

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF CONGRATULATORY WHATSAPP MESSAGES: LANGUAGE, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL HIERARCHIES

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Abstract:

This study explores the sociolinguistic dimensions of congratulatory messages exchanged on WhatsApp, a prominent medium of digital communication in Pakistan. Such messages, shared to celebrate personal or professional milestones, are examined as linguistic acts that construct identity, express solidarity, and negotiate social hierarchies. Grounded in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), the research investigates how linguistic choices particularly the use of English serve as markers of power, prestige, and social distinction in digital discourse. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study analyzes 50 naturally occurring congratulatory messages collected from participants of varying ages, genders, and professional backgrounds. Using thematic discourse analysis, the research identifies patterns in politeness strategies, linguistic forms, and code-switching between English and Urdu. The findings reveal that formal English is often used to convey respect toward higher-status individuals, while informal tone, humor, and bilingual expressions are employed in peer interactions to signal intimacy and solidarity. The study concludes that WhatsApp communication reflects, rather than diminishes, social hierarchies, with language functioning as a key tool for enacting identity and managing social relations.

Keywords: *WhatsApp, Politeness Theory, Pakistani English, digital sociolinguistics, language and identity*

1. Introduction:

Language is not only a tool of communication but also a social tool that portrays power, self-identity and cultural values. In the present digitalized society, online platforms like WhatsApp provide a necessary space in which linguistic interactions take place and social meanings are negotiated. WhatsApp which is one of the most common social media apps in Pakistan is a significant medium of person-to-person and group communication.

Among them, congratulatory messages are an important speech act that indicates the strategic use of language to show politeness, protect social relationships, and support social system. These short messages but very contextual, are used to denote social events like promotions, academic achievements, weddings, or other personal achievements. They are not only a form of goodwill but also subtle signs of the power relationships, prestige, and social identity.

In the Pakistani context where the borders of classes and verbal hierarchy are closely interlaced, the English language use in the digital setting tends to be associated with education, refinement, and promotion. In turn, the adoption of English in congratulatory WhatsApp messages can be regarded as a linguistic approach, which is associated with the aspects of politeness and social maintenance. Applying the Politeness Theory (1987) by **Brown and Levinson**, the analysis of

such interactions can bring significant information on how people control respect, familiarity and social distance across the internet.

2. Literature review:

The section is a review of the key theoretical and empirical work that underlies the current study entitled A Sociolinguistic Study of Congratulatory WhatsApp Messages: Language, Identity, and Social hierarchies. The review discusses how sociolinguistics is related to the topic of digital discourse, WhatsApp as a platform of communication, and the linguistic strategies that humans use to display politeness, identity, and social status in the online environment. It also explores the role of English in Pakistan as a symbol of social status and talks of the intersection of politeness theories and code switching, as well as digital communication in the Pakistani social cultural context.

This section, through a critical analysis of previous literature, is expected to contextualize the present study as part of the wider discipline into the realm of digital sociolinguistics and indicate the existing gap in the research which the present study will address.

2.1. Theory: The Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson

The Politeness Theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is the theoretical framework of this study. The theory argues that social interaction participants seek to maintain face, or their public self-image that has two aspects, positive face (the need to be liked and approved of) and negative face (the need to be free of imposition). Communication implies a number of face-threatening acts (FTAs), and politeness strategies employed by speakers to curb possible threats may be positive, negative, or off-record.

As an illustration, congratulations to a superior require deference and formal expression but congratulations to a peer welcome informality and comradeship. The framework provided by Brown and Levinson can, therefore, be used to interpret how WhatsApp users can use linguistic strategies to build respect, familiarity, and hierarchy in online communication.

2.2. Digital Communication and Sociolinguistics

The emergence of computer communication has transformed the role of language in social life. Historically face-to-face interaction has been a subject of interest in sociolinguistics but Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is now a field of legitimate study.

According to Androutsopoulos (2011) such characteristics mark social identities and group identities in the online areas. The use of WhatsApp as a hybrid means of communication, a mixture of speech-like immediacy and text-based permanence, can serve as a good source of sociolinguistic analysis.

2.3 WhatsApp as a Digital Discourse Media

WhatsApp has become one of the most popular web-based communication tools in the world, and especially in Pakistan. It gives an opportunity to communicate privately, instantly, and personally using messages, voice notes, photos, and videos.

WhatsApp has several communicative purposes in Pakistan- it is used personally, in education or in business. Its accessibility and flexibility of the language means that users commonly alternate between English, Urdu and regional languages based on situation and relationship. This attributes WhatsApp to be a perfect location in analyzing language variation, politeness, and identity construction.

2.4. Language, Power and Social Hierarchies in the Pakistani Context

Pakistan is a multi-lingual nation and the utilisation of language is highly connected to the class, education, and power (Rahman, 2010). The English language is placed in a superior position as the language of education, government and promotion. Urdu is the national lingua franca and ethnic and local identities are represented by regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, and Sindhi.

The language reflects and recreates the social power structures just as Fairclough (2001) suggests. English is a language of symbolism of being elite and sophisticated in Pakistan. In such applications as WhatsApp, people tend to use English or a combination of English and Urdu to indicate sophistication and progressive surroundings.

2.5. English as a Sign of Status and Pride in Pakistan

Rahman (2011), Mahboob (2009) and Mansoor (2005) are some of the scholars who have widely written about the sociolinguistic importance of English in Pakistan. English, which is a colonial heritage has become an influential status and world-connecting symbol. Rahman (2010) notes that English is not only a means of economic progress but it is also used as a cultural identity of a high social status.

Mahboob (2009) writes about the development of linguistic and pragmatic peculiarities of the so-called Pakistani English that does not resemble either British or American version. In WhatsApp communication, people use English to show education or identify with urban or cosmopolitan identities. The application of English in congratulatory messages, particularly that is sent to superiors or other respected individuals, depicts the fact that it has long been associated with politeness, formality, and respect.

2.6. Politeness Strategies in On-line Communication

Digital politeness is a topic that has been under extensive scholarly examination in the recent past. The authors like Locher (2013) and Darics (2015) have stressed that digital politeness works not exactly the same as face-to-face communication because physical gestures, tones, and expression are substituted by the text.

According to Holmes, politeness is context specific (2013), and in collectivist culture such as that of Pakistan, harmony and deference are significant to the communicative action. Praise messages are therefore minor efforts to balance between social orders.

2.7 Construction of Identity and Code-Switching in Digital Texts

Code-switching- a behavior of using two or more languages alternately in a conversation- is one of the frequent language practices of a multilingual society. According to Gumperz (1982), it is a signalling identity, solidarity or distance tool. Pakistani WhatsApp conversations often have users switching between English and Urdu, with English being used to demonstrate prestige and Urdu being used to express affection or even religiousness (e.g., "MashaAllah! So happy for your success").

Androutsopoulos (2015) considers these types of hybrid linguistic practices as identity performances that enable users to create various selves modern, traditional, professional, or intimate depending on the situation.

2.8 Literature Review on the Past Research on the WhatsApp Communication

A number of studies have analyzed WhatsApp as a platform of digital sociolinguistics practice. Tagg and Seargeant (2014) discussed the role of WhatsApp messages as an identity-constructive

and bonding behavior. Darics (2015) highlighted that the online messages involve a pragmatic force that is similar to oral speech and can affect social relations and group solidarity.

2.9. Research Gap

Sociolinguistic studies of how interactions via everyday WhatsApp, particularly congratulatory messages, are connected with the problem of language, identity, and social hierarchy in Pakistan are deficient. The available research is predominantly technical and does not take into consideration how the choice of language can have a polite, powerful, or even sociocultural impact. This paper bridges this gap by attempting to analyze how English and code-switching in WhatsApp congratulatory messages reproduce and negotiate social hierarchies, cultural ideologies, and sociocultural norms. Through the interaction of linguistic, sociocultural and politeness strategies, it brings out how people build their identity and the way they deal with people in digital communication using language.

2.10. Significance of the Study

This study is important in a number of crucial respects. First, the study uses WhatsApp messages to place the linguistic behavior in the shifting digital culture in Pakistan. Secondly, it helps gain an insight into the language and power within the multilingual society. The paper points out the ways that people subconsciously or unconsciously use English to reference prestige and politeness in the online interactions. Third, the findings of this study give empirically supported accounts of the functioning of the Politeness Theory developed by Brown and Levinson in Pakistani online settings. Lastly, the conclusions have general consequences to digital sociolinguistics that provide clues to the fact that technology mediated communication recreates instead of solves social disparities.

2.11. Objectives of the Study

The current paper will require the following goals:

In order to examine the linguistic qualities and politeness strategies in congratulatory messages sent in WhatsApp in the Pakistani digital discourse.

To discuss the strategic application of English as an indicator of social identity, prestige and hierarchy.

To test the hypothesis that language selections are indicators and perpetuators of social relationships like respect, familiarity, and status inequalities.

2.12. Research Questions

Having the above objectives in mind, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

What linguistic and politeness strategies are used in congratulatory messages posted in WhatsApp?

What role does the use of English in these messages play in terms of identity, prestige and social stratification in Pakistani society?

How do the participants bargain power relations and social distance using their language choice?

3. Research Methodology

This section characterizes the methodological framework to explore the sociolinguistic aspects of congratulatory message sent on WhatsApp in the Pakistani setting. It outlines the study design, sample, data gathering methods, analysis, and ethical reflection. The research uses a qualitative method to discuss the identity, politeness strategies and code-switching practices in digital communication in terms of identity, hierarchy and power relationship.

3.1. Research Design

The qualitative sociolinguistic study is to investigate the nature of language use in a natural situation. The qualitative methods help to develop a profound insight into meanings, intentions, and cultural norms of the underlying linguistic behavior. This design enables one to interpret language as a social practice, in terms of the pragmatic and ideological role of congratulatory messages and not its linguistic structure.

3.2 Participants

A sample size of 50 WhatsApp users of different age groups, gender, professions, and social classes was used. The respondents were university students, teachers, government employees, business professionals, family members, friends and classmates. Each participant was sampled using the purposive sampling because they all were frequent users of WhatsApp, and agreed to provide genuine congratulatory messages.

3.3 Data Collection

There were 50 naturally occurring congratulatory messages that were gathered to do this study. These messages were acquired, with full knowledge of the participants, on various occasions such as academic success, career advancement, marriages and religious festivities. The anonymization of all screenshots was also used to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Data were subsequently coded and analyzed.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The Politeness Theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) helped to guide the analysis and was centered on the manner in which messages are expressed with regard to positivity in terms of solidarity and approvals and negativism in terms of respect and deference. The messages were analysed on:

- Linguistic forms (language choice, form and tone),
- Strategies of politeness (honorifics, indirectness, or praise),
- The patterns of code-switching between English and Urdu, and
- Social signs of identity and stratification.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The subjects gave informed consent to share their WhatsApp messages. Their contact information and the identities were also kept secret. Transcription of data was done by eliminating all identifiable information. The research ethics were fully followed in the research and no data were used or disseminated outside the academic use.

4. Data Analysis and Discussions

This section includes the analysis, interpretation and discussion of fifty of the most natural congratulatory messages shared on WhatsApp on different events such as academic success, job promotions, weddings, and religious holidays. Its main aim is to explore the relationship between linguistic choices, code-switching and politeness strategies as indicators of social hierarchies and creation of identity against the Pakistani socio-cultural setting. The discussion applies Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as a model of how people use language to save face, maintain solidarity, and exercise bargaining power.

In line with this, this section explores the operation of positive and negative politeness strategies, code-switching and tactical use of English as means to construct identity, express relational dynamics, and reflect social hierarchies in digital interactions.

4.1 Overview of the Data

The dataset will consist of 50 natural congratulatory WhatsApp messages that will be gathered amongst different people aged differently, gender, and other social backgrounds. These messages were gathered in a form of naturally occurring conversations and were sorted into five broad social situations that often experience congratulatory expressions in the Pakistani society:

4.1.1 Academic Achievements

The Messages include graduation, examination results and admission success.

4.1.2 Professional Milestones

Job promotions, appointments, and awards are included in messages.

4.1.3 Weddings and Engagements

Marriage announcements and engagement ceremonies are some of the messages.

4.1.4 Religious Celebrations

It contains messages like Eid greetings, completion of Umrah or Hajj and Quran recitation ceremonies.

4.1.5 Socio-Cultural Festivals

There are messages like Mother day, Father day, Teacher day and Independence day.

This classification presents a systematic examination of linguistic characteristics, politeness behaviors, and socio-cultural trends. Moreover, it emphasizes how digital communication reflects social identity, cultural norms, and hierarchical relations in everyday interactions.

4.2. WhatsApp Congratulatory Messages on Academic Achievements

Message 1 (Graduation Success)

"Well done on your graduation! It is major accomplishment and your diligence has laid the foundation of a prosperous future. To do what you believe in with all your heart!"

Analysis: It is a congratulatory message using positive politeness techniques. "Well done... and ...major accomplishment and your your diligence" phrases appeal to positive face. Vocabulary is formal but friendly, indicating respect and a personal relationship.

Discussion: The message emphasizes success and persistence. The polite tone suits semi-formal digital interaction (e.g., senior → junior). It shows a balance between solidarity and respect, and how language choices negotiate social distance.

Message 2 (Graduation Success)

Your determination and hard work are a testament to your graduation. This is a well-deserved success, congratulations! Wish you the best in life and inexhaustible opportunities.

Analysis: The message is formal and respectful, showing admiration through positive politeness. Expressions like "testament to your graduation" and "well-deserved success" convey praise and respect.

Discussion: This message is respectful, honoring and optimistic, which is a characteristic of academic politeness rules. The formal tone implies medium social distance, which is appropriate in the relationship within the working environment or in school.

Message 3 (Examination Success)

"Woohoo! You did it! You did pass your exam, congratulations, you really deserve it!"

Analysis: The message uses colloquial and expressive language as a marker of positive politeness. Phrases like "Woohoo!" and "you really deserve it" express emotional closeness and appreciation.

Discussion: The informal tone indicates solidarity and reduced social distance, typical among equals or close friends. It shows how WhatsApp users use informal English to express warmth and

equality, reflecting the role of language in constructing identity and relationships in digital discourse.

Message 4 (Examination Success)

"Fantastic news! It is a wonderful thing that you passed your exam, your perseverance and hard work are so impressive!"

Analysis: The message combines excitement and respect through expressive yet polite wording (*Fantastic news* and *so impressive*). Compliments on perseverance and effort reflect positive politeness strategies that recognize and appreciate the receiver's qualities.

Discussion: The moderate level of formality suggests balanced social distance appropriate for friends or academic peers. Emphasis on effort and achievement reinforces values of academic identity and mutual respect within WhatsApp communication.

Message 5 (Admission Success)

Congratulations on your admission! Your hard work and perseverance have conducted new openings to you-May the road of success attend you everywhere.

Analysis: The message uses formal and encouraging language expressing positive politeness through praise and good wishes. Terms like "*hard work* and *perseverance*" highlight achievement and recognition, strengthening the recipient's positive face.

Discussion: The message reflects courtesy and respect, appropriate for teacher-student or senior-junior relationships. The metaphor of "*new openings*" symbolizes academic growth and supports the maintenance of social harmony and hierarchy through polite digital communication.

Message 6 (Admission Success)

"Well done! This opportunity is a reward of your labor and willpower; hope this academic path augers well in advance."

Analysis: The message employs positive politeness through direct praise ("*Well done!*") and recognition of individual effort ("*labor* and *willpower*") that shows appreciation and encouragement. It combines an informal and respectful tone, expressing support and success acknowledgment.

Discussion: The semi-formal tone fits relationships such as peer-to-peer or teacher-student. By emphasizing merit and effort, the message reinforces academic identity and the maintenance of respectful and supportive social relations in digital interactions.

Message 7 (Book Publication)

My best regards of your new book! Your efforts and perceptions are indeed brilliant through your work.

Analysis: The message employs formal and appreciative language, showing positive politeness through praise and recognition of intellectual effort. The phrase "*indeed brilliant through your work*" expresses admiration and respect.

Discussion: The message maintains academic respect and acknowledgment, fitting within professional hierarchies such as among colleagues or mentors. It reinforces the recipient's academic identity and uses politeness strategies to express solidarity and recognition in a scholarly context.

Message 8 (Academic Achievement)

"Your work is not only a result of hard work but also a great desire to learn. It is a fantastic accomplishment! Congratulations!"

Analysis: This message is based on admiration and appreciation and lays emphasis on hard work and passion for learning. The structure is a blend of compliment and praise, showing positive politeness and enhancing the recipient's positive face.

Discussion: The tone is formal yet friendly, appropriate in academic or workplace contexts. It promotes respect and acknowledgment of achievement, reflecting how language conveys social recognition and hierarchy in digital communication.

4.3. WhatsApp Congratulatory Messages on Professional Milestones

Message 9 (Job Appointment)

"You really are suited to this position. Congratulations on being appointed and I wish you a successful professional life to come!"

Analysis: The message conveys respect and approval, using positive politeness through recognition of merit and competence. The formal and respectful wording reflects professional admiration and optimism.

Discussion: This message reinforces professional identity and reflects hierarchical respect in workplace communication. It demonstrates how politeness and praise function to maintain status and social harmony in digital discourse.

Message 10 (Job Appointment)

"Congratulations on your new appointment! May this new phase also make you successful, stable and bless you a lot."

Analysis: The message employs positive politeness through formal congratulations and blessings (*"May this new phase also make you..."*) that combine respect with emotional warmth. The blessing structure reflects cultural and relational values within professional communication.

Discussion: The language reflects cultural politeness that blends formality and empathy, reinforcing professional respect and hierarchical acknowledgment. It highlights how politeness and positive expressions maintain social harmony and identity in digital discourse.

Message 11 (Promotion)

"Hearty congratulations on the promotion of your merited rise! Due to your hard work and commitment, you have indeed paid off, and I hope you keep achieving in your newly acquired position."

Analysis: The message uses formal and appreciative language with positive politeness strategies such as direct praise (*"promotion of your merited rise"*) and acknowledgment of effort (*hard work and commitment*) reflect respect and social recognition.

Discussion: The message demonstrates professional politeness and hierarchical respect, showing how formal language and praise construct professional identity and maintain social harmony in workplace communication.

Message 12 (Promotion)

"A promotion is the correct decision to give you! You are so intelligent, understanding, creative and dedicated. Well done in this success you have created."

Analysis: The message uses emotional and descriptive language with positive politeness strategies, such as admiration and praise (*"intelligent, understanding, creative and dedicated"*) to highlight the recipient's valued qualities and acknowledge individual achievement.

Discussion: The personal and informal tone reflects close social relations and positive face orientation, showing how language choice and emotional involvement help express solidarity and appreciation in professional hierarchies.

Message 13 (Project Completion / Award)

“Having seen how much effort you put into your project, I am sure that you truly deserved this win. You are very much congratulated on the completion of your project, and these high honors.”

Analysis: The message uses personal observation and positive politeness to express sincerity and admiration. The phrase *“truly deserved”* acknowledges effort and achievement enhancing the recipient’s positive face.

Discussion: The message reflects closeness and mutual respect, showing how language choice reinforces social bonds and recognition in hierarchical or semi-formal contexts. It demonstrates the role of positive politeness in maintaining solidarity and appreciation.

Message 14 (Award / Achievement)

“Congratulations on your award! It has really paid off your efforts and hard work in your work. Keep reaching for the stars!”

Analysis: The message uses formal and positive politeness to acknowledge the recipient’s effort and dedication. The phrase *“truly paid off”* recognizes achievement and enhances the recipient’s positive face. The motivational element (*“keep reaching for the stars”*) adds encouragement.

Discussion: The message reflects moderate social distance, suitable for formal or semi-personal communication. It demonstrates how language conveys appreciation, reinforces effort, and maintains social recognition in achievement-oriented contexts.

Message 15 (Retirement)

“Your retirement has been congratulated! It has been my pleasure to work with you. I hope you are well and happy and with the liberty you have to show up and do all those things you never had time to do.”

Analysis: The message uses positive politeness to express appreciation, respect, and good wishes. Phrases like *“my pleasure to work with you”* and *“I hope you are well and happy”* recognize the retiree’s contributions and reinforce positive face.

Discussion: The message reflects respect for seniority and professional contribution, while maintaining interpersonal warmth. It demonstrates how language in digital communication can construct social identity and recognition within hierarchical relationships.

Message 16 (Retirement)

“Warmest congratulations on an extensive and a successful career! Your imagination and work spirit have been the real inspiration, and I know you will always be happy and fulfill the purpose whatever you will do in future.”

Analysis: The message expresses positive politeness, recognizing the retiree’s creativity, dedication, and contributions. The mention of the future (*“you will always be happy and fulfill the purpose...”*) reflects optimism and support.

Discussion: It reinforces professional identity and respect for seniority, showing how digital communication constructs hierarchical relationships and social recognition in a workplace setting.

4.4. WhatsApp Congratulatory Messages on Weddings

Message 17 (Marriage)

“Congratulations, you are getting married! May the love, joy, and beautiful memories fill the way you spend together.”

Analysis: The message shows positive politeness through affectionate and inclusive wishes (*love, joy, and beautiful memories*) and it emphasizes emotional support and goodwill.

Discussion: It constructs a social identity for the couple entering a new life stage and reflects emotional and egalitarian social relations, aligning with the sociolinguistic norms of digital congratulatory messages.

Message 18 (Marriage)

“Congratulations to your marriage! May Allah bring your hearts together in worship, may Allah bless your household, and bring you good children.”

Analysis: The message shows positive politeness through religious and culturally respectful wishes (“*May Allah bring your hearts together...*”) emphasizing goodwill and spiritual support.

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms, constructs ingroup identity, and demonstrates collectivist values such as family, faith, and social solidarity.

4.5. WhatsApp Congratulatory Messages on Religious Celebrations

Message 19 (Umrah)

“During this Umrah, I hope Allah empowers and gives you the strength to do your Umrah with good intentions. May He lead you and pour His everlasting blessings. Umrah Mubarak!”

Analysis: The message demonstrates religious politeness through prayers and blessings (“*May He lead you...*”) showing goodwill and respect.

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms, constructs shared religious identity, and strengthens ingroup solidarity through faith-based expressions.

Message 20 (Umrah)

“The Umrah trip is a reminder of the fact that Allah is the Most Merciful and Forgiving. May your efforts be accepted. Umrah Mubarak!”

Analysis: This message is a combination of praise, reflection and prayer which is rich in theological consciousness (“*Allah is the Most Merciful and Forgiving*”). It employs good manners by empathy and spiritual support where emphasis is made on the acceptance of actions- a major religious issue.

Discussion: It reflects shared Muslim identity, emphasizes collective religious values, and subtly reduces social hierarchy through religious humility.

Message 21 (Umrah)

“May Ihram be pure, Tawaf be perfect, and Sa'i be accepted. May Allah take care of the details of each of your Umrah steps and bring you a blessed home.”

Analysis: The message shows religious politeness through blessings and care, expressing empathy and respect for the sacred practices (“*Ihram, Tawaf, Sa'I*”).

Discussion: It reflects shared Muslim identity and ingroup religious and cultural solidarity, emphasizing spiritual support and social cohesion through faith-based communication.

Message 22 (Hajj)

“May Allah accept your Hajj, forgive your sins and give you no-endless peace and prosperity. Hajj Mubarak!”

Analysis: The message shows religious politeness through supplication and blessings (“*May Allah accept...*,” *“forgive your sins*”), expressing respect and goodwill toward the recipient.

Discussion: It reflects shared Muslim identity and spiritual solidarity, emphasizing social cohesion and politeness within the religious-cultural hierarchy.

Message 23 (Hajj)

Congratulations, the best of luck on doing Hajj! May Allah grant you all the steps you made on his path and bestow you with infinite barakah. Remember us in your prayers.”

Analysis: The message combines congratulation with religious supplication, showing respect and attentiveness toward the recipient's accomplishment.

Discussion: It reflects shared religious identity and spiritual solidarity, indicating social cohesion and polite acknowledgment within the faith-based community.

Message 24 (Quran Completion)

"MashaAllah! Thank God, you have finished reciting the Holy Quran, and it will be a guide to you in both this world and the Hereafter."

Analysis: The message is religious and respectful, with *MashaAllah* serving as positive politeness by conveying admiration without envy. The wording emphasizes spiritual guidance and blessings.

Discussion: It reflects shared religious identity and unity, strengthening the social and spiritual connection between sender and recipient in line with Islamic sociolinguistic conventions.

Message 25 (Quran Completion)

"Nice job, MashaAllah, beautiful! May Allah raise your knowledge, and bring you barakah in the recitation of you!"

Analysis: The message combines expressive praise (*"what a beautiful accomplishment!"*) and religious supplication (*"May Allah increase you in knowledge and grant you barakah"*). Positive politeness acknowledges effort and spiritual merit.

Discussion: It reflects friendliness, respect, and encouragement, highlighting shared religious values and faith-based identity in the context of Quran recitation.

Message 26 (Religious Festival – Ramadan)

"May Ramadan bring you joy and fortune. May the light of Ramdan overcome the darkness and have faith in your heart. Ramadan Mubarak!"

Analysis: The message is formal, religious, and poetical. The phrases of blessings (*"joy and fortune"*) and positive politeness (*"...light of Ramdan overcome the darkness and have faith in your heart"*) are used to show care and admiration.

Discussion: It reflects religious and cultural sensitivity, emphasizes shared Islamic values, and strengthens faith-based identity and ingroup solidarity.

Message 27 (Religious Festival – Ramadan)

"It is this holy month, my Allah sprinkle his blessings on you and your household. I wish you a pleasant and happy Ramadan!"

Analysis: This message is a mix of religious appeal (*"may Allah sprinkle His blessings"*) and warm and non-discriminatory greetings (*"you and your household"*) which is a sign of positive politeness. The language focuses on care, goodwill and the common good which is the communal nature of the Ramadan celebrations.

Discussion: It reflects religious respect, social connectedness, and collective Islamic identity, suitable for both intimate and formal relationships.

Message 28 (Religious Greeting – Jumma Mubarak)

"I only hope that this Jumma will be full of peace, happiness, and forgiveness to your life. Jumma Mubarak!"

Analysis: This message is warm, sincere and spiritually oriented language, one that speaks of positively polite things by blessing people (*"peace, joy, and forgiveness"*). It is a personal, emotional supportive tone, intended to improve the positive face of the recipient towards him or her through care and goodwill.

Discussion: It reflects religious respect, spiritual solidarity, and Islamic communal identity, marked by the culturally appropriate greeting “Jumma Mubarak.”

Message 29 (Religious Greeting – Jumma Mubarak)

“Wish you and your family Jumma Mubarak. May the blessings of Allah keep our hearts prepared to his remembrance, and be thankful to his blessings.”

Analysis: The message shows positive politeness through religious blessings and family-oriented goodwill.

Discussion: It reflects Islamic group identity, respect, and spiritual solidarity, appropriate for both formal and intimate relations.

Message 30 (Religious Festival – Eid-ul-Fitr)

“Wish you and your family a happy Eid-ul-Fitr! May Allah accept your fasts, prayers and good deeds and leave your life full of happiness and peace.”

Analysis: The message conveys positive politeness through religious blessings and inclusion of the recipient’s family. The mention of the religious practices (“fasts, prayers and good deeds”) displays respect and common spiritual values.

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms, spiritual values, and ingroup solidarity, suitable for formal and intimate relations.

Message 31 (Religious Festival – Eid-ul-Fitr)

“May Allah receive all the dua, all the rakah and all the charity. May our Lord bless us with Ramadan again. Eid Mubarak!”

Analysis: The message uses positive politeness through spiritual blessings (*“bless us with Ramadan once again”*) and inclusive religious language (“all the dua, all the rakah and all the charity”).

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms and shared religious identity reinforcing ingroup solidarity and piety, suitable for both close and formal relationships.

Message 32 (Religious Festival – Eid-ul-Adha)

May Allah bless all your sacrifices and compensate you with happy and successful life. Eid ul Adha Mubarak!”

Analysis: The message uses positive politeness through blessings (*“happy and successful life”*) and recognition of the recipient’s devotion (*“bless all your sacrifices”*).

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms, emphasizing faith, respect, and ingroup identity, suitable for both personal and professional contexts.

Message 33 (Religious Festival – Eid-ul-Adha)

“May the spirit of sacrifice during Eid al-Adha make you come even closer to Allah and make your life peaceful, full of love and prosperous. Eid Mubarak!”

Analysis: The message conveys positive politeness through blessings, highlighting religious affiliation (*“closer to Allah”*) and personal welfare (*“life peaceful, full of love and prosperous”*).

Discussion: It reflects Islamic sociolinguistic norms, strengthening religious identity, ingroup cohesion, and collective values, suitable for both intimate and formal interactions.

Message 34 (Religious Celebration – Mawlid al-Nabi)

“Assalamu alaikum wa salatullah. On this holy day of Mawlid al-Nabi {Silla Llahu Alayhi WaSallam} may Allah shower the Noor, mercy, and love of his Beloved Prophet upon your heart {Salla Llahu Alayhi WaSallam}”

Analysis: The message uses formal, respectful, and religiously rich language. The blessings (“*Noor, mercy, and love of his Beloved Prophet*”) reflect positive politeness and strengthen the spiritual and religious identity of the recipient.

Discussion: It aligns with Islamic sociolinguistic norms, emphasizing reverence, piety, and communal religious values, suitable for formal and semi-formal Muslim interactions.

Message 35 (Religious Celebration – Mawlid al-Nabi)

“Duniya Ki Har Fiza Me Ujala Rasool Ka Ye Sari Kainat Hay Sadqa Rasool Ka Khushboo Ghulab Hay Pasina Rasool Ka Ap Ko Bhi Ho Mubarak Mahina Rasool Ka”

Analysis: The message uses poetic and expressive language, with imagery (“*Ujala [light], Khushboo [fragrance], Pasina [sweat of the Prophet]*”) that reflects admiration and spiritual reverence. Positive politeness is applied through blessings and exaltation, reinforcing communal religious identity.

Discussion: It demonstrates how religious devotion and cultural creativity strengthen ingroup cohesion and communal celebration. The poetic style is suitable for peers, family, or local community interactions, showing language as a tool to enhance spiritual and cultural identity.

Message 36 (Religious Celebration – Rabi-ul-Awal)

Aslamo Alakum RABI-UL-AWAL Sharif MUBARAKH. Nisar tayri chahl pahl per hazaron Eidain Rabi-ul-awal, Siwa ablees k jhan main sabhe tou khushian mana rahay hain.

Analysis: This message combines the greetings of tradition, the expressions of celebration and religious-moral opposition (the word “*ablees*”) to bring blessing and religious ecstasy. Given that there is mutual delight and commitment, there is positive politeness. It is culturally rooted, festive, emphatic, and high-energy, indicating the involvement of the community.

Discussion: It reflects community-based sociolinguistic norms, emphasizing shared religious identity, moral consciousness, and cultural unity. The style is suitable for interactions among friends, relatives, and community members participating in Rabi-ul-Awal celebrations.

4.6. WhatsApp Congratulatory Messages on Socio-Cultural Festivals

Message 37 (Teacher’s Day)

“Dear Teacher, I would not be what I am today without your advice and wisdom. Happy Teacher Day, Thank you!”

Socio-Cultural Analysis

The message conveys respect and gratitude to the teacher. Positive politeness is shown through thanking and acknowledging guidance, which reinforces the teacher’s authority and prestige.

Discussion: It reflects cultural norms of respecting educators in Pakistan, strengthening social hierarchy and mentor-student relationships. Recognition of the teacher’s role promotes social harmony and aligns with societal expectations of deference to elders and mentors.

Message 38 (Teacher’s Day)

“You were a good teacher and always knew how to open the mind of a soul. Happy Teacher Fairy To my favorite teacher!”

Socio-Cultural Analysis: The message combines respect and emotional warmth. Positive politeness is conveyed through praise and admiration, highlighting the teacher’s authority and inspirational role.

Discussion: It reflects cultural norms of teacher-student relationships in Pakistan, balancing hierarchy with personal closeness. The message reinforces the teacher’s role as a mentor while

expressing gratitude and emotional connection, aligning with societal expectations of respect and interpersonal rapport.

Message 39 (Mother's Day)

"Without you, I would have a hollow and miserable world. You are the greatest encouragement and the most vocal fan of my life. Love you, Mom. Happy Mother's Day!"

Analysis: The message is emotionally expressive, using positive politeness to acknowledge the mother's central role in the sender's life.

Discussion: It reflects cultural norms of filial respect and family hierarchy in Pakistani/Islamic contexts. The language conveys warmth and gratitude, reinforcing the mother's social and emotional significance while adhering to socio-cultural expectations of respect and affection.

Message 40 (Mother's Day)

"Happy Mother's Day! You are the centre of our household, the spring of our energies and why we always smile on every day."

Analysis: The message is inclusive and collective ("*our household, the spring of our energies and why we always smile...*") that shows positive politeness to recognize the mother's central role in maintaining family cohesion and happiness.

Discussion: It reflects cultural norms of maternal respect and family hierarchy in Pakistani society. The language emphasizes the mother's social and emotional significance, conveying warmth and admiration in line with socio-cultural expectations for familial acknowledgment on special occasions.

Message 41 (Father's Day)

"You are the mainstay of our family and the life of our lives. Happy Father Day full of Love and big smiles!"

Analysis: The message is collective and respectful, using positive politeness to acknowledge the father's central role as the family's moral and social foundation ("*mainstay of our family*").

Discussion: It reflects cultural norms of paternal respect and hierarchy in Pakistani society. The language emphasizes the father's authority, guidance, and responsibility while balancing warmth and emotional attachment, demonstrating how congratulatory messages reinforce both hierarchical recognition and familial bonds.

Message 42 (Father's Day)

"Happy Father's Day! The work of love, power and strength you have had to give me, I could never have asked."

Analysis: The message expresses personal gratitude and positive politeness, recognizing the father's guidance, support, and contribution.

Discussion: It emphasizes filial respect, emotional closeness, and acknowledgment of the father's role in the family hierarchy. The message illustrates how intimate, personal expressions coexist with hierarchical recognition in Pakistani socio-cultural contexts.

Message 43 (Birthday – Friend)

"Happy Birthday, you dear friend of mine! Whether you are there or not is what makes life better. May you have a happy day, a happy day with laughter, love, and all the beautiful."

Analysis: The message uses warm, friendly language with positive politeness expressed through praise and affectionate wishes.

Discussion: It reinforces egalitarian peer relationships, strengthens social bonds, and reflects the cultural value of emotional expressiveness among friends. The message constructs the recipient's identity as a valued friend rather than in a hierarchical role.

Message 44 (Birthday – Son)

“Happy Birthday, dear son! May Allah purify your heart, make your dreams come true and make your life rich with barakah.”

Analysis: The message combines religious blessings with parental affection, using positive politeness to convey moral, spiritual, and personal growth. Prayers are used to give positive politeness exuding moral, spiritual, and personal growth (*“May Allah purify your heart, make your dreams come true...with barakah”*).

Discussion: It reinforces generational hierarchy and parental authority while showing emotional intimacy. The message reflects Islamic cultural norms, balancing affection, authority, and religiosity in family communication.

Message 45 (National Celebration – Pakistan Day)

“May the blessings of the Pakistan Day befall them all. Wish our nation continue to improve in the years to come!”

Analysis: The message uses inclusive and formal language with positive politeness (*“befall them all”* shows general blessings and *“nation continue to improve in the years to come years to come”* represents national development) and it emphasizes collective wellbeing and national development.

Discussion: It strengthens the recipient's identity as part of the national community, promoting solidarity and patriotism. The tone aligns with Pakistani sociolinguistic norms for formal celebratory messages, showing encouragement, unity, and collective responsibility.

Message 46 (National Celebration – Independence Day)

“Today we are all here to enjoy unity and freedom. Let's make our nation proud. Happy Independence Day!”

Analysis: This is a collective, action message, and celebratory message with the key point of unity, freedom and national pride. Positive politeness is conveyed based on mutual agency (*“we are all here to enjoy unity and freedom. Let's make our nation proud”*) which creates a sense of social cohesiveness and the sense of community.

Discussion: It reinforces citizen unity and patriotic identity, aligning with sociolinguistic norms of national celebrations in Pakistan. The tone balances enthusiasm, respect, and civic responsibility, reflecting culturally appropriate communication during national holidays.

Message 47 (Academic Achievement – Admission Abroad)

“Congratulations on your admission to the foreign country! The sweat and the blood have indeed paid off. Wishing you a wonderful inspiring learning growth and successful journey.”

Analysis: The message uses formal and motivational language, emphasizing hard work, persistence, and success. Positive politeness is expressed by recognizing effort and determination and wishing further success, enhancing the academic identity of the recipient.

Discussion: It reflects socio-cultural values where educational achievements and merit-based success are appreciated. The message is respectful, supportive, and encouraging, suitable for friends, family, or mentors acknowledging academic accomplishments.

Message 48 (Academic Achievement – Study Abroad)

“Good luck in starting your studies in a foreign country! I hope this experience broadens your mind, builds your brain, and directs you to a wonderful and fulfilling future.”

Analysis: The message emphasizes individual development and future success. Positive politeness is expressed through blessings and good wishes, showing care and support for the recipient’s academic growth.

Discussion: It highlights the recipient’s identity as a learner and underscores socio-cultural values of education and personal development. The message fosters supportive social relations by acknowledging and encouraging future academic achievements.

Message 49 (Professional Achievement – International Employment)

“Congratulations on your international employment! May your new chapter be a step to professional development, success and many blessings upon you in every footstep.”

Analysis: This advertisement is written in formal and supportive language with a positive politeness and religious-cultural overtones (“many blessings”). It glorifies the professional accomplishment of the recipient and hopes that one will be professionally successful in the future, which is a socio-cultural norm where hard work, opportunity and morality are appreciated.

Discussion: It highlights the recipient’s identity as a competent professional and reinforces social goodwill. The message aligns with cultural norms of recognizing career success and offering encouragement in semi-formal relationships.

Message 50 (Professional Achievement – Job Abroad)

“Thank you, congratulations on your new job in a foreign country! How wonderful a thing-- do you think this trip will sharpen you and make you see more, and open the doors of more success?”

Analysis: The message uses positive politeness by acknowledging the recipient’s professional achievement and expressing admiration (“How wonderful a thing”). It emphasizes career advancement and opportunities for growth.

Discussion: The message further affirms the identity of the recipient as a good, high-achieving and cosmopolitan professional, which promotes social solidarity and support. It is in line with cultural norms of rewarding hard work and valuing hard work and providing encouraging wishes to further development, which will suit friends, relatives, or work colleagues.

5. Key Findings

5.1. Summary of the Findings

The study examined the sociolinguistic aspects of congratulatory messages that are sent and received via WhatsApp within the Pakistani setting. It was informed by the Politeness Theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), which dwells on the relationship between linguistic forms and politeness strategies and social identities and hierarchical relationships. The data were made of 50 naturally occurring congratulatory messages obtained in various social events, namely-academic success, promotions at work, weddings, and religious festivals.

5.2. Significant Results

5.2.1. Politeness in a good way prevails in all circumstances.

Finding: In all types of the strategies, positive politeness strategies were very predominant. Some of the most used techniques are compliments, praise, blessings, emotional support, and expressions of solidarity.

Implication: WhatsApp messages are used as a device to optimize the positive face of the recipient and confirm his/her value and achievements. Positive politeness strengthens social networks, interpersonal proximity, and affective intimacy.

5.2.2. Use of Negative Politeness in Hierarchical and Formal Contexts

Finding: Propagandering to teachers, older people, professional seniors or people in authority tended to use negative politeness strategies, including indirectness, formalism, honorifics, minimizing imposition expressions.

Implication: Negative politeness shows consciousness of social hierarchies and respect to power relations.

5.2.3. Language Choice and Code-Switching are used to serve Politeness and Identity purposes

Finding: Alternation between English and Urdu is often seen among the users:

The Urdu language is commonly used in religious or spiritual messages with Islamic words which strengthens cultural cohesion.

Implication: The code switching is a tool of strategic politeness that mediates the social distance, relational proximity, and cultural identity.

5.2.4. The Future-Oriented and the Blessing-Oriented Expressions strengthen the Social Solidarity

Finding: A lot of messages contain wishful thinking or prayers of success, well-being, or spiritual development in the future (e.g., “May your future be bright and have endless opportunities”). These strategies are positive politeness (admiration and encouragement) with a negative politeness that is slightly negative.

Implication: Future-oriented language is an expression of cultural and relational role of face-supporting strategies, with focus on moral support as well as on collective wellbeing.

5.2.5. Emotional and Relational Bonding is Dependent on the context.

Finding: The messages to family members and close friends were more expressive in terms of emotions, more intimate, and less formal. Messages that were supposed to be used in professional or formal settings were less assertive, indirect and had a formal tone.

Implication: In line with the theory of Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies are context sensitive in nature and they are relative to distance of relationship, hierarchy and social role.

5.2.6. Group Identity is Fortified by Religious and Cultural Messages.

Finding: Religious messages (Umrah, Hajj, Eid, etc.) or national messages (Pakistan Day) were often regularly constructed with blessings, prayers, and plural pronouns (e.g., May this Pakistan Day bring fortune and success to all of us).

Implication: Such politeness strategies are also used to boost face, as well as to strengthen collective, cultural, and religious identity.

6. Conclusion

The article examined sociolinguistic aspects of congratulatory WhatsApp messages among Pakistani people with specific emphasis on politeness practices, social hierarchies and identity formation. Based on the Politeness Theory, provided by Brown and Levinson (1987), the aim of the research was to discover how people use words to save face, show solidarity, and bargain social and cultural hierarchies in online communication.

The results indicate that positive politeness strategies prevail in congratulatory messages and compliments, blessings, and praise are commonly utilized as strategies to improve positive face

by the recipient. These trends prove that face-management processes, suggested by Brown and Levinson, work in the informal digital environment, where users use language variations based on the degree of relational distance, social status, and context.

The language choice and code-switching became so important as the means of carrying out identity and the means of negotiating the social relationships. The prestige, modernity and success were often communicated through English, and intimacy, cultural belonging, and respect were communicated through Urdu.

On the whole, the analysis shows that even in such informal environments as WhatsApp, digital communication reflects the socio-cultural hierarchies and norms on the bigger scale. Politeness strategies, linguistic variations, and code-switching are strategically used by users to negotiate relationship, form identity as well as face in the most culturally significant and contextually appropriate manner.

Finally, WhatsApp congratulatory messages can be identified as a fruitful ground of investigation into the interplay of the language, culture and social organization, which shows how online communications support social norms, articulate the self identity, and ensure a harmonious relationship.

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