophy of language, and pragmatics. Here are examples of the four main types of speech acts (examples provided are from Searle 1979):

1. Assertive Speech Act: "The Earth revolves around the Sun." (Stating a fact)
2. Directive Speech Act: "Please close the door." (Giving a command)
3. Commissive Speech Act: "I promise to help you move next week." (Making a promise)

#### 4. Expressive Speech act: “I am mad at you” (expressing a feeling or emotion)

These examples demonstrate how speech acts can go beyond mere communication to encompass actions, directives, commitments and emotions that influence the social dynamics and relationships between speakers and hearers.

Works on social media including Facebook and WhatsApp have been common in recent years (Raiman, Richard and Asad 2017; Hamdan and Al-Salman 2021; Shehabat and Rababah 2021; Al-Wazeer and Ashuja’a 2022; Abdalhadi, Al-Khawaldeh, Al Huneiti and Al-Mashaqba 2023). Three interesting works are worth reviewing here. First, Sanchez-Moya and Cruz-Moya (2015) examined the most common discourse forms in WhatsApp messages in order to identify their recurrent pragmatic uses. Analyzing a corpus of 400 WhatsApp statuses, the paper demonstrated the frequent occurrence of multimodal discourse in this kind of communication. Second, Hamdan and Al-Salman (2021) investigated the use of neologisms in most social media platforms, indicating that their use is becoming more frequent with mixed results. Different word-formation processes are at work in the creation of neologisms including loan blends, morpho-syntactic changes, phonemic changes, abbreviations and clippings. Third, Kreuder, Frick, Klütsch, Haehn and Schlittmeier (2024) investigated cyber-aggressive behaviors within adolescents and young adults’ chat groups. Simulated WhatsApp chats made it possible to find out if and how reactions (funny, aggressive, or friendly) influenced the adolescents’ and young adults’ conformity to cyber-aggression. The effect of chat group type—close friends versus fellow students—on the anticipation of aggressive reactions was also investigated. Logistic regression analyses indicated that aggressive group norms can predict cyber-aggression anticipation, but no effect of group type was observed.

Works related mostly to the Jordanian realia include Al-Khatib and Al-Sabbah (2008) who argued that studying the linguistic structure and functional uses of language in text messages on mobile phones may have a dynamic impact on establishing a connection between the speaker and the recipient by switching the code from English to Arabic. This is considered a highly favored strategy by users as they believe it enhances bonding and communication.

Studies on Facebook language include Dawaghreh (2016) who investigated from a social perspective (gender and religion) the ideas and information in the Facebook language used by Jordanian university students. The results emphasize the extent of utilizing linguistic features in Facebook language, the influence of Islamic religion, and the common use of easier language through code-switching or the use of emoticons. The study also reveals the inclination of females towards social statuses, while males favor personal and academic statuses. Regarding Facebook also, Khalaf (2018) investigated the communicative functions of Facebook posts and status updates among individuals aged 21-35 years. The study randomly selected ten statuses and posts with several comments and categorized them based on their semantic domain. The results showed that the most common speech act used in Facebook posts and status updates was assertive.

In the Facebook domain too, Bader and Ababneh (2023), following Searle’s (1969) taxonomy of speech acts, discussed the impact of gender in Facebook status

updates in Jordan. The study found that gender is an effective factor in the use of speech acts in these updates. Significant differences were found between Jordanian males and females. For example, speech acts denoting gratitude were the least common among males, whereas those referring to sports were the least common among females. Furthermore, the study noted that expressives were the most frequently employed speech acts among both genders, while commissives were the least frequent. Additionally, the study identified three categories specific to the Jordanian context, including religious invocations, humor, and quotation, which were not included in Searle's taxonomy.

Handling WhatsApp, Al-Smadi (2017) investigated the relation between social language and gender in WhatsApp statuses by collecting 400 cases within the age group of around 30 years. Several topics were addressed, including religious, social, economic, and political situations, among others. The results showed that social topics are the most commonly used by males, while females favored religious ones. Analyzing WhatsApp language too, Khuwailah (2020) attempted to assess linguistic proficiency in communication and its impact on individuals' social and academic lives. A random sampling approach was employed within the society of North Jordan, specifically focusing on Jordan University of Science and Technology and surrounding area. The sample consisted of both male and female students pursuing B.A., B.Sc., and M.A. degrees (200 respondents for questionnaires and 10 educators and/or parents for semi-structured interviews). Additionally, the researcher closely monitored Jordanian media, both traditional and digital, to gather insights on people's perceptions and reactions towards WhatsApp. Findings showed that WhatsApp had both positive and negative semiotic effects on individuals, contingent upon the users and their intentions. While a considerable number of participants regarded WhatsApp as a source of significant negative behaviors, such as semiotic addiction, academic dishonesty, reduced face-to-face communication, and time wastage, many others perceived it as an excellent digital platform for cost-effective, rapid, and clear communication, capable of handling multimedia content like video clips and images.

Analyzing WhatsApp statuses among students in another northern Jordanian university (Jadara), Rababah (2020) focused on the types of speech acts used. He found that the expressives represented 37 per cent of speech acts, followed by directives (25%), assertives (23%) and commissives (15%). The declarative type was not found. Regarding speech acts too, Ammari, ALmahameed, Bataineh and Al Ahmad (2024) investigated congratulation methods by Jordanian users of social media and the influence of culture on speech acts of congratulation. The researchers compiled a corpus consisting of (400) messages and comments from two major social media, Facebook and WhatsApp. The results of the study showed that the most frequently used strategies of congratulation were illocutionary acts, offer of good wishes, and expression of happiness combined with religious invocations. The role of culture was evident in the religious domain.

Studies related to the present topic and conducted in other countries showed that social media was used positively in the learning process, with students utilizing the platform for assignment discussions, obtaining news and updates on class

schedules and locations, exchanging information with peers, and addressing coursework-related concerns (Boateng and Amankwaa 2016). However, other studies revealed a negative effect of social media use on the academic performance of university students. Students who spent excessive time on social media platforms for chatting were more likely to experience a decline in their academic achievement (Mensah and Nizam 2016). In addition, students who were deeply engaged in networking activities lacked focus and were easily distracted (Ibid.). Support for the negative impact of social media use was evident in a study conducted in four tertiary educational institutions in the UAE, where male students interviewed through focus group sessions reported that extensive social media use had a detrimental impact on class performance and even resulted in class failure in some cases (Alkaabi et al. 2016). These findings were similar to those reported for 220 Turkish male and female students, which revealed that digital technologies and social networking sites negatively impacted students' studies and routines. (Mensah and Nizam 2016)

In relation to academic achievement too, Sutherland et al. (2018) surveyed 106 Australian undergraduate students; 67 per cent of them attributed their academic success to technology use, including social media. Similar results were obtained in a study involving 30 male students at the Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, where students with high GPAs were found to spend considerable time on social media sites and applications (Tayseer, Zoghieb, Alcheikh and Awadallah 2014). Facebook was found to be the most commonly used social media platform among students, followed by WhatsApp.

### **3. Method**

Since this study deals with WhatsApp status updates among Jordanian university students, the first research tool was to collect and classify the updates. For this goal, 100 status updates were collected from male and female students in three Jordanian universities in the north of Jordan. The second tool was a questionnaire in which some specific questions were asked. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to a sample of 100 students from the English Departments of three Jordanian universities. The data was then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively in light of the questions of the study.

Initially, the questionnaire was distributed by email to about 150 students to elicit their opinions about status updates on WhatsApp. Students' emails were obtained from Departments of Registration at these universities. About 115 students filled the questionnaires, but 15 responses were discarded for various reasons such as being incomplete or lacking consistency. The questionnaire method was selected due to its effectiveness in research. The design of the research was carefully crafted to align with the research requirements and encompass the utilization of multiple data sources, such as questionnaires and raw data (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2007). The issues were formulated in the forms of statements to which the respondents had to respond by checking one of the following: Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, strongly disagree. Due to the nature of the investigation, an alternative way was a multiple-choice question like the following:

What type of content do you usually include in your status updates? (Select all that apply)

- (A) Personal experiences
- (B) Academic achievements
- (C) Social events
- (D) Quotes or religious verses
- (E) Political opinions
- (F) Other (please specify)

The population of this study included all English-major students from three universities: Yarmouk University, Jadara University, and Jordan University of Science and Technology. The estimated number of students was around (2200) during the second semester 2022/2023. (Source: Registration Departments in the three universities). The sample included a focus group of 100 students randomly selected: Yarmouk University (14 students), Jadara University (51 students) and Jordan University of Science and Technology (35 students). The number of females was 63 as opposed to 37 males. The number of males and females from each university was determined based on availability and student willingness to participate in the survey.

The validity of the questionnaire was assured by submitting it to a team of professors in linguistics who suggested changes regarding the number of questions, the distribution of scores, the content, form, spelling, and grammar. Their remarks and recommendations were all taken into consideration.

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to examine constructs reliability; it indicated that the minimum acceptable value for a new scale is 0.70. We can notice that the highest value is (0.85), which is suitable to achieve the objectives of the study.

SPSS ver. 26 was used to analyze the data obtained from the study sample; frequencies, percentages, and chi square tests were utilized to reveal the findings.

#### **4. Findings**

The study was aimed to address the following questions:

1. Does gender play a role in WhatsApp status updating? How does this compare with the role of status updates on Facebook?
2. How can college students' WhatsApp status updates be classified within the Speech Act Theory?
3. Does WhatsApp develop students' lexical ability and improve academic performance?

To answer these questions, frequencies and percentages for the students' responses to the items of the questionnaire were tabulated, as shown in Table (1) for item 1:

Table 1. WhatsApp statuses as a means of communicating positive or negative messages

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Totally Disagree	3	3.0
Disagree	9	9.0
Neutral	29	29.0
Agree	30	30.0
Strongly agree	29	29.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows that most of the answers were for agree or strongly agree with 58 per cent, followed by the answer neutral with 29 per cent, and in the final rank came the answer disagree/totally disagree with 12 per cent.

Table 2. Interactive emoticons as a substitute for written text in WhatsApp communication

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0
Disagree	7	7.0
Neutral	27	27.0
Agree	33	33.0
Strongly agree	29	29.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows answers to the second question: most of the answers were for agree or strongly agree with 62 per cent, followed by the answer neutral with 27 per cent, and in the final rank the answer disagree/totally disagree with 11 per cent.

Table 3. The prevalence of religious issues on social media

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly disagree	2	2.0
Disagree	9	9.0
Neutral	22	22.0
Agree	32	32.0
Strongly agree	35	35.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows that most of the answers were for strongly agree or agree with 67 per cent; next was the answer neutral with 22 per cent, and in the final rank the answer strongly disagree with 2 per cent.

Regarding question (4) ‘How often do you update your status on WhatsApp’, most of the answers were: rarely with 41 per cent, immediately followed by the answer multiple times a week with 40 per cent; next was the answer once a day

with 13 per cent, and in the final rank was the answer multiple times a day with 6 per cent,

For question (5) “What type of content do you usually include in your status updates?” 35 out of 100 answers were: religious quotes or verses, followed by the answer social events with 28 per cent and political opinions with 22 per cent. In the final rank came the answers personal experiences, academic achievements and other with 5 per cent for each. These results coincide with the findings obtained from an analysis of students’ WhatsApp statuses collected.

Question (6) was “Do you feel that there are differences in the content of status updates between males and females?” Most of the answers were: not sure with 64 per cent; next came the answer no, there are no noticeable differences, with 24 per cent, and in the final rank the answer Yes, there are noticeable differences with 12 per cent

Question (7) was “How comfortable do you feel expressing your feelings or emotions through status updates?” Most of the answers were: neutral and somewhat uncomfortable with 34 per cent for each, followed by the answer moderately comfortable with 15 per cent, and in the final rank the answer extremely uncomfortable, with 5 per cent.

Question 8 asked: “In your opinion, do status updates play a role in shaping social patterns and gender stereotypes?” Half the students (50) answered in the negative; the remaining 50 were divided almost equally between yes (24) and not sure (26).

Question (9) was “Have you ever received comments or remarks from others about your status updates?” Most of the answers were: Yes with 76 per cent and in the second rank came the answer No with 24 per cent, which means that statuses contribute to social interaction and communication.

Table 4. The nature of comments or remarks made on social media

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Religious quotes like Amen	57	57.0
Compliments from my friends	15	15.0
Congratulations on an achievement	28	28.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows that most of the answers were for religious quotes with 57 per cent, followed by the answer congratulations on an achievement with 28 per cent, and in the final rank came the answer compliments from my friends with 15 per cent.

Table 5. Perceptions of the level of engagement and interaction with status updates in terms of gender

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males are more engaged and interactive	32	32.0
Females are more engaged and interactive	53	53.0
Engagement and interaction levels are equal between males and females	7	7.0
Not sure	8	8.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows the most of the answers were for Females are more engaged and interactive with 53 per cent, followed by the answer Males are more engaged and interactive with 32 per cent, and in the final two ranks came the answers Not sure with 8 per cent and Engagement levels are equal between the two sexes with 7 per cent.

Table 6. The impact of gender differences in status updates on academic performance

Answers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, they have a significant impact	42	42.0
No, they do not have an impact	37	37.0
not sure	21	21.0
Total	100	100.0

The table shows most of the answers were for Yes, they have a significant impact with 42 per cent; this shows that gender differences in status updates can have an impact on academic performance within the university. Research has shown that individuals may perceive and respond differently to status updates based on the gender of the person posting them. This can lead to biases, stereotypes, or unequal treatment, affecting the dynamics of relationships and potentially creating barriers to equal opportunities and inclusion. It is important to address and mitigate these effects to foster a more equitable and inclusive environment within the university (Banikhalef 2019).

The study also computed frequencies and percentages for all study items according to gender, year of the study and university, and computed Chi square to conclude if there are any statistical differences due to these variables, as shown in the following tables:

Table 7. Responses to study items in terms of gender

Items	Answers	Male	female
1. WhatsApp statuses are a way to communicate a positive or negative message directly to the individuals involved.	strongly disagree	0	0
	disagree	3	9
	neutral	20	9
	agree	10	29
	strongly agree	4	16
2. Interactive emoticons are considered a substitute for the written text in the case of WhatsApp that conveys the intended idea.	strongly disagree	0	0
	disagree	6	5
	neutral	8	19
	agree	12	23
	strongly agree	11	16
3. Religious issues are the most used on social media.	strongly disagree	2	0
	disagree	3	6
	neutral	8	14
	agree	9	23
	strongly agree	15	20
4. How often do you update your status on WhatsApp?	multiple times a day	6	0
	once a day	6	7
	multiple times a week	15	25
	rarely	10	31
	5. What type of content do you usually include in your status updates?	personal experiences	2
academic achievements		2	3
social events		12	16
quotes or religious verses		14	21
political		4	18
other		3	2
6. Do you feel that there are differences in the content of status updates between males and females?	yes, there are noticeable differences	5	7
	no, there are no noticeable differences	9	15
	not sure	23	41
	very comfortable	4	8

7. How comfortable do you feel expressing your feelings or emotions through status updates?	moderately comfortable	7	8
	neutral	13	21
	somewhat uncomfortable	9	25
	extremely uncomfortable	4	1
8. In your opinion, do status updates play a role in shaping social patterns and gender stereotypes?	yes, they can reinforce social patterns and gender	6	18
	no, they do not have an impact on social patterns and gender	19	31
	not sure	12	14
9. Have you ever received comments or remarks from others about your status updates? If yes, please describe the nature of the comments/remarks.	yes	31	45
	no	6	18
10. If yes, please describe the nature of the comments/remarks.	amin	26	31
	compliments from my friends	9	6
	congratulations on an achievement	2	26
11. How do you perceive the level of engagement and interaction with status updates between males and females?	males are more engaged and interactive	12	20
	females are more engaged and interactive	20	33
	engagement and interaction levels are equal between males and females	3	4
	not sure	2	6
12. Do you believe that gender differences in status updates have any impact on academic or social relationships within the university?	yes, they have a significant impact	9	33
	no, they do not have an impact	18	19
	not sure	10	11

Table 8. Pearson Chi-Square test for gender comparisons.

Items	Gender		
	Chi	df	Sig.
1. WhatsApp statuses are a way to communicate a positive or negative message directly to the individuals involved.	<b>18.092</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>.000(*, a)</b>
2. Interactive emoticons are considered a substitute for the written text in the case of WhatsApp that conveys the intended idea.	2.355	3	.502(a)
3. Religious issues are the most used on social media.	5.058	4	.281(a,b)
4. How often do you update your status on WhatsApp?	<b>13.485</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>.004(*, a)</b>
5. What type of content do you usually include in your status updates?	5.063	5	.408(a)
6. Do you feel that there are differences in the content of status updates between males and females?	.146	2	.930
7. How comfortable do you feel expressing your feelings or emotions through status updates?	6.276	4	.179(a)
8. In your opinion, do status updates play a role in shaping social patterns and gender stereotypes?	2.439	2	.295(a)
9. Have you ever received comments or remarks from others about your status updates? If yes, please describe the nature of the comments/remarks.	1.951	1	.162
10. If yes, please describe the nature of the comments/remarks.	<b>15.927</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.000(*)</b>
11. How do you perceive the level of engagement and	.613	3	.893(a)

interaction with status updates between males and females?			
12. Do you believe that gender differences in status updates have any impact on academic performance?	<b>7.539</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>.023(*)</b>

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

\* The Chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

a. More than 20% of cells in this subtable have expected cell counts less than 5. Chi-square results may be invalid.

b. The minimum expected cell count in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square results may be invalid.

The chi square showed that there were no statistical differences between males and females except for the following items, in which the differences were always in favor of females:

1. WhatsApp statuses are a way to communicate a positive or negative message directly to the individuals involved.
2. If yes, please describe the nature of the comments/remarks.
3. How often do you update your status on WhatsApp?
4. Do you believe that gender differences in status updates have any impact on academic or social relationships within the university?

## 5. Discussion

This study aimed to uncover types of speech acts and gender differences among Jordanian university students in relation to updating their statuses on WhatsApp and its correlation with academic performance. To achieve this goal, the questions of the study are discussed below.

### 5.1 Discussion of the first question

"Does gender play a role in status updating? How does this role compare with or contrast with its role in Facebook updates?"

The results showed the role of gender differences from the students' perspective. Referring to Questions (5) and (6) above, different percentages of content variation were observed. Answers to question (5) indicate that "quotes or religious verses" showed the highest variation with a percentage of 35 per cent, compared to "social events (28%) and "political opinions" (22%). On the other hand, answers to question (6) revealed the extent of content variation between males and females in WhatsApp status updates. The results showed that the highest responses were for "not sure" with a percentage of 64, while the response "no" received 24 per cent, and "yes" stood at 12 per cent, revealing noticeable differences between the answers. The aforementioned findings somewhat align with ones by Al-Smadi (2017) regarding question 5. They indicate that religious topics are most commonly used by females, while social topics are most commonly used by males.

The least common topics for females were political and economic ones, and for males personal experiences and academic achievements. Regarding question (6) and its comparison to Facebook status updates, the results point to Bader and Ababneh's (2023) study, which shows that religious status updates were more commonly used by both males and females. However, there were differences in the use of other categories.

This result may be due to the fact that Jordanian university students tend to focus on religious statuses as a result of the influence of the Islamic religion in their education and life, a reflection of the Jordanian society at large (Bader and Ababneh 2023; Khuwailah 2020) This influence necessarily compels them to use religious statuses on WhatsApp and other social media platforms.

Examples of status updates involving religious topics and quotes include the following in Arabic with an English translation:

- First and foremost, praise be to the Lord (count your blessings): *أولا وقبل كل شيء احمد ربنا*
- My veil is part of chastity and purity, thank God: *حجابي هو جزء من العفة والنقاء فالحمد لله*
- Oh my God, please guide us to the straight way: *يا الهي اهدنا الصراط المستقيم*
- Man proposes but God disposes, just say o Lord: *العبد يفكر والله يدبر فقط قل يا رب*
- Prayer is your way to paradise. *الصلاة طريقك إلى الجنة.*

Furthermore, when asked whether or not religious issues were the most common topics of status updates, most of the answers were for strongly agree and agree with 67 per cent, followed by neutral with 22 per cent, and in the final rank came the answers strongly disagree and disagree with 11 per cent (Table 3).

## 5.2 Discussion of the second question

In discussing the second question, 'How can college students' WhatsApp status updates be classified within the Speech Act Theory?', it is important to recognize that the categorization of WhatsApp status updates align with the functions of speech acts within the theory of semantics. These functions represent different communicative intentions. For instance, '**Assertives**', as described by Searle (1969), encompass linguistic actions that involve conveying information or sharing news about the world.

For example, quotes like "**To Allah we belong, and to Him we will return**" *إنا لله " وإنا إليه راجعون"* in a status update convey or confirm the news of somebody's death. Another example, with a touch of humor, could be: "**All is good when it is its time, except me; I'm always beautiful.**" *كل شيء بوقته حلو إلا أنا حلوة بكل الأوقات.* Regarding another speech act function, '**Directives**,' we can see them involving specific requests or suggestions. For instance, "**I am starving; I need a place to eat. Give me some ideas.**" *ميتة من الجوع حدا يدلني ع مكان للأكل.*

In this case, the student seeks advice or recommendations from contacts. Another example that involves teasing or challenge to get an answer is the

following: **'You guys hate me, hahaha, prove me wrong.'** أنتو بتكرهوني ههههههه اثبتولي العكس. This instance may prompt a quick response from contacts.

In a religious context, a status update involving directives might read: **'Pray for me.'** ..... ادعولي This constitutes a request with an implied expectation of an 'Amen' response as supported by Table 12 which shows that most of the answers were for quotes or religious verses like "Amen".

Within the speech act **'Expressives,'** emotions or specific situations are articulated. We found examples like **'I'm mad at you,** أنا زعلانة منك' or **'It's raining cats and dogs,** انت تعصبي "You're driving me nuts" الدنيا عم بتشتي كثير. These examples and others underscore the strength of interconnection fostered by status updates among individuals and how they serve diverse functions within social relationships (Bader and Ababneh 2023; Khuwailah 2020; Banikhalef and Rababah 2018; Khalaf 2018).

### 5.3 Discussion of the third question

Does WhatsApp develop students' lexical ability and improve academic performance? Certainly, utilizing the WhatsApp application can indeed contribute to enhancing students' ability to express themselves verbally and expand their intellectual horizons. The communication features offered by this platform have the potential to enrich their vocabulary, language skills, and critical thinking. For instance: **Enhancing Vocabulary:** Through interactions on WhatsApp, students engage in conversations, sharing their thoughts and expressing their ideas. This may happen in various ways, as attested by the respondents and indicated by other studies on Facebook (Paul et al. 2012; Al-Harashah 2014; Alnjadat et al. 2019; Khuwailah 2020; Bader and Ababneh 2023).

- First: **Vocabulary building:** exposure to diverse topics and discussions inherently introduces students to new words and phrases. As they interact with their peers, they may come across unfamiliar terms and endeavor to comprehend and incorporate them into their linguistic use. For example, when discussing a specific topic, such as "code switching," they broaden their knowledge of the specialized terminology in this field.

- Second: **Critical Thinking:** referring to Al-Khatib and Al-Sabbah (2008), we can see that Critical Thinking may occur. Indeed, WhatsApp discussions can stimulate this ability as students share their viewpoints, participate in debates, and analyze different perspectives. This encourages them to assess arguments, provide justifications, and develop well-balanced opinions.

Example: Engaging in a group discussion about the pros and cons of technology in education prompts students to engage in critical thinking regarding the impact of technology on the learning process and society.

- Third: **Cultural Awareness:** Interacting with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds through WhatsApp exposes students to various cultures, languages, and communication styles. This exposure fosters cultural sensitivity and broadens global understanding (Banikhalef and Rababah 2018).

Example: Engaging with international students on WhatsApp may involve learning about customs, traditions, and languages beyond their own cultural context.

- Fourth: Written Expression: Text-based communication on WhatsApp encourages students to effectively convey their ideas in writing. While composing messages, they refine their writing skills, learn to structure arguments, and enhance overall communication clarity (Banikhalef and Rababah 2018; Banikhalef 2019). Example: Crafting a persuasive message in a WhatsApp group to advocate a specific issue improves the student's ability to present a coherent and compelling argument.

In summary, WhatsApp can serve as a dynamic platform enabling students to participate in discussions, exchange ideas, and collaborate with peers, ultimately leading to an improvement in their abilities.

## **6. Conclusion**

The study has shown that WhatsApp is an important platform used by both male and female Jordanian university students. Many of them frequently perform status updates to achieve various purposes. In fact, the majority of students indicate that WhatsApp helps sharpen their lexical ability and academic performance including critical thinking, writing skills, and cultural awareness. The speech acts (assertives, directives and expressives) were the most common in status updates and served the purpose of conveying or confirming information, making requests of various kinds, and showing emotions. Regarding gender differences between males and females, they have been found to be limited in status updates and related to certain preferred topics, as girls favored religious issues and quotes, while boys opted for social issues. Moreover, females were more in favor of some issues than males regarding the following: support of the claims that WhatsApp helped academic performance and that WhatsApp had both a positive and negative impact on social relations. This aligns with findings by other studies on Facebook and telephone messages among students. The present study concludes by recommending other studies on WhatsApp updates among other groups of people like university professors, school students and teachers, bank employees, and other categories.

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