

EXPRESSING BEST WISHES IN ARABIC: ROOM FOR PRAGMATIC FAILURE?

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BIBLID [1133-8571] 24 (2017) 175-186.

Resumen: El objetivo del estudio es identificar fórmulas que se utilizan en árabe para expresar buenos deseos en ocasiones especiales tales como bodas o el nacimiento de un bebé. Estas expresiones se podrían dividir en dos categorías: expresiones formulaicas y fórmulas en forma de una oración para bendecir el acontecimiento. Los participantes de este trabajo son mujeres árabes de los países del CCG (EAU, Qatar, Baréin, Kuwait, Omán y Arabia Saudí), Siria y Palestina. Los datos se recopilaron en Abu Dhabi. El estudio también analiza las diferencias regionales entre estos países y se centra en las situaciones comunicativas en las que se podría producir un fallo pragmático. Este estudio tiene implicaciones pedagógicas no solo para los aprendientes de árabe sino también para los estudiantes árabes de lenguas extranjeras.

Palabras clave: expresiones formulaicas de cortesía. Árabe hablado. Cortesía

Abstract: The purpose of the study is to identify the formulas that are used in Arabic to express good wishes in special occasions such as weddings and the birth of a new baby. These expressions could be divided into two categories: formulaic expressions and formulas in form of a prayer to bless the event. Research participants are female Arab speakers from the GCC⁽¹⁾ countries (UAE, Qatar,

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I would like to express my gratitude to Mira Arman, Dana Halwani and Wid Al Ahmad, students at Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, for their valuable help in the data collection.

(1) Gulf Cooperation Council.

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia), Syria and Palestine. Data was collected in Abu Dhabi. The study also analyzes the regional differences between these countries and focuses on communicative situations where pragmatic failure might occur. The present study has pedagogical implications not only for learners of Arabic but also for Arab learners of foreign languages.

Keywords: formulaic courtesy expressions. Spoken Arabic. Politeness

ملخص: يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحديد وتعريف الألفاظ والتعابير المستخدمة باللغة العربية للتعبير عن حسن التمنيات في مناسبات خاصة مثل الزواج وولادة الأطفال. يمكن تقسيم هذه التعابير إلى قسمين: التعابير الجاهزة والتعابير التي تكتسب صيغة الصلوات أو الأدعية من أجل مباركة المناسبة. قد اشتركت في هذا البحث مجموعة من النساء من بلدان الخليج العربي (الإمارات وقطر والبحرين والكويت وسلطنة عمان والمملكة العربية السعودية) إضافة إلى سوريا وفلسطين. وقد تم جمع المعلومات في دبي. كما يسعى هذا البحث إلى تحليل الفوارق الملاحظة بين البلدان المذكورة، مع التركيز على أحوال التواصل التي يمكن فيها ارتكاب أخطاء عملية. ولهذا البحث تداعيات تعليمية ليس فقط لتعلمي العربية بل أيضاً للطلاب العرب الذين يدرسون لغات أجنبية.

كلمات مفاتيح: التعابير الجاهزة للمجاملة، العربية المحكية، أساليب المجاملة.

0.Introduction

The Arabic language is rich in courtesy expressions and formulaic formulas. According to Farha (1991: VII), courtesy expressions are truly the essence which makes the language sound so beautiful and meaningful. The most common situations in which these specific expressions are used are: weddings, the birth of a baby, a new haircut, when someone prepares a meal, when someone buys something new, when meeting someone for the first time and when seeing someone after a long time.

Although the importance of these formulas, there are few contrastive studies between courtesy expressions used in different Arabic dialects, namely Al-Shurafa, 1997, Arman and Halwani, 2015, Al Ahmad, 2015 and Ramajo Cuesta, 2015. This study aims at a positive contribution in this field of research.

1.Purpose of the study and research participants

The purpose of the study is analyzing formulas used in Arabic for the following communicative situations:

- expressing best wishes in weddings
- expressing best wishes for newborns

Previous research (Ramajo Cuesta, 2012, 2015) showed that due to the formulaic nature of Arabic, real language samples might be collected through

different instruments⁽²⁾ including role plays, interviews, muted videos... In the present study, data was collected through questionnaires that inquired the participants about the expressions that they usually use in different situations⁽³⁾.

Participants of the study are female native speakers of Arabic with ages between 18 and 36⁽⁴⁾ years old from the following regions:

- the GCC countries (UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia)
- the Levant region (Syria and Palestine)

The independent variable is “origin”. According to the taxonomy of Arabic dialects of Abboud-Haggar (2010) and Vicente (2008), Syria and Palestine are part of the Levant⁽⁵⁾ and the GCC countries belong to the dialects spoken in the Arabian Peninsula⁽⁶⁾.

2. Data analysis

In order to analyze the formulas that are used to express good wishes in weddings and the birth of a new baby, the expressions are divided into two categories: formulaic expressions and formulas in form of a prayer to bless the event.

2.1. Formulaic expressions

If someone gets married, buys something new or has a baby, it is customary to say the word *مبروك* which means “congratulations” as shown in tables 1 and 2.

Participants share the same set expressions and prayers, although some formulas are only used in The Arabian Peninsula. For instance, in Saudi Arabia and in the United Arab Emirates, it is frequent to use: *منك المال ومنها العيال* “from you (male) the money and from her (female) the children”. It has a rhyme in Arabic, which makes it a common expression.

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- (2) However, in other languages, such as Spanish, previous research showed the importance of using secret recordings to collect real language samples (Ramajo Cuesta, 2012).
 - (3) Questionnaires included the following situations: formulas used during a dinner invite, in a wedding, for a newborn, expressions for changes in physical appearance (new clothing, new haircut...)
 - (4) The influence of the “age” variable was not considered in the research.
 - (5) Levantine Arabic is spoken in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon.
 - (6) Yemen is also included in the taxonomy of Abboud (2010) and Vicente (2008).

For newborns, the UAE and Oman use an uncommon phrase to other countries. For a baby boy it is said الطارش which means that when the boy grows up, he will be helpful towards his father as well as his work. The literal meaning in the UAE dialect is “the sender”. Likewise, الحاسر means a woman that will help in the household.

Weddings			
	Countries	Wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	منك المال و منها العيال مبروك ما سويتو	From you the money and from her the children Congratulations on the marriage (lit: congratulations for what you did).
	Oman	مبروك	Congratulations.
	Saudi Arabia	منك المال و منها العيال	From you the money and from her the children.
	Qatar	الف مبروك	(A thousand) congratulations.
	Bahrain	الف مبروك	(A thousand) congratulations.
	Kuwait	مبروك	Congratulations.
Levant	Syria	ألف مبروك / ألف مبروك تتهنو مبارك ما عملتو	Congratulations, I hope you will be happy. Congratulations on the marriage (lit. congratulations for what you did).
	Palestine	مبروك ما عملتو ألف مبروك / مبروك ما سويتو	Congratulations on the marriage (lit. congratulations for what you did).

			(A thousand) con- gratulations.
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Table 1. Formulaic expressions used to express good wishes in weddings in the GCC countries and in the Levant.

Newborn			
	Countries	(Expressing) wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	ولد: مبروك الطارش بنت: مبروك الحاسر مبروك ما ياكم	For a baby boy: “eltarish” For a baby girl: “elhaser” Congratulations for what you got
	Oman	مبروك عليكم المولود ولد: مبروك الطارش بنت: مبروك الحاسر	Congratulations for your newborn For a baby boy: “eltaarish” For a baby girl “elhaser”
	Saudi Arabia	الف مبروك	(A thousand) congratulations
	Qatar	الف مبروك	(A thousand) congratulations
	Bahrain	الف مبروك	(A thousand) congratulations
	Kuwait	مبروك ما ياكم	Congratulations for what you got
	Levant	Syria	مبارك ما اجاكن/ مبروك ما اجاكي
Palestine		الف مبروك مبروك يترى بعزك	Congratulations, may he grow up in your wealth

Table 2. Formulaic expressions used to express good wishes for a newborn in the GCC countries and the Levant.

2.2. Formulas in form of a prayer

“God gives you happiness” is a regular expression for many situations and it is very commonly used for marriage couples and for newborns. The compliment of a newborn baby is very important for the parents and family members as they receive small prayers for their baby. For instance, يتربى في عزمك “God brings him happiness and safety” is commonly said as it means that the baby will be raised safely in the hands of the parents.

Furthermore, expressions against the “evil eye” are used in both occasions: الله يبعد عنكم عيون الحساد “God keeps away the evil eye”. The use of Maašaallah “May God protect you” is very frequent when complimenting (Ramajo and Yousefian 2015, Migdani, 2010, Mughazy, 1999).

Weddings			
	Countries	Best wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	الله يهنيكم	May God bring you both happiness
	Oman	الله يهنيكم	May God bring you both happiness
	Saudi Arabia	الله يرزقكم الذرية الصالحة الله يبعد عنكم عيون الحساد	May God give you good children May God keep away the evil eye
	Qatar	الله يسعدكم	God brings you happiness
Levant	Syria	ان شاء الله التمام على خير تتهنوا يا رب/الله يهنيكن	I hope things end up well for you too May God make you happy
	Palestine	الله يتمم عليكم بالخير / الله يتمم لكم الله يرزقكم الذرية	I hope things end up well for you two

		الله يعطيكم الذرية الله يهنيكم ويسعدكم	May God give you good children May God make you happy
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Table 3. Formulas in form of a prayer used in weddings in the GCC countries and in the Levant.

Newborn			
	Countries	(Expressing) wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	يتربى في عزكم	He/she is raised in your wealth.
	Saudi Arabia	الله يجعله من أطفال السلام الله يبلغكم فيه و تشوفون عيال عياله الله يبلغكم فيه، وان شا الله تفروحوون فيه	God makes him a child of safety. I hope you see the children of my children. May God give you children and <i>inšaAllah</i> (If God wills), they will make you happy.
	Qatar	الله يبلغكم فيه	God brings you happiness by him
	Bahrain	يتربى بعزكم	He/she is raised in your wealth
	Kuwait	يتربى بعزكم ان شاء الله	He/she is raised in your wealth <i>inšaAllah</i> (if God wills)
Levant	Syria	يتربى بعزكن/ ان شاء الله يربي بعزكن / يعيش ويربي بدلالكن الله يجعله من الصالحين	May he grow up (newborn) in your wealth. God bless him and make him a good person.

	Palestine	يتربى بعزكم يخليكم فوق راسه الله يبارك فيه و يجعله من الذرية الصالحة / الله يجعله من الذرية الصالحة يعيش و يحمل اسمه	May he grow up in your wealth God keep you there for him (God keep you upon his head as the head symbolizes the importance of the parents for the baby). God bless him and make him a good person. I hope he lives and carries his name.
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Table 4. Formulas in form of a prayer used for newborns in the GCC countries and in the Levant.

2.3.Responding to best wishes

Responses to best wishes are also set expressions as shown in tables 5 and 6. "God bless you", "الله يبارك", "God keep you safe", "الله يسلمك", or "Amen", "آمين" are common expressions.

Weddings			
	Countries	Responding to best wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	آمين الله يبارك في حياتك/ك	Amen God bless you with more things in your life.

	Oman	الله يبارك في حياتك/ش	God bless you with more things in your life.
	Saudi Arabia	آمين	Amen.
	Qatar	الله يبارك فيك/ج آمين	God bless you Amen.
	Bahrain	الله يبارك فيك/ج	God bless you.
	Kuwait	الله يبارك فيك/ج	God bless you
Levant	Syria	الله يسلمك امين . الله يبارك فيكون عقبال العزابية الله يبارك بعمرک	God keep you safe, Amen. God bless you, I wish the same to all bachelors. God bless you.
	Palestine	شكرا و تسلمي الله يبارك فيكي آمين	Thanks, God keep you safe. God bless you. Amen.

Table 5. Formulas for responding to best wishes for weddings in the GCC countries an in the Levant.

Newborn			
	Countries	Responding to best wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	الله يبارك في حياتك/ك	God bless you with more things in your life.
	Oman	الله يبارك في حياتك/ش	God bless you with more things in your life.
	Saudi Arabia	آمين والقبائل	Amen and to you (the person who said it).
	Qatar	الله يبارك فيك/ج آمين	God bless you Amen.
	Bahrain	الله يبارك فيك/ج آمين	God bless you Amen.

	Kuwait	الله يبارك فيك يبارك الله خير	God bless you and bring you good.
Levant	Syria	الله يسلمك ويخليلكون ولادك عقبال فرحتك بولادك وتشوفي ولادهم عقبال ما نفرح من اولادك	God keep you safe and God keep your children. I wish the same to your children, and I wish you see their kids too. I wish we see the kids get married.
	Palestine	جزاك الله خير شكرا و الله يبارك فيكون و يطرح البركة بجميع اولاد المسلمين تفرحوا باولادكم	God bless you. Thank you and God bless all the Muslim children. I hope you see the same to your children.

Table 6. Formulas for responding to best wishes for newborns in the GCC countries an in the Levant.

3. Conclusions and pedagogical implications

This study has some pedagogical implications. If Arab learners of a L2 translate literally these formulas, pragmatic failure might occur (Al Khateeb 2009, Ramajo and Ainciburu 2015). At the same time, if learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language do not use these formulas, this might cause native Arab speakers to feel uncomfortable due to the belief in the ‘evil eye’ as shown in the study of Mursy, 2001⁽⁷⁾.

As courtesy expressions play a very important role in Arabic culture, learners should be aware of them in order to fully master the language (Ramajo

(7) Mursy (2001:150) explained the discomfort and distress felt by an Egyptian woman when her baby was complimented by a foreigner. The reason is that women might take compliments on children’s health and physical growth as a sign of envy and believe that it may cause harm to the child.

Cuesta, 2013b). Research in interlanguage pragmatics and sociolinguistics has suggested that foreign language learners have difficulties in reaching higher levels of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence without receiving specific instruction (Warga y Scholmerge, 2007:221, apud Smith, 2009:47). Explicit instruction seems to have a positive impact in the development of the pragmatic and cultural competence of language learners (Dastjerdi and Farshid, 2011, Ramajo Cuesta, 2012, Ramajo Cuesta, 2013a) Thus, introducing courtesy formulas with real language samples and comparing their use to that of the students 'mother tongue helps learners to identify the differences between both languages and the communicative situations that could lead to cultural misunderstandings.

Conducting studies of different speech acts between various languages and cultures enrich the research in the field of politeness and provide valuable material that will help learners to acquire the pragmatic competence in a foreign language.

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