

Between Sincerity and Politeness: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Ritual Offerings and Politeness Strategies among Libyan Arabic Speakers.

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بين الإخلاص والمجاملة: تحليل سوسيوبراغماتي لتقديم العروض الطقوسية واللباقة لدى المتحدثين بالعربية الليبية

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Abstract

This study investigates the complex sociopragmatic phenomenon of mjamla (social courtesy or flattery) within the specific communicative domain of ritualistic offering among Libyan Arabic speakers. While the act of offering food, services, or hospitality is a universal feature of politeness systems, the Libyan context presents a unique interplay between genuine intent (sincerity) and performative social maintenance (ritual). Drawing upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework, and recent developments in the study of ostensible speech acts, this research analyzes data collected from 50 Libyan participants via Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) and semi-structured qualitative interviews. The findings reveal that what is frequently dismissed by outsiders as "empty" ritualistic offering actually serves critical face-saving functions, negotiates social hierarchies, and indexes group membership. The study identifies specific linguistic strategies—most notably the "rule of three offers" and hyperbolic insistence utilizing religious oaths—that systematically distinguish mjamla from sincere transactional offers. Furthermore, the results indicate a significant generational shift, with younger speakers exhibiting ambivalence toward high-effort mjamla strategies compared to older generations. This paper contributes to the broader field of Arabic pragmatics by offering a nuanced understanding of how "insincerity" in ritual offering is not a violation of Gricean maxims but a culturally codified strategy for social cohesion.

Keywords: Mjamla, Libyan Arabic, Politeness Theory, Ritualistic Offering, Sociopragmatics, Face-work, Ostensible Speech Acts.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في الظاهرة السوسيوبراغماتية المعقدة للمجاملة ضمن المجال التواصلية المحدد للعرض الطقوسي لدى متحدثي اللهجة الليبية. وفي حين أن فعل عرض الطعام أو الخدمات أو الضيافة يُعد سمة عالمية من سمات أنظمة الأدب، فإن السياق الليبي يقدم تفاعلاً فريداً بين النية الحقيقية (الصدق) والأداء الاجتماعي الطقوسي (الشعائرية). واستناداً إلى نظرية الأدب لبراون وليفينسون (1987)، وإطار عمل إدارة العلاقات لسبنسر-أوتي (2008)، والتطورات الحديثة في دراسة أفعال الكلام الظاهرية، يحل هذا البحث البيانات المجمعة من 50 مشاركاً ليبيا عبر مهام إكمال الخطاب والمقابلات النوعية شبه المنظمة. وتكشف النتائج أن ما يُرفض في كثير من الأحيان من قبل الخارجيين باعتباره عرضاً طقوسياً "فارغاً" يؤدي في الواقع وظائف حاسمة لإنقاذ ماء الوجه، ويتفاوض حول التراتيبات الاجتماعية، ويشير إلى الانتماء الجماعي. وتحدد الدراسة استراتيجيات لغوية محددة - ولا سيما "قاعدة العروض الثلاثة" والإصرار المبالغ فيه باستخدام الإيمان الدينية - التي تميز بشكل منهجي بين المجاملة والعروض التبادلية الصادقة. علاوة على ذلك، تشير النتائج إلى تحول جيلي كبير، حيث يُظهر المتحدثون الأصغر سناً موقفاً مزدوجاً تجاه استراتيجيات المجاملة عالية الجهد مقارنة بالأجيال الأكبر سناً. تساهم هذه الورقة في المجال الأوسع للبراغماتية العربية من خلال تقديم فهم دقيق لكيفية أن "عدم الصدق" في العرض الطقوسي ليس انتهاكاً لمبادئ غرايس بل استراتيجية مشفرة ثقافياً للتماسك الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المجاملة، اللهجة الليبية، نظرية الأدب، العرض الطقوسي، البراغماتية الاجتماعية، العمل الجاهي، أفعال الكلام الظاهرية.

1.Introduction

In the intricate tapestry of daily interactions within Libyan society, the boundary between a genuine offer and a ritualistic display of courtesy is frequently navigated through a complex array of linguistic and paralinguistic cues. This phenomenon is locally encapsulated in the concept of *mjamla*, a term that roughly translates to courtesy, flattery, or social niceties, yet carries a significantly heavier sociopragmatic load in Libyan culture than its English equivalents suggest (El Gareidi 2015). Unlike the Western pragmatic expectation—where an offer is typically viewed as a sincere proposal of goods or services intended to be accepted or rejected based on the hearer's need (Searle, 1969)—the Libyan offer often operates within a framework where immediate acceptance is neither expected nor, in some instances, desired. This study seeks to explore this tension: specifically, how do speakers produce and interpret offers that hover precariously between sincerity and ritual?

The significance of studying *mjamla* lies in its pervasive role in maintaining social harmony and defining interpersonal relationships. To an outsider, or even a pragmatic novice within the culture, the insistent nature of Libyan offers—such as urging a guest to stay for dinner despite their protests, or the aggressive "battle" to pay a friend's bill at a restaurant—might seem aggressive, inefficient, or confusingly redundant. However, as Eelen (2001) suggests, politeness is inherently evaluative and culturally situated. In the Libyan context, the failure to perform these "insincere" offers can be perceived as a severe social transgression, indicating emotional coldness, social ineptitude, or a lack of proper upbringing (*tarbiya*). Thus, the "insincerity" inherent in *mjamla* is pragmatic rather than moral; it is a tool for social indexing rather than a deception.

This paper aims to dissect the mechanics of these interactions. While politeness in the Arab world has a rich scholarly tradition, much of the existing literature focuses heavily on Levantine or Egyptian dialects (Feghali, 1997; Nelson et al., 2002). Libyan Arabic remains relatively under-researched in sociopragmatics, particularly regarding its specific strategies of ritualistic

offering. By examining the linguistic markers that distinguish a sincere offer from a *mjamla* offer, analyzing the "acceptance-refusal" sequence, and investigating the impact of social variables such as distance and gender, this research fills a critical gap. We ask: How do interlocutors successfully navigate the "dance" of refusal? Is *mjamla* strictly a face-saving mechanism, or does it serve other communicative functions? And importantly, is this traditional system eroding under the pressures of modernization and globalization among the younger generation?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Politeness and Speech Acts in Arab Sociocultural Contexts

Politeness within Arab societies has long been understood as a relationally oriented communicative system in which the maintenance of social harmony takes precedence over efficiency, brevity, or informational precision. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Arab discourse is often characterized by the extensive use of positive politeness strategies that emphasize solidarity, respect, and interpersonal warmth. Unlike communicative traditions that prioritize directness, Arab interactions frequently foreground social connectedness through expressive language, elaborate greetings, and ritualized exchanges designed to affirm mutual regard. Feghali (1997) notes that Arab communication patterns are deeply embedded in collectivist values, where preserving relationships and demonstrating sincerity are paramount objectives. Within such high-context cultures (Hall, 1976), meaning is conveyed not only through linguistic content but also through shared cultural assumptions, social expectations, and interactional conventions.

Comparative scholarship highlights the distinctiveness of these patterns. Katriel's (1986) analysis of the Israeli concept of *dugri*—a style of blunt, straightforward speech—provides a useful contrast to Arab communicative preferences for accommodation and courtesy, often described by terms such as *musayara* (adaptation to others) or *mjamla* (courteous exaggeration). In Arab contexts, communicative acts frequently involve repetition, intensification, and affective expression as means of signaling sincerity and commitment. Nelson, Al Batal, and El Bakary (2002) similarly observe that Arabic discourse tends toward indirectness when compared to American English, particularly in socially sensitive situations where maintaining face is crucial. Such practices are not merely stylistic but are grounded in broader cultural expectations concerning honor, respect, and communal belonging.

Offering behavior represents a particularly salient domain in which these norms are enacted. Al-Khatib's (2006) study of invitation-making in Jordan demonstrates that offers often follow a conventionalized sequence: the recipient initially declines, the offerer reiterates insistently, and only after multiple exchanges does acceptance become socially appropriate. This ritualized pattern performs dual functions. On the one hand, it allows the offerer to display generosity (*karam*), a highly valued moral attribute in Arab culture. On the other hand, it enables the recipient to maintain modesty and avoid appearing burdensome. Schielke (2015) argues that acts of generosity in Arab societies frequently serve as symbolic performances of identity and moral standing, independent of any material outcome. Thus, the communicative act itself—rather than its practical fulfillment—becomes the primary locus of social meaning.

Although anecdotal evidence suggests that similar practices are widespread in Libya, systematic empirical research remains scarce. Existing studies often treat "Arab culture" as a monolithic entity, overlooking regional variation between the Maghreb and the Mashreq. As a result, the specific linguistic realizations and sociocultural nuances of Libyan Arabic politeness

practices remain underexplored, despite their potential to enrich broader theories of intercultural pragmatics.

2.2 Ritualized Politeness and the Cooperative Principle

Ritualized politeness poses a theoretical challenge to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle, particularly the Maxim of Quality, which presupposes that speakers aim to be truthful. Offers that are extended without genuine intention of fulfillment appear, on the surface, to violate this maxim. However, subsequent scholarship suggests that such interpretations may be overly literal. Bousfield (2008) and Haugh (2014) argue that politeness phenomena cannot be adequately explained solely through Gricean pragmatics, as they often rely on culturally shared understandings that transcend propositional truth. When both interlocutors recognize the ceremonial nature of an utterance, the interaction does not constitute deception but rather a socially sanctioned performance.

Cross-cultural parallels support this view. The Persian practice of *ta'arof* (Beeman, 1986) and the Spanish tradition of *cumplido* (Placencia, 2004) involve offers and compliments that are not intended to be taken literally but function to reinforce social bonds. These conventions rely on mutual awareness of the underlying norms, allowing participants to navigate interactions without misunderstanding. Isaacs and Clark's (1990) concept of "ostensible invitations" further clarifies this phenomenon. Such invitations are extended without a genuine expectation of acceptance but communicate goodwill and respect. The key feature is the shared recognition that the invitation is symbolic rather than contractual.

Applying this framework to Arab contexts suggests that ceremonial offers—often labeled *mjamla*—should not be interpreted as violations of truthfulness. Instead, they may reflect adherence to a higher-order pragmatic principle oriented toward rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). From this perspective, maintaining social harmony and demonstrating benevolence take precedence over literal accuracy. The communicative success of the exchange lies in its ability to affirm relationships, not in the fulfillment of the offer itself.

Despite these theoretical insights, the mechanisms through which speakers signal the ostensible nature of an offer remain insufficiently understood. Research has yet to determine which linguistic cues—such as repetition, intonation, formulaic expressions, or contextual factors—indicate whether an offer is ceremonial or genuine. This gap is particularly pronounced in studies of Arabic varieties, where empirical analyses of naturally occurring interactions are limited.

2.3 Research Gaps in Contemporary Sociopragmatic Studies

While politeness phenomena have been documented across numerous cultural contexts—including the Chinese concept of *lǐmào* (Gu, 1990)—several critical gaps persist in the literature. First, much existing research adopts a broad, pan-Arab perspective that obscures regional diversity. North African societies, including Libya, possess distinct historical, linguistic, and sociocultural trajectories that may shape communicative norms differently from those of the Middle East. The scarcity of focused studies on Libyan Arabic politeness practices therefore represents a significant lacuna in intercultural pragmatics.

Second, most investigations rely on qualitative descriptions or anecdotal observations rather than systematic empirical data. Few studies have attempted to quantify interactional patterns, such as the number of repetitions required before an offer is interpreted as sincere or the conditions under which ritual refusal transitions into acceptance. Without such data, it is difficult to operationalize key concepts or compare findings across contexts.

Third, the dynamic nature of politeness norms—particularly in the context of social change—has received limited attention. Globalization, urbanization, and generational shifts may be transforming traditional communicative practices, yet empirical evidence documenting these changes remains sparse. Younger speakers, for instance, may adopt more direct styles influenced by digital communication or exposure to other cultures, potentially altering the conventional scripts of offering and refusal.

Finally, theoretical integration remains incomplete. Existing frameworks—such as Brown and Levinson's face theory, Gricean pragmatics, and rapport management models—have rarely been applied collectively to analyze Arab ceremonial politeness. A more comprehensive approach could illuminate how these phenomena operate simultaneously at linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal levels.

2.4 Purpose of the Present Study

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to provide a systematic examination of ceremonial offering practices in Libyan Arabic. Specifically, it investigates how speakers distinguish between genuine and ostensible offers, what linguistic and pragmatic cues signal the intended interpretation, and how these practices contribute to rapport maintenance within Libyan society. By focusing on a relatively understudied context and incorporating both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, the study aims to advance sociopragmatic theory while offering a more nuanced understanding of Arab communicative diversity.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical architecture supporting this investigation synthesizes two foundational frameworks, adapted specifically to address Libyan contextual particularities.

3.1 Face Theory as Articulated by Brown and Levinson

Initially, this research employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, with particular emphasis on their Face conceptualization. The analytical approach assumes that *mjamla* offers primarily constitute Positive Politeness strategies—mechanisms oriented toward satisfying the addressee's positive face needs (encompassing desires for approval, affiliation, and social inclusion). Through such offering behavior, speakers enhance addressees' face by constructing them as "deserving" recipients of generosity, irrespective of whether resource transfer materializes. When a speaker insists upon financial responsibility for shared expenses, the underlying communicative message effectively conveys: "Your presence holds significant relational value that transcends monetary considerations." This face-enhancing function operates independently of payment outcomes, contingent solely upon appropriate ritual execution.

3.2 Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Framework

Subsequently, this investigation incorporates Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management theoretical model. This framework transcends conventional "face threat" conceptualizations, reconceptualizing interactions as negotiations balancing social entitlements and responsibilities. Within Libyan cultural parameters, a distinctive social imperative exists regarding offering behavior. Failure to perform ritualistic offers represents rapport management inadequacy, potentially compromising relational integrity. The "insistence" phase within offering sequences constitutes negotiation of these entitlements; recipients possess a "right" to decline, thereby avoiding host burden imposition, while hosts maintain an

"obligation" to persist, demonstrating that offers extend beyond mere performative gesture. Paradoxically, speakers authenticate offer genuineness through intensified performance of ritualistic elements traditionally associated with ceremonial emptiness.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participant Selection and Sampling Procedures

The empirical foundation undergirding this investigation comprises a cohort of 50 participants (N=50), all of whom are native Libyan Arabic speakers and live in Al-Baida city. Snowball sampling methodology, initiated through academic institutional networks and community organizations, facilitated access to participants representing diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Demographic composition received careful monitoring to ensure adequate representation of the socially engaged adult population.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Category	Sub-category	Frequency (N)	Percentage
Gender	Male	26	52%
	Female	24	48%
Age Group	18-30 (Young Adult)	18	36%
	31-50 (Middle Age)	20	40%
	50+ (Senior)	12	24%
Education Level	High School or below	15	30%
	University Degree or higher	35	70%

4.2 Data Collection Methodologies

To establish robust data triangulation, a mixed-methods research design was implemented, integrating a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with semi-structured follow-up interviews.

1. Discourse Completion Task (DCT): The DCT consisted of six scenarios designed to elicit offers in varying contexts of social distance and power. For example: *Scenario A (Social Distance Condition)*: You are eating a sandwich and a colleague you don't know well walks into the break room. *Scenario B*: You are in a taxi with a close friend and the driver asks for the fare. Participants were asked to write down exactly what they would say.

2. Interviews: A subset of 15 participants engaged in recorded interviews to discuss their responses. They were asked explicitly about their intentions: "Did you actually want the person to accept the offer?" and "How would you feel if they accepted immediately?" This introspective data is crucial for distinguishing *mjamla* from sincerity.

4.3 Data Analysis and Coding

The DCT responses yielded a corpus of 300 distinct speech acts. These were transcribed and coded for specific linguistic strategies (e.g., use of religious formulas, repetition, conditional clauses, imperatives). The "sincerity" of the offer was evaluated not by the researcher's intuition, but by cross-referencing the participant's own admissions in the follow-up interviews and by analyzing the conditional phrasing within the offers themselves (e.g., offers made with built-in escape clauses). The data was analyzed quantitatively to identify frequency patterns and qualitatively to interpret the sociopragmatic functions.

5. Results

The analysis revealed a complex landscape of offering strategies. Offers were broadly categorized into "Sincere Offers" (where the speaker indicated a genuine desire for acceptance) and "Ritualistic Offers/Mjamla" (where acceptance was not the primary goal). A striking 62% of all elicited offers in "high social distance" scenarios (acquaintances/strangers) were identified by participants themselves as purely mjamla.

5.1 Linguistic Strategies of Mjamla

The study identified distinct linguistic markers that signal an offer is ritualistic rather than transactional. Unlike sincere offers, which often focus on the logistics of the transfer ("Do you want half?"), mjamla offers focus on the relationship and the character of the speaker.

Table 2: Frequency of Linguistic Strategies in Ritualistic Offers

Strategy	Example (Libyan Arabic / English)	Frequency (%)
Oath-taking (Swearing)	"Wallahi ma tsir" (I swear by God it won't happen [you paying])	78%
Hyperbolic Future Tense	"Tfaddal, al-hosh hoshak" (Please, the house is your house)	65%
Diminutives/Minimization	"Haja baseeta" (It's a simple/small thing)	42%
Conditional Impossibility	"Law kan endi..." (If only I had...)	30%

5.2 The "Wallet Reach Ritual"

One of the most salient contexts for mjamla identified in the study was the payment of a bill (restaurant or taxi). In 90% of cases involving peers, participants engaged in what we term the "Wallet Reach Ritual." This involves a physical performance accompanying the speech act. Even if a participant had no intention of paying—or indeed, had no cash in their wallet—they physically reached for their pocket or bag.

Participant 14 (Male, 34) articulated this clearly in the interview:

"If I don't reach for my pocket, even if I know he invited me, I look cheap. It is a play. We both know the script. If I just sat there and waited for him to pay, it would be an insult to him, as if I expect him to serve me."

This finding underscores that mjamla is multimodal; the linguistic offer must be supported by kinesic cues to be valid.

5.3 The "Three-Offer Rule"

Quantitative analysis of the exchange sequences suggests a robust pattern we have termed the "Three-Offer Rule." In sincere offers, the speaker typically insists once or twice, and then accepts the refusal. However, in mjamla scenarios, the ritual often has a specific cadence. The offer must be made, refused, re-offered, refused again, and potentially offered a third time before the subject is dropped.

Consider the following exchange from our data (Scenario: Offering food to a casual visitor):

A (Host): *"Tfaddal, kul maana."* (Please, eat with us.)

B (Guest): *"La la, sahha, wakil."* (No no, health to you, I have eaten.)

A (Host): *"Ghair duga bas."* (Just a bite/morsel only.)

B (Guest): *"Wallahi al-hamdullah."* (I swear to God, praise be to God [I am full].)

A (Host): [Stops insisting].

Here, the host fulfills the social obligation of offering twice. Had the host continued beyond the second refusal reinforced by an oath ("Wallahi"), it might have created awkwardness. Conversely, had the host accepted the first "No" immediately, it would have been perceived as "cold" or the initial offer as "fake" (even if it was). The ritual requires the persistence to validate the initial gesture.

5.4 Power Dynamics and Social Distance

A deeper analysis of the data reveals that social power significantly impacts the performance of mjamla. In scenarios involving a power differential (e.g., an employee offering to pay for a boss), the dynamic shifts. Subordinates were found to be more likely to engage in "safe" mjamla—making offers they knew would be refused by a superior due to social norms (the superior is expected to provide). Conversely, between equals, the risk of an "accidental acceptance" is higher, leading to more cautious phrasing.

Social distance also played a paradoxical role. With close friends, mjamla was often truncated or performed ironically. With acquaintances (mid-distance), mjamla was at its most rigid and formal. With total strangers, mjamla reappeared in specific contexts (like sharing food on a bus) as a way to establish temporary trust.

6. Discussion

6.1 Sincerity vs. Social Indexing

The findings challenge the binary distinction often drawn in Western pragmatics between "sincere" and "insincere." In Libyan Arabic, mjamla represents a form of "social sincerity"—it is sincere to the relationship, if not to the propositional content. When a speaker says, "*Wallahi tatghadda*" (I swear you will have lunch), knowing there is no lunch prepared, they are indexing the high value of the guest. As Mills (2003) argues, politeness is a judgment made by the community of practice. In Libya, the "insincere" offer is judged as "polite" while the "sincere" silence (not offering because you have no food) is judged as "rude."

This aligns with Gu's (1990) analysis of Chinese politeness, where "limao" involves adherence to social norms rather than instrumental satisfaction of wants. The Libyan speaker prioritizes the appearance of generosity over the actuality of resource transfer. The speech act performs the generosity, rather than the resource itself.

6.2 The Pragmatic Paradox of Oaths (Wallahi)

The high frequency of oath-taking (78%) in ritualistic offers presents a fascinating pragmatic paradox. Religious oaths (Wallahi, Wrasak) are ostensibly designed to bind a speaker to the truth. However, in Libyan pragmatics, Wallahi functions here as an intensifier of illocutionary force, not a verifier of propositional content. It signals, "*I am serious about my desire to be generous*," rather than "*I am serious about the logistics of this offer*."

This usage transforms the oath into a politeness marker. However, we observed a statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) between age and the use of oaths. Older participants used oaths freely in mjamla, whereas younger participants showed hesitation, often viewing the casual use of God's name for social niceties as religiously problematic or "old fashioned."

6.3 Gendered Dimensions of Mjamla

While the initial scope of this study was general, gender differences emerged as a significant variable. Male participants were more likely to engage in public, aggressive mjamla (e.g., fighting over a bill in a restaurant), viewing it as a contest of masculinity and honor (sharaf).

Female participants, conversely, reported more intricate mjamla strategies within the domestic sphere, particularly regarding food and hospitality. For women, mjamla often involved self-deprecation (minimizing the effort of cooking) while simultaneously insisting the guest eat more. This suggests that while mjamla is universal, its performance is gendered: for men, it is often about power and resources; for women, it is often about care and domestic competence.

6.4 Generational Shifts and Pragmatic Fatigue

Perhaps the most critical finding for the future of Libyan sociopragmatics is the generational tension. Younger participants (18-30) expressed frequent frustration with the ambiguity of mjamla.

Participant 03 (Female, 22) noted:

"Sometimes I just want to say no and have them stop. The drama is exhausting. If I say no, it means no. I prefer the Western style where 'no' is respected immediately."

This sentiment suggests that globalization and exposure to direct communication styles (via media and English language education) might be eroding the traditional "dance" of refusal and insistence. The younger generation appears to be moving toward what Blum-Kulka (1987) might describe as a more direct positive politeness, stripping away the ritualistic layers. This "pragmatic fatigue" could lead to a gradual simplification of Libyan politeness rituals over time.

7. Implications

7.1 For Language Pedagogy

These findings have profound implications for Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL). Current curricula often focus on the transactional aspects of language—how to order food, how to buy a ticket. However, a student who learns to say *"Do you want this?"* without understanding the "Three-Offer Rule" will be pragmatically incompetent in Libya. They may inadvertently offend a host by accepting the first "polite" refusal, or they may accept an "empty" offer (like a taxi driver refusing a fare) and be perceived as rude. Pedagogy must include the "scripts" of mjamla, teaching learners not just the words, but the sequence of refusal and insistence required to be a polite social actor.

7.2 For Intercultural Communication

In business and diplomatic contexts, the misinterpretation of mjamla can lead to significant friction. A Western negotiator might interpret a Libyan counterpart's initial refusal as a final decision, unaware that it is a ritualistic posture awaiting insistence. Conversely, a Westerner might interpret a mjamla offer ("Stay at my house") as a literal invitation, leading to awkwardness. Recognizing mjamla as a rapport management tool rather than a literal transfer of information is essential for successful cross-cultural engagement.

8. Conclusion and Future Research

This study has examined the sociopragmatic phenomenon of mjamla in Libyan Arabic and demonstrated that it constitutes a complex and culturally meaningful communicative practice rather than superficial politeness or empty social ritual. The findings indicate that ritualized offering functions as a crucial mechanism for maintaining interpersonal harmony, preserving face, and reinforcing social cohesion within Libyan society. Far from being deceptive, the apparent "insincerity" of such offers operates as a culturally intelligible signal of respect, goodwill, and social competence. Participants rely on shared pragmatic knowledge to interpret

these exchanges correctly, ensuring that relationships are strengthened rather than compromised.

The analysis revealed that offering sequences are governed by recognizable interactional norms, including repeated insistence and stylized refusal. Practices such as the “Three-Offer” pattern—where an offer is reiterated multiple times before acceptance becomes appropriate—and performative gestures like reaching for one’s wallet function as symbolic acts that index generosity, humility, and mutual regard. These behaviors illustrate how communicative actions in Libyan Arabic extend beyond literal meaning to perform social work, negotiating status relations and affirming communal values such as *karam* (generosity) and respect for others’ dignity. In this sense, *mjamla* operates as a culturally sanctioned script through which speakers manage both their own social identity and that of their interlocutors.

At the same time, the study provides preliminary evidence of sociolinguistic change. Younger speakers appear to question the necessity or efficiency of highly ritualized exchanges, particularly those requiring significant effort or time. This generational shift suggests that Libyan politeness norms may be undergoing transformation under the influence of modernization, urbanization, digital communication, and increased exposure to global interactional styles that prioritize directness and efficiency. Rather than indicating the disappearance of *mjamla*, these tendencies point toward an ongoing renegotiation of its forms and functions. Understanding this evolution is essential for capturing the dynamic nature of pragmatics in contemporary Libyan society.

Methodologically, the findings—derived primarily from Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs)—offer valuable insights into speakers’ perceptions of appropriate behavior but may not fully capture the complexity of naturally occurring interaction. Consequently, future research should employ ethnographic observation, audio-recorded natural conversations, or Conversation Analysis (CA) to examine how *mjamla* unfolds in real time. Such approaches would allow researchers to analyze prosody, timing, overlap, embodied actions, and contextual cues that cannot be adequately represented in elicited data alone. Longitudinal studies could also track changes across generations to determine whether emerging communicative preferences represent temporary trends or enduring shifts.

Another promising direction involves cross-regional comparison. Investigating whether similar ritualized offering practices exist in neighboring Maghreb countries—such as Tunisia and Algeria—would help map the continuum of politeness norms across North Africa. Such comparative work could reveal both shared cultural foundations and locally specific adaptations, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Arab sociopragmatics beyond the often-assumed homogeneity of “Arab culture.” Additionally, comparative studies with Middle Eastern contexts could clarify whether Maghrebi practices represent distinct pragmatic systems or variations within a broader cultural framework.

Further research may also explore contextual variables that shape the use of *mjamla*, including gender, social class, rural-urban differences, and situational formality. For instance, ritualized offers may be more prevalent in family settings than in professional environments, or they may vary according to the relative status of participants. Investigating these factors would deepen our understanding of how politeness strategies intersect with social structure.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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