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Self-praise on Arabic social media

To date, research on self-praise has highlighted mostly the pragmatic contingencies of self-praise in Western and Asian discourse. This study examines how self-praise is linguistically and multimodally realized on Arabic Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok. In addition to identifying various types of self-praise speech acts constructed on Arabic social media platforms, the study explores how self-praise facilitates cultural reflection in the understudied Arabic context, along with the role that emojis and other graphicons can play in enhancing self-praise or acting as self-praise.

The present study is part of a larger ethnographic project on the sociolinguistic management of Arab cultural face in memetic actions created and shared nationally on social media by Arabs in the Arabian Gulf region, with a focus on the social monarchy Oman. Key to this management – which entails impolite-oriented discourse directed at contesting traditional cultural identity from the bottom-up, is the concept of self-praise, positive explicit or implicit statements about one's self. The data set consists of over 5000 posts shared between 2015-2023.

Adopting a discourse-pragmatic perspective, while highlighting graphicon-text interplay, the study reveals three types of macro self-praise acts among Arabs on social media: personal, national and cultural. The study further demonstrates how to engage in cultural reflection, the citizens in Oman in specific draw upon personal and cultural self-praise (constructed through language and emoji) which help question national identity while saving face. Interestingly enough, of all six Arabian Gulf countries, Omanis engaged most in national praise, complementing their country and its history. As for personal self-praise, the main finding was the use of Twitter by Arabs as a safe space to promote professional accomplishment, while Instagram was marked for showcasing personal attributes. The study breaks new ground by implementing an expansive view of self-praise acts, illuminating the role self-praise can play not just as a tool of interpersonal management, but also as a tool of dissent and reflexivity and a marker of national identity in Arabic digital discourse.

The presentation contributes to digital discourse, pragmatics and multimodality by: examining self-praise acts in the understudied Arabic digital context, documenting macro and micro types of self-praise acts, and demonstrating the interplay between self-praise speech acts, emojis and other types of graphicons.

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