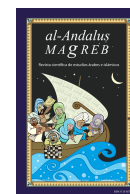


EXPRESSING BEST WISHES IN ARABIC: ROOM FOR PRAGMATIC FAILURE?



RAMAJO CUESTA, Ana

Ana RAMAJO CUESTA

anitaramajo@yahoo.es

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, España

Al-Andalus Magreb

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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⁽⁴⁵⁷⁾ countries (UAE, Qatar, 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.

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.

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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^[(458)] 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^[(459)].

Participants of the study are female native speakers of Arabic with ages between 18 and 36^[(460)] 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^[(461)] and the GCC countries belong to the dialects spoken in the Arabian Peninsula^[(462)].

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 ##### 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: ##### “from you (male) the money and from her (female) the children”. It has a rhyme in Arabic, which makes it a common expression.

For newborns, the UAE and Oman use an uncommon phrase to other countries. For a baby boy it is said ##### 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, ##### 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 تهنو 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) congratulations.

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	Congratulations on your new baby
	Palestine	الف مبروك مبروك يتربى 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, ##### “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: ##### “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 الله يعطيكم الذرية الله يهنيكم ويسعدكم	I hope things end up well for you two May God give you good children May God make you happy

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 inshaAllah (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 inshaAllah (if God wills)
Levant	Syria	يتربى بعزكم ان شاء الله يرثي بعزكم / يعيش ويرثي 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.

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”, ##### “God keep you safe” or ##### “Amen” are common expressions.

Weddings			
	Countries	Responding to best wishes	Translation
GCC countries	United Arab Emirates	أَمِين 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	أَمِين	Amen.
	Qatar	الله يبارك فيك /ج أَمِين	God bless you Amen.
	Bahrain	الله يبارك فيك /ج	God bless you.
	Kuwait	الله يبارك فيك /ج	God bless you
Levant	Syria	الله يسلمك أَمِين . الله يبارك فيكون عقبال العزابية الله يبارك بعمرك	God keep you safe, Amen. God bless you, I wish the same to all bachelors. God bless you.
	Palestine	شكرا وتسلمي الله يبارك فيكي أَمِين	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	أمين والقابل	Amen and to you (the person who said it).
	Qatar	الله يبارك فيك /ج أمين	God bless you Amen.
	Bahrain	الله يبارك فيك /ج أمين	God bless you Amen.
	Kuwait	الله يبارك فيك براك الله خير	God bless you and bring you good.
Levant	Syria	الله يسلّمك ويخليك ونولادك وتشفوني ولادهم عقبال فرحتك بولادك وتشفوني 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 والله يبارك فيكون ويطرح البركة لجميع 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 and 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^[463].

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 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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NOTES

* PhD holder of Arabic and Islamic Studies from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The present study was conducted while working as a lecturer at Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi. E-mail: anitaramajo@yahoo.es.

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([457]) Gulf Cooperation Council.

([458]) However, in other languages, such as Spanish, previous research showed the importance of using secret recordings to collect real language samples (Ramajo Cuesta, 2012).

([459]) 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...)

([460]) The influence of the "age" variable was not considered in the research.

([461]) Levantine Arabic is spoken in Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon.

([462]) Yemen is also included in the taxonomy of Abboud (2010) and Vicente (2008).

([463]) 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.