

Prayers as Forms of Speech Act Modification in Saudi Hijazi Arabic

Objectives:

This study investigates the role of prayers and religious invocations as internal modifiers to various speech act strategies in Saudi Hijazi Arabic (SHA). The main objective is to examine how prayer expressions such as 'inshallah', 'wallah', 'ya rab', and 'Allah ykhalik' function within various speech acts SHA. The research questions focus on the extent to which these formulas modify the force of speech acts, and whether they serve as replacements to common English modifiers and other speech markers, such as mitigators, downtoners, sweeteners and expressions of gratitude.

Methodology:

The study adopts a socio-pragmatic framework, drawing on politeness theory (1987) and speech act theory (1962). Data were collected through discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and naturally occurring conversations among SHA speakers in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. A total of 80 participants, balanced across gender and age groups, contributed to the dataset. Instances of prayers embedded within speech acts were identified and analysed in terms of pragmatic function. The analysis compares between modifiers in English and common prayer expressions in SHA and then explores whether these prayers can serve as substitutes in some contexts.

Results:

Prayers are highly frequent and multifunctional in SHA, serving as modifiers that shape the tone, politeness, and social meaning of speech acts. In requests, speakers often used expressions like 'Allah ykhalleek, if you can help me with this task', which softened the imposition and increased the likelihood of a positive response. In refusals, phrases such as 'Insha'Allah khair' created indirectness and left room for negotiation or compromise. When expressing gratitude, invocations like 'Allah yjzeek khair' intensified appreciation and added emotional and cultural depth; while in apologies, expressions such as 'Allah yighfir li' signaled sincerity, humility, and social respect. Prayers were also common in greetings and farewells, for example, 'As-salamu alaykum' and 'Allah ma'ak' strengthened social bonds and expressed care and hope for the listener's well-being. In compliments, speakers often said 'Mashallah', enhancing praise while showing modesty, and in encouragement or advice giving, phrases like 'Allah ywafgak' motivated and supported the listener while embedding a prayer. Across these contexts, prayers functioned not only as religious expressions but also as social tools that enriched communication in culturally meaningful ways.

Discussion:

The study highlights the central role of religious language in shaping politeness strategies in SHA. Prayers serve not only as linguistic embellishments but also as key internal modifiers to various speech acts. Their presence underscores the intertwining of religious and cultural norms in everyday communication. By demonstrating how invocations operate pragmatically, the research contributes to broader discussions of Arabic pragmatics,

politeness theory, and the interface between language and religion. These findings suggest that prayers in SHA are essential components of pragmatic competence and should be considered in intercultural communication and language pedagogy.