

# *Oh Yeah, That Was Super Sincere: Social Meanings of Congratulatory Speech Acts*

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## 1 Introduction

Social meaning has been theorized in sociolinguistics as a layer of not-at-issue meaning representing the wide variety of social information a form can convey about a speaker—things like identities, affects, stances, and ideologies. Social meaning has largely been studied in how it attaches to forms through indexical relationships, with a focus on phonetic variables (Eckert 2008, 2019), while the potential social meaning of larger stretches of discourse remains undertheorized. Building on previous work, this study examines the social meanings of congratulatory speech acts. I ask whether/how social meaning might attach to speech acts and how this might be different from other forms, and to what extent the perceived validity of a speech act performed by two different speakers varies depending on the social categories of the speakers. I answer these questions via a matched guise experiment.

### 1.1 Speech Acts

Felicity conditions constitute a large part of the conditions for appropriate use of speech acts. These conditions, as Austin (1975) defines them, are essentially the social circumstances that must be in place in order for speech acts to be performed normatively, and for the social contracts that give speech acts their power to be invoked. These social circumstances include the need for appropriate participants; the right speaker must perform the speech at the right time. Austin explains this with institutional and ritual examples; a christening of a ship is only successful if performed by the designated and authorized ship-christener at the appropriate moment of the ritual ceremony. A random passerby may jump in to christen the ship, using the explicit performative “I name this ship the *Generalissimo Stalin*” but this christening will not be seen as successful. Because the random passerby is not the agreed-upon christener and the ritual order is interrupted, the ship will not be considered to have been christened the *Generalissimo Stalin*. Outside of ritual and institutional settings, Austin’s conditions around appropriate participants can include social distinctions and notions of personhood. In order for certain speech acts to be successful, social hierarchies between the speaker and addressees must be drawn upon and reified. For example, even though there may not be a ritual setting in which a speaker issues a command, there must be a social relation (in this case, a power differential) between the speaker and addressees which legitimizes the speaker’s right to issue a command and have it be recognized as such.

We know social meaning attaches to phonetic features and phonological variants. Here, I ask whether social meaning might attach to particular speech acts and how this process might be different from the processes by which it typically attaches to phonetic/phonological variants. Speech acts merit the attention of sociolinguistics because the study of language as a social practice would be incomplete without considering speech acts. Besides the obvious uses of speech acts to carry out the needs of an individual speaker, speech acts have the capacity to create, reinforce, or change the social relations that make up a community. The sociolinguistic study of speech acts can improve our notions of social meaning and the semiotic processes through which it is accrued, as well as expand our notions of what constitutes style. If style is a way of linguistically presenting oneself in the world (Eckert 2003, 2012), the use of speech acts to structure and negotiate one’s social world should be considered as part of this.

### 1.2 Social Meaning

Social meanings have been theorized as the wide variety of social information a form can convey

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about its speakers (Beltrama 2020, Eckert 2008). The field of sociolinguistics has largely focused on the social meanings conveyed by phonetic and phonological variables. This is in part because variationist sociolinguistics has relied on the analysis of large numbers of tokens produced in naturalistic speech, which is more easily achievable when tokens are phonetic features, rather than lexical or morphosyntactic features. Furthermore, phonetic variation does not itself carry denotational meaning, so social meanings can easily be determined from the comparison between utterances that vary in terms of phonetic realization but are otherwise identical in denotational meaning (Lavandera 1978). Not only is this not the case for lexical and morphosyntactic features, but the possibility of treating a feature as a variant or variable cannot be taken for granted in the same way as for phonetic features. Variationist sociolinguists have typically followed Labov's Principle of Accountability (Labov 1972)—the idea that a variant of a variable should be studied in relation to its competing variants, as long as those variants are different ways of saying the “same thing”—that is, that there is no difference in denotation. For phonetic features, non-denotational meaning attaches to an otherwise blank meaning slate. However, if we are to treat speech acts as sociolinguistic variables, there is already denotational meaning. How might the social meanings and denotational meanings of speech acts interact?

Though social meaning is often understood as originating from an association with particular social categories, recent work in sociopragmatics has shown that words can develop social meanings that derive from the word's denotational meaning or the presuppositions the word triggers, rather than from associations with groups of speakers (Acton and Potts 2014, Acton 2021, Beltrama and Staum Casasanto 2017, Glass 2015). In these cases, the denotational meaning contributes to a social meaning, which then becomes ideologized as linked to particular kinds of speakers, in a process of indexicality that is the reverse of that for phonetic variables. While phonetic features typically become associated with particular demographic groups (usually by those groups that use the feature more frequently), and then become associated with characteristics, stances, and qualities associated with those demographic groups, the denotational meaning of words provides the content from which qualities and stances may become associated with the words. Then, listeners connect those qualities with groups of speakers, ultimately associating the words with the groups of speakers indirectly. However, larger units of speech remain undertheorized in the variationist literature as to their potential to accrue social meanings. Expanding on the sociopragmatics literature, I consider speech acts—whether they can take on social meanings and how these social meanings may differ from those carried by other kinds of sociolinguistic variables. My goal in this paper is to explore the relation between social meaning and speech acts: whether speech acts can take on social meanings at all, and if so, how these social meanings may differ from those carried by other kinds of sociolinguistic variables.

### 1.3 Congratulations

In order to investigate the possible social meanings of speech acts, I perform a perceptual matched-guise study focusing on congratulatory speech acts. I choose congratulations, because they appear not to be enregistered (Agha 2005) to particular social types in the same way that other speech acts have been. While non-linguists may have intuitions about the ideal kinds of speakers for a congratulation, congratulations are not the object of metalinguistic commentary to the same extent as other speech acts.

Congratulations are an expression of a psychological state (Searle 1975)—unlike speech acts that try to achieve a word-world or world-word fit—namely a positive sentiment regarding something good that has happened to another person. Unlike other speech acts that express a *belief* about the propositional content (e.g. assertions), an *intention* to do the propositional content (e.g. promises, threats), or *desires* about the propositional content (e.g. requests), congratulations express pleasure—whether it is authentic or not—at the propositional content. In order to be authentic, congratulations require some empathy and recognition of what qualifies as a positive event for another person, in that the act of congratulation allows “the speaker to share in the experience and feelings of the addressee” (Norrick 1978:286). Like other speech acts, there are innumerable utterances that can be used to perform a congratulation.

## 2 Methods

Following the methodologies of Hilton (2018), I use a perceptual study involving two surveys to understand the potential social meanings of speech acts and how they may function differently than for other sociolinguistic variables. These surveys involve a matched-guise (Lambert et al. 1960) design.

### 2.1 Survey 1

For the first survey, I use a matched-guise design to elicit participant reactions to congratulation speech acts, specifically in terms of qualities typically encountered in social evaluation tasks but also in terms of qualities relating to social interaction. Namely, participants view a scenario in which two individuals are engaged in conversation in a workplace. One speaker informs the other of a recent achievement, and the second speaker responds in a congratulatory or non-congratulatory way. After reading this scenario, participants are then asked to rate how well they believe attributes like *friendly* or *competent* apply to the second speaker. In this survey, 3 factors were varied: gender of speaker and listener (man-man, woman-woman), the type of scenario (canonical, competitive), and response type (*congratulations*, *I'm proud of you*, neutral), for a total of 12 conditions.

### 2.2 Survey 2

For the second survey, I use a nearly identical design, but rather than asking questions about speaker attributes, the survey asks participants to attend to the interaction overall and respond to questions regarding the relationship between the two speakers, and evaluating the legitimacy or appropriateness of the speaker's congratulatory or non-congratulatory response. For this survey, the same factors are varied, except I include all four possible binary gender pairings for the speaker and listener (man-man, man-woman, woman-man, woman-woman), which results in 24 conditions. In both surveys, I collect the demographic information of age, gender, and self-reported level of excitement the participant feels when a friend accomplishes something. In both surveys, participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the researchers.

### 2.3 Stimuli

The stimuli consisted of short written dialogues, all two turns long, with a sentence of background information. The goals in creating the stimuli were to resemble real-life conversations, while also meeting the requirements of the experiments in terms of conditions, and not providing excess information to participants, encouraging participants to focus specifically on the speech act without being explicitly told to do so. While socially-oriented studies of speech acts typically examine naturalistic data, having explicit control over the stimuli by writing it allows us to independently test the effects of speaker and listener gender, scenario, and response type over the perception of the speech act.

Because this study examines the social meanings of pragmatic, rather than phonetic features, written dialogues in this scenario were preferred over auditory stimuli, because the sociophonetic features of different voices may produce extra information that may influence participant decisions. However, in reality, speech acts are necessarily embodied, and phonetic and visual semiotic information given by the speaker is part and parcel of the speech act and cannot be detached from it for a perceiver.

The genders of the speaker and listener were indexed through the use of stereotypically gendered names (Robert and Michael as man names, and Alice and Michelle as woman names). The competitive and canonical scenarios refer to different possible dynamics in which congratulations may be expected. The competitive scenario is one in which the accomplishment being announced by the first speaker is something the second speaker was striving for as well and did not attain. In the experiment, the competitive scenario is one where the first speaker tells the second speaker that they got the promotion. The preceding background before the dialogue tells the participants that both speakers were being considered for the promotion. The canonical scenario is one in which both speakers were not necessarily in competition for the achievement. In the case of my experiment, the canonical scenario consists of one speaker telling the other speaker they were able to bring on a new client. Participants are given the background information that the two speakers work together on the same team at a marketing agency.

The response types I include are the typical congratulations formula “Congratulations!”, the less typical congratulations formula, “I’m proud of you!”, and a neutral or non-congratulatory formula (“When did you hear?” or “When did this happen?”). I recognize that there is no such thing as a “neutral” speech act, or an ideologically neutral context that would precipitate such a speech act. The matched guise design requires a neutral guise against which to compare a marked guise—in this case, I treat the presence of congratulation and the absence of congratulation in an utterance as two variants of the same variable. Further, the contexts presented in the stimuli are ones in which congratulations are expected, and the lack of congratulations is unexpected. I discuss the issues that arise as a result of using this type of context later in the paper.

Following Hilton (2018) I use a between-subjects design such that each participant only views one condition, because within-subjects designs for social evaluation tasks such as matched guise studies can cause participants to feel obligated to exaggerate the differences they perceive between conditions. Further, in order to avoid participant fatigue, participants only completed one trial. Survey 1 and 2 were designed in Qualtrics and administered via Prolific, where native speakers of US American English were paid \$0.55 for each survey, the duration of which was less than five minutes. Survey 1 was administered to 480 participants, and Survey 2 was administered to 960 participants. Both surveys included two attention check questions. Participants who failed any of the attention check questions were still paid, however their responses were excluded from the analysis.

### 3 Results

In this section, I will summarize the results that arose as significant from my experiment. Following Hilton (2018), I analyze the Likert scale data using linear regression models. 18 total responses (6 from Survey 1, 12 from Survey 2) from participants who failed the attention checks were excluded from the analyses.

#### 3.1 Congratulatory Responses vs. Non-congratulatory Responses

One result relates to how congratulatory responses (“Congratulations” and “I’m proud of you”) are perceived relative to a non-congratulatory response (“When did you hear?” or “When did this happen?”). Specifically, speakers producing the non-congratulatory response are perceived as significantly less polite ( $p < .001$ ), friendly ( $p < .001$ ), professional ( $p < .001$ ), collegial ( $p < .001$ ), trustworthy ( $p < .001$ ), likable ( $p < .001$ ), easygoing ( $p < .001$ ), sincere ( $p < .001$ ), hardworking ( $p < .05$ ), kind ( $p < .001$ ), competent ( $p < .05$ ), and emotionally expressive ( $p < .001$ ). This suggests that both congratulatory responses have these social meanings, whereas the non-congratulatory responses do not have these social meanings, and if anything, the marked lack of a congratulatory response may carry the opposite social meaning; that is, if a speaker who utters a congratulation is trustworthy or kind, for instance, the lack of a congratulation in the same context will make the speaker be viewed as untrustworthy and unkind. No significant results arose for the attributes assertive, rural, or wealthy.

Responses to questions relating to the relationship between the two speakers show similar results. The two speakers are rated as knowing each other significantly less well ( $p < .001$ ) if the second speaker produces a non-congratulatory response as opposed to a congratulatory response. Similarly, non-congratulatory responses are rated as significantly less socially acceptable ( $p < .001$ ) than both congratulatory responses.

Figure 3, below, illustrates the results relating to the main effect of congratulatory vs. non-congratulatory response type for each attribute. Namely, the *estimate* column shows the extent to which non-congratulatory responses differ from congratulatory responses in terms of their effect size on the ratings for the quality in the *attribute* column. Figure 4 provides a visualization of the average Likert scale rating for each attribute, by response type.

#### 3.4 Gendered results

As well as response type and scenario type, some results relating to gender in interaction with the aforementioned variables arise as significant. Regardless of response, woman-woman dyads in competitive scenarios are rated as significantly less friendly ( $p < .05$ ) and less professional than man-

man dyads and speakers in canonical scenarios. Woman-woman interactions in competitive scenarios, regardless of response type, are rated as more socially acceptable ( $p < .05$ ). These results do not tell us directly about the relationship between gender and congratulations, though the overall perception of gender and scenario type, relative to each other, can inform some of the other gendered results that do relate to response type.

Some negative perceptions arise in the interaction between gender and other predictors. Women who address other women with non-congratulatory responses are rated as significantly less collegial ( $p < .01$ ) than male or congratulatory counterparts. In competitive scenarios, women who address other women with a non-congratulatory response are perceived as significantly less polite ( $p < .05$ ) than speakers in man-man dyads, or canonical scenarios, or those who use congratulatory responses. For the attribute sincere, an interaction between gender, scenario, and response type arises as significant: women who address other women with *I'm proud of you* in competitive scenarios are rated as less sincere ( $p < .05$ ) than their counterparts.

Further, women who address other women with *I'm proud of you* instead of *congratulations* are rated as knowing each other significantly better ( $p < .05$ ) than their counterparts. Lastly, women who address other women with *I'm proud of you* are perceived as significantly more assertive ( $p < .05$ ) than their counterparts regardless of environment, although women who address other women with *I'm proud of you* in competitive environments are seen as less assertive ( $p < .05$ ).

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Social Meanings of Congratulating vs. Not Congratulating

The clearest pattern in the results is that on the whole, the social meanings of the non-congratulatory response differ from those of congratulatory responses, as the speakers uttering congratulatory responses are rated overall as more strongly possessing qualities such as politeness, sincerity, friendliness etc., than those uttering non-congratulatory responses. This pattern could be interpreted in more than one way, depending on how we understand speech acts like congratulations to function as sociolinguistic variables.

We can treat the choice to congratulate or not to congratulate as a sociolinguistic variable, such that a response that contains a congratulation, and one not containing a congratulation, which we can call [+ congratulation] and [- congratulation] respectively, each are variants. We can borrow from discussions of other ostensibly binary sociolinguistic variables in which each variant has a set of social meanings that is in ideological opposition to the social meanings of the other variant. For instance, the realization of the English -ING suffix as either velar [ɪŋ] or alveolar [ɪn] has been at the center of these discussions; speakers who use the [ɪn] form are perceived as informal, uneducated, unintelligent, and less likely to be gay, whereas [ɪŋ] users are perceived as articulate, intelligent, educated, and formal (Campbell-Kibler 2007, 2008, 2010). In a similar vein, we could argue that [+ congratulation] has a set of social meanings including *polite, friendly, collegial, likable* etc., whereas [- congratulation] has the “opposite” of such social meanings: *rude, unfriendly, uncollegial, unlikable* etc.

A more likely possibility is that given certain contexts, including the scenarios in my experiment, [+ congratulation] is seen as a sort of baseline neutral utterance expected of typical social actors, whereas [- congratulation] is seen as marked. This can be understood following discussion around the structure of interaction from ethnomethodologists such as Goffman. In an analogous way to how Grice (1975) describes the maxims of conversation that a rational speaker should follow in order to communicate effectively, Goffman's concepts of face and conversation as ritual explain how social actors behave in order to exist appropriately in their society. Despite the improvisational aspects of conversation, conversation is considered in linguistic anthropology as an interaction ritual that follows a metricalized script (Goffman 1983, Silverstein 2004, Lempert 2008). This can be illustrated with adjacency pairs, for instance, as well as discourse markers that make up transitions between bits of metricalized interactional text. Currently, congratulation has become very conventionalized as a response to hearing a piece of good news from an interlocutor. A congratulation is not simply an expression of recognizing the interlocutor's accomplishment or positive event and sharing in the interlocutor's joy, but in many instances has become a default polite response to hearing another person's good news as part of a contact ritual (Goffman 1983) and is necessary for

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face-maintenance of both interaction participants. That is, congratulation can be thought more as a sort of “bare minimum,” rather than an index of a speaker’s kindness and empathy. This, of course, differs from context to context; hearing of another person’s good news from a source other than the person themselves does not always require that the speaker congratulate the person with good news. For instance, it can be appropriate to see an acquaintance’s tweet announcing their engagement without responding to the tweet. This is appropriate in part because participants on Twitter are aware that many people choose to view content on the platform without engaging in responses or likes, and also because the person tweeting may not even be aware that their acquaintance saw their announcement, which spares the acquaintance from an obligation to respond. In real-time conversational interaction, speakers are not given this same benefit of the doubt and are pressured to respond to the good news immediately—and the expected response includes [+ congratulation] in some shape. The completion of the *good news* and [+ congratulation] adjacency pair marks the completion of a successful conversational ritual, and both speakers can retain face and continue the interaction. In this case, [+ congratulation] can be said to index the positive qualities like *polite, friendly*, etc., given the assumption that most rational speakers who participate appropriately in society possess these qualities, rather than treating these positive qualities as exceptional and marked.

The disruption of the expected interaction ritual through a [- congratulation] utterance comes off typically as shocking and hurtful to the person with good news seeking out congratulations. We can see evidence of this from metalinguistic commentary. Participants in my second survey were given free response questions relating to what the speaker meant by their response, and how the person sharing the good news may have felt upon hearing the response. The responses to these questions were not statistically analyzed, but provide a source of metalinguistic commentary as to how congratulations or lack thereof are viewed. Participants who were shown non-congratulatory conditions where the second speaker responded to the first speaker’s good news with “When did you hear?” or “When did this happen?” shared the intuitions that the scenario’s context made a congratulation expected. The non-congratulatory response was unexpected because it was not a congratulation, and it may be understood as rude or hurtful to the speaker with good news. The following are just a few examples of these intuitions expressed by experiment participants.

In response to the question, “How do you think [the responder’s utterance] made [the speaker with good news] feel?” participants say:

- (1) Could go either way. It may have made Robert feel a little deflated, perhaps?
- (2) Like Michael did not care and wasn’t happy for Robert.
- (3) Maybe a little disappointed not to be congratulated?
- (4) It maybe disappointed her also, because she expected Michelle to be happy.
- (5) Alice probably hoped Michelle would’ve shown a little more enthusiasm on her part.

Further, not only do participants view the [- congratulation] response as coming off as unexpected given the circumstance, but some also see it as potentially indexical of the speaker’s negative sentiments towards the good news, which can be seen in the following examples. In response to the question “What do you think [the responder] meant by their response?” participants say:

- (1) I think Michelle was jealous of Alice.
- (2) It almost seemed like she was upset or even jealous that Alice brought a new client in.
- (3) Nothing, she just wanted Robert to feel bad.

We can see from this metalinguistic commentary that a [- congratulation] reaction of a responder is unexpected. Participants have the intuition that the person sharing good news with their colleague expects some sort of positive acknowledgement in the form of a congratulation, and that not receiving a congratulation when expecting one is surprising, disappointing, and invalidating. We can also see that the lack of congratulation affects the perception of the speaker—due to their non-congratulatory response, the speakers who don’t congratulate are perceived as at best uncaring and thoughtless, or jealous and unskilled at concealing that sentiment, and at worst, intentionally hurtful. These intuitions are shared by others outside of the experimental context, and salient enough to be explicitly verbalized as metadiscourse, as illustrated in the following viral tweet.

It seems that speakers sharing good news might prefer that their congratulators genuinely share in their joy and hold the feelings they are indexing through their congratulation. However, sometimes a congratulation is an expected part of the interaction order even when it seems unlikely that the speaker can truly share in their addressee's joy. For instance, after the contentious 2016 United States presidential election, candidate Hillary Clinton called Donald Trump to congratulate him on winning. Not only is it very unlikely that Hillary Clinton shared in Trump's joy at winning, given that she herself lost, but she likely also felt concern and despair for the future of the U.S. That her sentiments towards Trump's victory did not include sharing in his joy did not delegitimize her congratulation—whether or not Clinton was sincere was not in question, because her congratulation was simply an expected part of an established interaction ritual.

While expectations will vary from context to context, it seems that in cases where a person shares their own good news directly with an interlocutor, a congratulation is an expected part of the interaction order, such that the sharing of good news and a congratulation form a sort of adjacency pair. The completion of the adjacency pair is not remarkable and continues to index the speaker's basic assumed status as polite/friendly/etc., whereas completing the adjacency pair with anything other than a congratulation is marked and will lower the extent to which the responder is perceived as a normal participant in society. So, while we can say that congratulations index all of the qualities found in the experiment, their social meanings amount more to a general and expected sense of normalcy, whereas the lack of a congratulation not only does not index those positive qualities, but indexes the opposites of those qualities—unfriendliness, rudeness, etc.—in a more noticeable way. This way of thinking about social meanings could be extended to other speech acts that are expected parts of certain interaction rituals, such as apologies. These results relating to the difference between [- congratulation] and [+ congratulation] utterances suggest that speech acts do have social meanings, but they differ somewhat from phonological variables in what work those social meanings do when a speaker deploys, or doesn't deploy, that speech act.

#### 4.2 Gender

In this section I seek to interpret the gender-related results that arose as significant and relate them to the broader functioning of social meaning for speech acts. While gender can be indexed at the  $n$ th order for a phonological variable (Silverstein 2003), I argue that in the case of speech acts, gender and other similar demographic categories become associated with a speech act at the  $n+1$  order; the leap from the  $n$ th order to the  $n+1$  order is fueled by ideologies about which categories of speakers are best suited to achieving the felicity conditions of the speech act. In the case of congratulations, gendered expectations regarding women's homosocial behavior, as well as gendered stereotypes of women as *catty*, are useful examples for understanding how demographic categories can indirectly become part of a speech act's social meaning through ideology.

From my experiment, I find that women in woman-woman dyads with [-congratulation] responses are rated as less collegial than men, or women with [+congratulation] utterances. Further, in competitive scenarios, women with [- congratulation] utterances are rated as less polite than their counterparts. This should not be particularly surprising, as we know that speakers producing [- congratulation] are negatively evaluated, and women are often negatively evaluated for language practices for which men are not (Lakoff 1975, Rubin and Nelson 1983). In this case, however, the social requirements specific to congratulations can illustrate a fuller picture as to why women are evaluated in this way.

Though stereotypes exist that cast women as catty and adversarial in workplaces, women are socially evaluated positively when they demonstrate solidarity and support each other in breaking glass ceilings. Glass ceilings are the barriers faced by women and minorities in ascending workplace hierarchies (Cotter et al. 2001). In a competitive situation where one woman gains access to a new level of power, this could be perceived as an instance of breaking the glass ceiling. In such a case, a woman could be expected to be genuinely happy for the woman with whom she was in competition for a promotion, because the glass ceiling has been broken by the mere presence of a woman in that space, even though it is not herself. Thus, since breaking the glass ceiling is thought to ultimately benefit all women, a woman may be expected to produce a sincere [+congratulation] utterance. This would not be the case for other gendered dyads, as one speaker receiving the promotion would not be seen as beneficial on the whole for the other speaker. Another relevant gender ideology relates

to empathy; the speaker needs to have some empathy (or be perceived as having empathy) to perform a congratulation that appears sufficiently genuine. Because women are generally perceived as being more empathetic than men (Hakansson and Montgomery 2003, Cundiff and Komarraju 2008), if a woman congratulates another woman with whom she was in competition, she is more likely to be perceived as capable of truly sharing in the other speaker's joy than a man in the equivalent situation. Thus, a speaker could be perceived as especially sincere in their speech act, because they are perceived as more capable of genuinely feeling the positive sentiments indexed by congratulations. This suggests that because women are seen as having more reason to congratulate each other, higher expectations are thus placed on them to congratulate than for other speakers. Because of these expectations, the uttering of [-congratulation] is more surprising and especially negatively evaluated. Further, the uttering of [-congratulation] reinforces existing *catty* and *mean girl* stereotypes – recurrent, salient images of women engaging in aggressive behaviors towards each other as part of a competition for power (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro 2008, Lester 2008). These images are reinforced by racist and sexist ideologies in workplace environments, where there are very few positions available for token women or minorities. That is, some competitive behaviors performed by women are perceived as catty or generally destructive to the social category of women, despite likely being used for the purpose of ascending in a work environment not designed for women.

I believe it is important to attend to the specific qualities that are rated lower for women who do not congratulate, namely *collegial* and *polite*. While it is expected that women will be negatively socially evaluated in some way, collegiality and politeness are especially indicative of pressures women face in the workplace. Specifically, there are different expectations around professionalism for men and for women, where men are seen as meeting the requirements of their job if they complete the officially required tasks, whereas women are also required to engage in emotional labor (Grandey 2000, Durr and Harvey Wingfield 2011, Guy and Newman 2004) and be polite to higher degrees than men in order to be perceived as adequate. Because getting along with one's coworkers and taking on the labor of managing interpersonal work relationships are qualities especially expected of women in the workplace, it should be unsurprising that a [-congratulation] will cause women to be rated as less collegial and polite, but will not affect these ratings of men.

### 4.3 Indirect/Direct Indexicality

Ochs (1992) proposes a model of indexicality that may be effective for describing how the social meanings of speech acts function. Specifically, her model relates to the simultaneous indexing of gender and qualities that relate to gender, such that a form *indirectly* indexes gender, and it also more *directly* and relevantly indexes qualities. Rather than a form directly indexing gender, it is used in constructing a number of stances that can then become associated with gender. In the case of a speech act, the felicity conditions and denotation directly index qualities expected for a speaker, and these qualities indirectly suggest social categories that the qualities point to. If we were to apply this model to congratulations, we would say that congratulations directly index “normal” and expected social qualities like baseline levels of friendliness, politeness, sincerity etc. These qualities suggest the possibility of a demographic category, one that is associated with these qualities, that congratulations would indirectly index. The other “variant,” [-congratulations], directly indexes qualities like insincerity, unfriendliness, etc. In the context of the workplace, these qualities suggest figures of personhood like “catty” women in competitive spaces, which we could say [-congratulations] indirectly indexes. This model is useful in ways that Silverstein's (2003) indexical order falls short; the indexical order requires that the n+1 order logically presuppose what is indexed at the nth order. In other words, if a form indexes *women* at the nth order, and a quality like *effortful* at the n+1 order, the form must additively index *women* and *effortful* even if *effortful* is the only relevant quality in context. Unlike the indexical order, Ochs' model makes no requirement that meanings be indexed in some additive way that presupposes other meanings. This is useful because there is no demographic category that directly corresponds to [+congratulation] and [-congratulation] that is presupposed when a speech act indexes other social meanings.

## 5 Conclusion

Sociolinguistics and pragmatics have taken different routes to answer the question of why people



say things in the way they do. Recent work in sociopragmatics has sought to combine the two lines of thought and grapple with the difficulty long ago noted by Lavandera (1984) of studying discourse features that have denotational meanings. In this paper, I ask whether speech acts have social meanings in addition to their denotational meanings, and if so, how these social meanings might function differently from those attaching to typical sociolinguistic variables. I focus on congratulatory speech acts and treat the choice of producing a congratulatory or non-congratulatory utterance as a sociolinguistic variable, departing from Labov's principle of accountability (Labov 1972). From the results of a matched-guise experiment, I find that speech acts, and the different ways of performing a speech act, do have social meanings, which are highly fluid and context-dependent like those attaching to sociophonetic variables. However, I argue that the social meanings in this case do not exactly follow Silverstein's (2003) indexical order. Rather than starting at a pre-ideological nth level of association with a demographic category through spatiotemporal contiguity, speaker intuitions about denotation and felicity conditions shape how speech acts become linked with characterological attributes and interactional qualities. In the context of use, these attributes and qualities may eventually index figures of personhood.

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