

A Pragmatic Study of the Speech Act of Threatening between Jordanian and American Speakers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v23i2.454>

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Received on 17.10.2021

Accepted on 18.9.2022

Published on 20.6.2023

Abstract: This paper investigates the speech act of making threats among native speakers of Jordanian Arabic (JA) and American English (AE). It explores new threat strategies used by Jordanian and American speakers and their pragmatic functions to construct an analytical framework for analyzing this act across cultures. The data for this study were collected using an open-ended questionnaire. This questionnaire consists of ten imaginary situations drawn from real life. The data were analyzed using chi-square tests (value ≤ 0.05) to determine whether the difference between the two groups for each threat strategy was statistically significant. The subjects of Jordanian Arabic included 40 male participants and 40 female participants from three universities in Irbid district while the American subjects included 15 male participants and 15 female participants from the University of Illinois in the United States. Five threat strategies were identified. Four of which were shared between the two groups: Telling Authority, Committing Harm, Introducing Options and Warning. However, Promise of Vague Consequence was confined to JA speakers. The study also found that JA speakers tended to be less direct than their AE counterparts.

Keywords: American English, DCT, Jordanian Arabic, speech acts, threat strategies

1. Introduction

Many scholars (e.g., Searle 1979) classify the speech act of threatening as a commissive. Commissives aim to secure the addressee's compliance (Benoit 1983). As is the case with any speech act, the speech act of threatening has been discussed in the light of the speech acts theory, pragmatics, and politeness. Moreover, different aspects of communication ranging from words through actions have been highlighted. This is because utterances consisting of lexical units (words) have specific forces, which lead to certain actions (Austin 1962). Accordingly, he (Austin 1962) distinguishes between three kinds of acts that are simultaneously performed: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. In this regard, Austin (1962) maintains that the uttering of particular words leads the speaker to performance of a particular speech act. It can be either physical or mental, or even acts of uttering further words, which is in turn the objective of the utterance.

The present study is a cross-cultural investigation of the speech act of threatening from a pragmatic perspective in two groups: Speakers of Jordanian Arabic (JA) and American English (AE). More specifically, this study examines

different pragmatic strategies used by both groups to make threats in JA and AE, which represent different cultures. In both societies, this act is performed using many strategies expressed through various linguistic expressions. This is attributed to the fact that people interact in different situations and for different purposes as part of their daily lives. This research paper presents the theoretical and empirical background in the literature review; followed by the methodology section showing how the data for this study were collected and analyzed. Against that background, the author then discusses the findings with many examples drawn from the data. This paper also involves implications and future research accordingly. This study aims to highlight expressions and strategies used by educated JA and AE speakers from universities in Jordan and the United States to make threats. To date, this act has not been investigated among JA speakers or compared between JA and AE speakers. In total, five pragmatic strategies used by Jordanians and Americans to make threats were identified: Telling Authority, Committing Harm, Introducing Options, Warning and Promise of Vague Consequence. In addition, the speaker's anger and dissatisfaction with the addressee's behavior were found to be among the main reasons for making threats.

2. Literature review

Speech act is defined as "an act performed in saying something" (Lyons 1977:730). Searle (1980:297-8) indicates that there are four main criteria for classifying speech acts: the main grammatical markers, the type of propositional content, their function and their origin (e.g., primary speech acts or secondary speech acts). Since speech acts involve action, many scholars (e.g., Searle 1979) propose five basic kinds of action that can be performed in speaking: Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declaratives. Searle (1979) and Brown and Levinson (1978) classify threatening acts as commissives since the threatener commits to taking future action against the addressee.

With regards to the speech act of threatening, Benoit (1983:305) defines this act as "an aggressive act against the hearer for the purpose of gaining compliance". Threats are conceptualized as "face-threatening" (Brown and Levinson 1987). Wierzbicka (1987:187) also defines threats as "utterances that refer to a future action by the speaker which is regarded as bad for the addressee". She formulates the following sentence as an example of threatening: "I will do something that will be bad for you if you don't do something" (Wierzbicka 1987:178).

Moreover, Wierzbicka says that threatening differs from warning in its performative ability. That is, one can say "I warn you" but not "I threaten you".

As threatening is related to power and performative ability which distinguishes this act from other related acts such as warning, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that the relative power of the speaker and the addressee and the social distance between them are important criteria for assessing the seriousness of a face-threatening act in most, if not all, cultures.

Many studies have been conducted to investigate different speech acts, such as warning (e.g., Simona and Dejica-Cartisa 2015; Bauler 2018), requests (Leopold

2015; Christensen 2017; Al Shboul 2020), threats (e.g., Benoit 1983; Barish, 1991; Salgueiro 2010; Walton 2014; Probst et al. 2018), apologies (e.g., Bataineh and Bataineh 2008), disagreements (e.g., Hamdan and Mahadin 2021) and also speech acts in political contexts (e.g., Loko 2018). They have examined the use of speech acts in different genres, including everyday interactions and media.

Johnson et al. (2004) conducted a study that involved 133 undergraduates (60 males, 73 females) who were asked to complete a questionnaire. The participants were asked to imagine interacting with people in hypothetical situations. The researchers focused on the relationship between face-threatening acts and refusals. They found that the relationship between power and threat was statistically significant. In addition, threats have different degrees, depending on whether they are performed as requests or refusals and how face-threatened a speaker is. Other researchers shed light on the relationships between threats and other acts, such as promises. In this regard, Beller et al. (2009:115) conclude that

Promises and threats are speech acts that aim at changing a person's behavior according to one's own goals. These acts combine several components on different levels: goals and incentives belong to the motivational level, formulations to the linguistic level, and effective responses to the emotional level.

Beller et al. (2005) also investigated participants' preferences for threats or promises, as both acts are to some extent related. This study thus can give us insight into how people perform threats. Sixty-six students (34 males and 32 females) from various disciplines at the University of Freiburg volunteered to participate in the experiment. The questionnaire administered to the participants is about a hypothetical situation in which a boy wants to obtain something from one of his schoolmates. They were asked to choose either the canonical promise or the complementary threat: 1. Canonical promise: (If P, then Q) and 2. Complementary threat: (If not P, then not Q). The researchers found that most participants (89.2%) preferred the canonical promise to the complementary threat. Ruzickova (1998) conducted another study on threats. He gathered 15 hours of mostly spontaneous nondirected speech of Cuban men and women of all age groups and education levels through tape recordings. He found that indirect threats were more frequently used by people of a lower status to those of a higher status and that a threat could fail or be ineffective if a hearer perceived that the speaker had no power to express it. In addition, Ruzickova highlighted the role of intentions as a means of realizing threats.

Other studies distinguished between threats based on the extent to which they can affect the addressee's behavior (the most to least powerful threats). For example, Berk-Seligson and Seligson (2016) identified several types of threats, including implicit, generic threats, indirectly reported, directly reported, and ambiguous threats. They found that the most powerful type of threats was directly reported threats, as this type can push the addressee to comply with the speaker's desires.

Many researchers conducted studies of speech acts in Arabic and other

languages. Abdel-Jawad (2000), for instance, investigated the speech act of swearing to demonstrate how swearing is used to perform some speech acts, such as threats, warnings, offers, and invitations. Speaking of threats, Abdel-Jawad (2000:234) says that “in order to assert and intensify a threat, warning or a challenge, speakers often resort to swearing”. Thus, an Arabic speaker may employ oaths when he/she commits the speech act of threatening for the sake of emphasizing and intensifying the act itself. Consequently, he/she can influence the addressee to comply with the speaker's desires. Thus, swearing appears to be functional and effective when making threats.

3. Purpose of the study

The goal of this study is to highlight the expressions and strategies used by educated JA and AE speakers to make threats, especially since this act has not been investigated among JA speakers or compared between JA and AE speakers to date. Specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the threat strategies employed by educated speakers of JA and AE?
2. What are the most prominent threat strategies utilized by educated speakers of JA and AE to perform the speech act of threatening?
3. Are there any statistically significant differences in the use of a certain strategy between the two varieties due to nationality and gender?
4. What are the linguistic forms employed by educated speakers of JA and AE to make threats?

4. Significance of the study

The importance of this study stems from the following reasons:

1. The study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics and contrastive studies by highlighting the expressions and strategies used to perform the speech act of threatening in JA and AE.
2. It acquaints students as well as researchers with such realizations and aspects of threatening in JA and AE, in the hope that it will fill a gap in the Arabic linguistic library.
3. It demonstrates possible discrepancies and differences in the use of threat strategies between JA and AE speakers.
4. It contributes to explaining some of the cultural gaps between JA and AE speakers.

5. Methodology

This section describes the methods and procedures adopted to collect and analyze the data in this study.

5.1 Sample

The study sample included 80 JA speakers (40 males and 40 females) from Yarmouk University, Jerash University and Balqaa University in Jordan and 15

male and 15 female speakers of AE from the University of Illinois in the United States. The sampling technique used in this study was purposive; a sample of students from universities in Jordan and the United States was selected to represent educated speakers in both countries. However, the difference in the size of the two samples is considerable. It is, therefore, important to compare the percentage of both groups to one another. Accordingly, percentages for the sample size were calculated by dividing the number of respondents of each nationality and gender (e.g., 80 or 30) by the total number of participants (110). The participants' ages range from 18 to 22 years. The demographic information is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of demographic information

Variable		Number of respondents	Percentage
Nationality	Jordanians	80	72.7
	Americans	30	27.3
	Total	110	100.0
Gender	Males	55	50.0
	Females	55	50.0
	Total	110	100.0

5.2 Data collection and analysis

The data for this study were collected using a questionnaire consisting of ten hypothetical questions to elicit the desired speech act of threatening (Please see the appendix). These questions were designed to collect data on participants' everyday communication and direct them to respond to specific situations in which they use expressions of threats in both cultures. For example, how employers and employees or teachers and students communicate when they make threats. The researcher of this study used the Discourse Completion Test (which was designed by Beebe et al. 1990) which includes hypothetical situations that participants need to answer to obtain data concerning the refusal act from those participants. Since refusals and threats are speech acts, he used this questionnaire design to collect data that can be classified under the speech act of threatening. That is, the researcher wrote hypothetical questions and asked participants to respond to them as if they were involved in these situations in real life. In this questionnaire, he included general scenarios that people of both cultures (Jordanian culture and American culture) were likely to encounter in their daily interactions. These questions ask the participants how they would make threats in such specific hypothetical situations. He wrote these questions in Arabic, then he rewrote these questions in English with assistance from native AE speakers to ensure that they would be fully understood by native speakers of English. To check the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, two important steps were previously taken before administering the

questionnaire to the participants of this study; first, the questionnaire of this study was revised based on some further suggestions by Jordanian and American researchers specializing in TESOL. The second step, a pilot study was conducted, with five speakers of Jordanian Arabic and American English to ensure that the questionnaire items would be fully understood. The questionnaire was then administered to 80 male and female JA subjects and 30 AE students. Although the data using the DCT questionnaire collected is not authentic or natural, the DCT questionnaire can show us how people think, and behave, when they are exposed to such situations in their real life.

After the questionnaire responses were collected, the researcher classified them into five strategies or categories based on their semantic content and function. For example, those responses related to any form of authority (e.g., the Police, Court or Headmaster) were classified under the Telling Authority category. Also, the responses that involved any physical harm (related to body) to the addressee were placed under Committing Harm category. He adopted and adjusted Benoit's model (1983) to classify the threats extracted from the data to suit the data of this study. Thus, classifications of threats based on Benoit's model (311-312) are indicated in the table (2) below:

Table 2. Benoit's model of threatening speech acts

No.	Threat strategies
1	Tell Authority
2	Commit Harm
3	Withhold Desired Action
4	Unspecified Consequence

However, the researcher classified the data for this study into five strategies or categories: Telling Authority, Committing Harm, Introducing Options, Warning and Promise of Vague Consequence. After this classification, he counted the responses involving threats under each category. These responses, which were elicited from the students, were grouped. The groups in turn numbered from 1 to 5, based on their frequency, where group 1 was associated with the highest frequency of responses, while group 5 was associated with the lowest frequency of responses.

6. Findings and discussion

Table 3 below statistically answers the four research questions for this study. This section discusses several examples of threat strategies employed by JA and AE speakers. With regards to the first question in this study, five categories (Telling Authority, Committing Harm, Introducing Options, Warning and Promise of Vague Consequence) were identified as pragmatic strategies used by Jordanians and Americans to commit the speech act of threatening. Four of which were shared between JA and AE. The analysis highlighted the similarities and differences between the two varieties (JA and AE). Table 3 below indicates the frequency,

percentage, and results of applied chi-square tests for threat strategies used by JA and AE speakers.

Table 3. Results of frequency, percentage and results of applied chi-square tests for threat strategies used by JA and AE speakers.

No.	Strategy	Nationality				Total	Chi-sq. value	Sig.
		Jordanian Arabic		American English				
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%			
1	Telling Authority	413	52.54	129	44.17	542	2.96	0.04
2	Committing Harm	155	19.72	55	18.83	210	0.89	0.87
3	Introducing Options	114	14.50	72	24.65	186	3.50	0.01
4	Warning	38	4.83	36	12.32	74	4.88	0.00
5	Promise of Vague Consequence	66	8.39	-	-	66	-	-
	Total	786	-	-	292	292	-	-

Note. The chi-square value is significant at $p < 0.05$.

In relation to question two, table 3 shows that Telling Authority was the most frequent strategy used by JA students in (413) responses (52.54%) and by AE students in (129) responses (44.17%). Regarding the third question, table 3 also provides information about whether the differences in the frequency of occurrences of the threatening strategies were significant at $p < 0.05$. For example, the difference in the frequency of occurrences of this strategy (Telling Authority) between the two varieties was found to be statistically significant at $p = (0.04)$, in favor of JA subjects. With regards to question four, the most linguistic forms or formulas which Jordanian and American speakers used were if-conditionals, (negative) imperatives and declarative sentences, with which they formulated their threats. Table 3 also shows that four strategies were shared by JA and AE: Telling Authority, Introducing Options, Committing Harm, and Warning. In addition, one strategy was confined to JA: Promise of Vague Consequence. This is explained in greater detail in the next section.

6.1 Strategies of threatening in JA and AE

The strategies of the speech act of threatening which were employed by JA and AE speakers are discussed in the following subsections. Barish (1991:268) says that

“threats arise because the speaker assumes that the hearer has done or might do something which the threatener finds to be strongly objectionable”. Thus, he/she issues a threat in an attempt to stop him/her. It is worth mentioning that, in the light of the data examined, anger and dissatisfaction with the addressee’s behavior were regarded as the main reasons for issuing threats.

6.1.1 Telling authority

Benoit (1983:311) claims that “tell authority is employed when the speaker threatens to seek authority intervention that would overtly punish the addressee”. The threatener thus resorts to a form of authority that could be the police, management or court to frighten the addressee and make him/her comply with the threatener’s desires.

This strategy included 413 responses representing (52.54%) of the JA data and 129 responses representing (44.17%) of the AE data. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant at $p = (0.04)$, in favor of the Jordanian respondents. In this study, the authority, which the respondents referred to, is either headmaster, court, manager or the police. In both cultures, speakers resorted to the same authorities to make the addressee comply with their threats. Here the speaker uses explicit forms of expressions (if conditional and declarative statement) to perform their threats in examples one and two respectively.

Example 1

/ʔaniy mihtaaj maʕaariy wʔintih ʔawwalit calay kthiir rah ʔashtakiy caleek lilmahkamih ʔidha maa bitsiddniy ʔilmablagh bʔasracā wagit/ (S1-JA)

‘I need money and it took you so long to repay me; I will sue you in the court if you don’t repay me as soon as possible.’ The first expression /ʔaniy mihtaaj maʕaariy/ ‘I need money’ is a statement of justification of why he threatens the addressee. The second expression /wʔintih ʔawwalit calay kthiir / ‘and it took you so long to repay me’ communicates dissatisfaction with the addressee’s behavior that he has not yet repaid the money to the addressee. The third expression /rah ʔashtakiy caleek lilmahkamih ʔidha maa bitsiddniy ʔilmablagh bʔasracā wagit/ ‘I will sue you in the court if you don’t repay me as soon as possible’ indicates that the speaker explicitly threatens the addressee with an appeal to authority (the court) unless he gives him back the money in a timely manner. With this threat issued, he expresses his anger and dissatisfaction with the addressee’s behavior. The threat is stated in an if-clause form which means that the speaker’s threat to the addressee is contingent on the addressee’s future behavior. In other words, the threatener will resort to the court if and only if the addressee does not comply. In this situation, both the speaker and the addressee appear to have equal power.

Example 2

‘I will report you to legal authorities and make you pay me my salary.’ (S7-AE)

The first expression (*I will report you to legal authorities*) shows that the employee threatens the manager with an appeal to legal authorities to make the manager pay his salary that otherwise he cannot get. This assumes that legal authorities are the most effective way of compelling the addressee with the speaker's desires. The threatener thus seeks authority intervention by which he can make the addressee, whose status is higher than the threatener, comply. The latter, in turn, perceives this intervention as negative or undesirable. In the expression which follows (*and make you pay me my salary*), the speaker specifies the consequence of his threat; he will force the addressee to pay by resorting to authority. Here the speaker threatens his manager who is in a higher position in terms of power. The speaker uses the Tell Authority strategy to execute his threat due to his dissatisfaction.

6.1.2 Committing harm

According to Benoit (1983), committing harm is a threat strategy used when the speaker threatens to harm the addressee physically. It is considered the most aggressive type used by the participants in this study.

This strategy occurred in 155 responses (19.72%) in the JA data, and occurred in 55 responses (18.83%) in the AE data. However, this difference was not statistically significant at $p = (0.87)$. Both groups used this strategy with almost the same percentage. This result shows that this type of threat was widely common in both cultures where speakers using this type believe they can secure compliance from the addressee. Here, the participants also used if conditionals, which are explicit forms of threats, to threaten the addressee.

Example 3

/rah ʔakkassir raasak ʔidha maa bitrajicaliy ʔilmaʕaariy/ (S1-JA)
'I will break your head if you don't pay me back the money.'

In /rah ʔakkassir raasak/ 'I will break your head' the speaker threatens the addressee with physical harm if he doesn't repay the money. There is a commitment by the speaker to take action against the addressee. In such a threat, the speaker exaggerates his threat, but such exaggerations are functional; that is, the speaker wants to intensify the threat and makes the addressee more concerned about his threat. The following expression /ʔidha maa bitrajicaliy ʔilmaʕaariy/ 'if you don't pay me back the money' provides the reason for the threat. The conditional form of the threat shows that it is contingent on the addressee's future behavior regarding returning the money.

Example 4

'If I ever hear that you are bullying my brother, I will beat the crap out of you.' (S4-AE)

The first expression (*If I ever hear that you are bullying my brother*) indicates the boys' bad act and at the same time justification of this threat. That is, there are some boys who have been bullying her brother. In this expression (*I will beat the crap out of you*) the speaker threatens the boys with serious physical harm if they hit her brother again. In other words, she specifies what the bad consequence would be. In addition, this threat is stated in the if-clause formula. This means that the threat issued by the speaker is contingent on the boys' future act. This strategy is more likely to be used by speakers with greater power or a higher position than the addressee, like the example given above (the boy's sister with his classmates).

6.1.3 Introducing options

The threatener allows the addressee to avoid the negative consequence by complying with an alternative option. Threats in this strategy appears to be direct as the speaker mentions consequences that the addressee would suffer from.

This strategy occurred in 114 responses 14.50% of the JA data and in 72 responses (24.65%) of the AE data. The difference between the two varieties was statistically significant at $p = (0.01)$, in favor of the AE respondents. This result proved that American speakers tended to use this strategy very frequently in comparison to their Jordanian counterparts. However, in this strategy the participants in examples five and six used specific expressions to introduce alternative options: using *yaa...yaa* in Arabic and either *..or..* in American English.

Example 5

/yaa bitsakkir tilifoonak yaa baṭalcak barrah/ (S8-JA)

'Either you switch off your mobile or I will make you leave.'

In the first expression /yaa bitsakkir tilifoonak/ 'either you switch off your mobile' the director threatens the addressee if he does not switch off his mobile. In the second expression /yaa baṭalcak barrah/ 'or I will make you go out', she makes a clear threat which specifies the bad consequence in case the addressee does not comply with the speaker's request. Both are undesirable outcomes for the addressee. The speaker, who has a higher status than the addressee, used this strategy to express her anger and give the addressee an opportunity to avoid the bad consequence by complying with the first option she suggests.

Example 6

'Either you stop hitting your classmate or you will have 3 hours of detention.' (S4-AE)

The teacher, who has a higher status than her student, threatens to punish the student with three hours of detention as a punishment if he does not stop hitting his classmate inside the classroom. Accordingly, the student has to choose either the first option (*either you stop hitting your classmate*), which reveals why the teacher issued a threat in the first place, or the second option (*or you will have 3 hours of detention*), which specifies the negative action if he does not stop hitting his

classmate. In American schools 'detention' is a punishment where students are held in a room after school for a fixed amount of time.

6.1.4 Warning

Warning means “informing somebody in advance of something, especially possible danger or something unpleasant that is likely to happen, so that they can try to avoid it” (Oxford Dictionary 2005).

The number of responses of this strategy in JA data is 38 responses (4.83%), and 36 responses (12.32%) in AE data. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant at $p = (0.00)$, in favor of the American respondents.

Example 7

/shuu maalak l?ameet biddak t̄dal t̄ijiy cala ?isharikah mit?akhir ?aniy rah̄ ?acaṭiik aakhir fursah/. (S9-JA)

‘What is wrong with you? How long will you still come to work late?. I’m warning you not to come late so you won’t lose your job.’

This expression /shuu maalak/ 'What is wrong with you?' signals dissatisfaction, while /l?ameet biddak t̄dal t̄ijiy cala ?isharikah mit?akhir/ 'how long will you still come to work late?' is a rhetorical question in which the manager blames the employee. In the last expression, /?aniy rah̄ ?acaṭiik aakhir fursah/ 'I am giving you one last chance' the manager warns the employee that it is his last chance. Such a threat is considered to be implicit. That is, the speaker does not directly mention the consequences in case the addressee does not comply.

Example 8

'I have warned you many times about your hours. If you come in late one more time, I will have to find someone else to fill your position.' (S9-AE)

The first expression (*I have warned you many times about your hours*) indicates that the manager has repeatedly warned the employee not to come to work late. In this expression (*If you come in late one more time*), she now gives him a last chance, or warning, to stop coming late. The last expression (*I will have to find someone else to fill your position*) specifies the negative consequence in case the addressee does not comply with the speaker's warning. Consequently, warning functions as a threat in this situation because the manager will fire the employee and hire someone else if he does not comply, which harms the addressee's interests.

6.1.5 Promise of vague consequence

Benoit (1983:312) classifies 'unspecified consequence' as a threat strategy. He says that this strategy is used when the intent of the threatener is not clearly specified. This strategy is thus characterized by vagueness.

This strategy was confined to JA speakers. There were (66) responses (8.39%). The nature of the threat of this type is unknown, the speaker threatens the

addressee in such a way that the addressee does not know what the threatener intends to do. The strategy of promise of vague consequence is conveyed through hints, because the message of the threat is indirectly stated. Hint is defined by the Oxford Dictionary (2005) as “a small indication given to somebody about what one is thinking, what one wants or what will happen.”. Wierzbicka (1987:271) provides the following formulas for hint:

'I say this, in this way, because I want to cause people to think something that I don't want to say.

I don't know if they will think it'.

Example 9

/batmanna ?innak tijjiy mit?akhir marrah thaanyih w shuuf shuu rah_h ysiir/ (S9-JA)
'I wish you would come to work late again and you will see what would happen.'

The manager, whose position is higher than the employee's, does not actually want him to arrive late at work but she indirectly threatens the addressee with a negative consequence if he fails to arrive on time again. The verb /batmanna/ 'I wish' therefore communicates a sense of threat and challenge; it implies the speaker's plans to punish the employee if he comes to work late again. Thus, the expression /batmanna ?innak tijjiy mit?akhir marrah thaanyih /'I wish you came to work late again ' shows the speaker's readiness to hurt the addressee. In /w shuuf shuu rah_h ysiir/ 'and you will see what may happen' the speaker implicitly threatens the addressee with something bad. He uses this vague utterance as a sign behind which he hides something bad.

This strategy was limited to JA speakers, which indicates that they tended to be more indirect than their American counterparts when making threats, with regards to this strategy. That is, they used some utterances or words to mean something other than the explicit meaning they bear. The results of the present study align with Benoit's (1983) findings in that the strategy of the promise of Vague or Unspecified consequence was not preferred because the addressee may not perceive the negative consequence of the threat. Table 4 shows the frequency, percentage, and results of applied chi-square tests for threat strategies used by male and female JA speakers.

Table 4 shows that statistically significant differences between the two groups were only found for two threat strategies: Committing Harm at $p = (0.00)$, in favor of JA male students and Warning at $p = (0.00)$, in favor of JA female students. In addition, the strategy of Telling Authority was more used by Jordanian female students in (219) responses (55.72%) than by Jordanian male students in (194) responses (49.36%). But, this difference between them was not statistically significant. Table (5) below shows the frequency, percentage and results of applied chi-square tests for the strategies used by male and female AE speakers.

Table 4. Results of frequency, percentage and results of applied chi-square tests for threat strategies used by male and female Jordanian Arabic speakers

No.	Strategy	Jordanian Arabic				Total	Chi-sq. value	Sig.
		Male		Female				
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%			
1	Telling Authority	194	49.36	219	55.72	413	2.21	0.17
2	Committing Harm	101	25.69	54	13.74	155	4.33	0.00
3	Introducing Options	55	13.99	59	15.01	114	0.26	0.92
4	Warning	9	2.29	29	7.37	38	4.50	0.00
5	Promise of Vague Consequence	34	8.65	32	8.14	66	0.05	0.99

Note. The chi-square value is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Table (5) above shows that there was only one strategy which had a statistically significant difference between the two groups (male and female Americans). This strategy is committing harm at $p = (0.00)$, in favor of AE male students, while the other strategies did not show any statistically significant differences between the two groups. In addition, table 5 shows that the last strategy, Promise of Vague Consequence, did not occur in AE at all.

The results of this study agree with Benoit's (1983:327) in that "the sex of interactant does not affect the frequency of threats". One way to compare this finding with that of Benoit's study is that all these strategies of threatening were used or shared by both genders for Jordanian and American groups. There was no strategy confined to one gender. Additionally, the percentages of the frequencies of occurrences of threats among males and females for Jordanians or Americans as indicated in tables 4 and 5 were similar. However, the statistics show that committing harm strategy was far more used by males than females for both groups. The results indicate that Jordanians and Americans to a large extent employed similar strategies to make threats. These results support cross-cultural studies (e.g., Tabatabaei et al. 2018) that found only small differences with regard to what strategies of speech acts that groups of different cultures would use. Also, this study demonstrates that the most common strategies were used by both groups. That is,

both Jordanians and Americans very frequently drew on these two strategies (Telling Authority and Committing Harm), with the result that these two strategies were the most prominent ones for both groups. This implies that these two strategies were among the most effective strategies used in both societies.

Table 5. Results of frequency, percentage and results of applied chi-square tests for threat strategies used by male and female American English speakers

No.	Strategy	American English				Total	Chi-square value	Sig.
		Male		Female				
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage			
1	Telling Authority	57	39.04	72	49.31	129	3.13	0.18
2	Committing Harm	38	26.02	17	11.64	55	7.11	0.00
3	Introducing Options	35	23.97	37	25.34	72	0.77	0.81
4	Warning	16	10.95	20	13.69	36	2.73	0.14
5	Promise of Vague Consequence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. The chi-square value is significant at $p < 0.05$

7. Conclusion

This study investigates how the American and Jordanian speakers engage in the speech act of threatening. Five pragmatic strategies were employed by the two groups (the American and Jordanian speakers), and most of which were shared. Regarding the shared strategies, three strategies have statistically significant differences between the two varieties in favor of one or the other category of speakers. These strategies were Telling Authority in favor of the Jordanian respondents; Warning and Introducing Options in favor of the American respondents. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was found for Committing Harm. However, all strategies used by the participants in this study aimed to show anger and dissatisfaction, as an explicit indication that the speaker was serious about executing his/her threat in case the addressee did not comply with his/her request. The participants of this study used different linguistic forms, ranging from if-conditionals, (Negative) Imperatives to declarative sentences to express their threats. Anger and dissatisfaction with the addressee's behavior were regarded as the main pragmatic reasons for issuing threats.

Like many speech acts (e.g., invitation and thanking), the threat strategies identified in this study were both culturally-universal, occurring in both varieties, and culturally-specific, occurring in one variety. Thus, people from the same or different cultures have different choices of making linguistic threats.

In addition, threats can be implicit or explicit in JA and AE. This depends on whether the commitment is specified. Barish (1991: 290) concludes that 'threats are implicit when the threatener does not specify a commitment to harm the addressee, nor specify the bad consequence in case the addressee has not complied'. In this study, this is considered the basis upon which the threats are classified as implicit or explicit. Regardless of the implicitness or explicitness of the threat committed, it was concluded that all the strategies, except promise of Vague Consequence, employed by the participants involved a specific request made by the speaker and directed to the addressee who was expected to show swift compliance with that request for the sake of avoiding any further consequences.

Jordanian learners of English language may misuse expressions of threat and/or perceive them as non-threatening in both oral and written contexts. This is attributed to the fact that threatening speech acts are often implicitly performed, which means that the addressee should infer the speaker's implicature to make communication successful. Thus, the current study can help instructors to teach all such possible expressions that can be used in the English culture to make threats. Miscommunication between the two cultures can thus be minimized or even avoided. This study can also help researchers to develop analytical frameworks to classify threats into different strategies investigating the speech act of threatening. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended to conduct similar studies that use other data collection methods (e.g., recordings and interviews) and feature other varieties of English and Arabic to further explore possible similarities and differences in terms of linguistic and pragmatic strategies. In addition, another study can be conducted where the speech act of threatening and other related speech

acts, such as criticism, insults, and warning in Jordanian Arabic, utilizing critical approaches (e.g., critical discourse analysis) to investigate the role of power and status in the participants' selection of pragmatic strategies. Finally, only 27.3% of participants in this study were American. Thus, future research should include a more even sample to ensure that the findings are more statistically representative of the study population. This can facilitate further exploration of differences or similarities between the two cultures.

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Appendix

The researcher is conducting a study entitled ‘A Pragmatic Study of the Speech Act of Threatening between Jordanian and American Speakers’. The goal of this study is to explore threat strategies in both varieties (JA and AE). You are kindly requested to answer the items of this questionnaire carefully and accurately.

Imagine that you find yourself in each of the situations described in the questionnaire. Write down what you would actually say in the given situation.

Age Gender level of education

1. When you lent a person money, you asked him to repay it later. He now denies that this is true. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

2. You are a teacher at a public school. While you were delivering a class, you noticed one of the students hitting his classmate many times. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

3. You bought a car from one of your relatives that he told you that it was in a good condition. Two days later, the car showed that this was not true. When you wanted to take it back, he refused. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

4. A brother of yours is at a primary school. There is a group of students who are always hitting him. If this situation were real, how would you threaten them?

.....

5. You are the manager of a company. One of your employees has stolen a project and called it his own. However, when you investigated and talked to him about it, he denied stealing the project. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

6. You are a partner in a supermarket. Your partner has given you the handwritten profits and they aren't as usual. You have made sure that he has concealed some of the profits. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

7. You are an employer at a private company, but your boss hasn't given you your salary for many months. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

8. You are an employer at a public library where people can't use their mobile phones, but one person continues to use his mobile, although you have warned him many times. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

9. You are a manager of a company. One of your employees is used to coming late every day, although you have warned him many times. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

.....

10. You are a police investigator. You have enough evidence to prove that the accused has committed a crime, but he insists that he is innocent. If this situation were real, how would you threaten him?

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