

The Pragmatic Functions of the Expression ‘Insha’a Allah’ in the Speech Acts of Non-native, Non-Muslim Arabic Speakers

Asma M. AL-Hawi, *University of Central Lancashire, Cyprus*

Abstract

There is a large volume of published studies on the pragmatic functions of the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’, which has a literal translation of (“God willing”). However, these studies investigated this issue from the perspective of Arab or Muslim participants only. Thus far, no attempt has been made to understand how the expression is used by non-native, non-Muslim speakers of Arabic as a second language. Based on the speech-act theory, this paper reports on a pilot study which investigates the different intercultural pragmatic functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in the speech acts of seven non-Arab, non-Muslim participants who speak Arabic as a second language, and who have been aware of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ for at least four years. Accordingly, this qualitative study is unique because it is the first that aims to (1) contribute to the fields of intercultural communication and pragmatics; and (2) shed light on misunderstandings of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ before and after individuals become familiar with it. To obtain data, the researcher constructed a questionnaire to generate factual and attitudinal information (Dörnyei, 2003). The questionnaire consisted of twelve open-ended questions to provide the participants with the opportunity to answer freely (Creswell, 2014). The results revealed that the intercultural pragmatic functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ as recognised by the participants serve six illocutionary and two perlocutionary functions. Also, the results showed that the participants’ motivations for using it reflect their deep understanding of the importance of integrating with Arabs in order to communicate successfully.

Keywords: ‘insha’a Allah’; intercultural pragmatics; speech act; illocutionary; perlocutionary

Introduction

The expression ‘insha’a Allah’ (ان شاء الله), which is literally translated as (“if God wills”) or (“God willing”), is commonly used by Arab people, whether they are of Muslim or Christian faith, in the Arab world. However, sometimes people diverge from that religious meaning and use it differently as it serves many pragmatic meanings according to certain situations. Thus, ‘insha’a Allah’ can be used to communicate certain functions such as irony, threat, wonder,

agreement, prohibition and wishing (Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2012; Mehawesh & Jaradat, 2015). In addition, this expression is used by non-Arab Muslims all over the world as in Iran and Indonesia because of its versatile pragmatic meanings.

This expression has three other manifestations that convey the same meaning: the term ‘insha:llah’, which is phonetically different from ‘insha’a Allah’, and the terms ‘in Allah raad’ (ان الله راد) and ‘beʔiðnillah’ (بإذن الله), which are both phonetically and morphologically different. The expression ‘insha’a Allah’ seems to be more powerful than other religious expressions used by Muslims, such as the greeting *assalamu alaykum* (“peace be upon you”). For example, Al-Nasser (1993) points out that when Iraqi Muslims greet other Iraqis who are Jewish or Christian, instead of using *assalamu alaykum* they use other forms of greeting, such as *marhaba* (“hello”) or *shalom* (“peace”). Although the greeting *assalamu alaykum* has religious connotations in Judaism and Christianity too, Muslim speakers recognise that Jewish and Christian speakers do not favour it; therefore, they use alternatives.

However, this is not the case with the phrase ‘insha’a Allah’. For example, Murphy (2006, para. 2), states that:

An American colonel in Iraq, writing to *The Washington Post*’s Thomas E. Ricks, recently observed: ‘The phrase “*inshallah*,” or “God willing” has permeated all ranks of the Army. When you talk to U.S. soldiers about the possible success of “the surge,” you’d be surprised how many responded with “*inshallah*” [‘insha’a’ Allah].’

The American soldiers seem to have been influenced by the powerful religious meaning of the term, which is clearly and widely recognised in the Arab world in general and Iraq in particular.

There is a large body of research on how the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’ is used from the perspective of Arabs and Muslims. Nazzal (2001) provided an in-depth analysis of the different functions of ‘insha’a Allah’ as practised by Syrian Arabs and how these functions are affected by the context. He concluded that ‘insha’a Allah’ is utilised either to avoid or mitigate any kind of commitment to others or to confirm that the speaker is eager to do something. In addition, Mehawesh & Jaradat (2015) investigated the pragmatic non-literal meanings of the expression when used by people in Jordan. The researchers concluded that

Jordanians use the expression to convey certain functions related to irony, threat, wonder, agreement, prohibition and wishing.

Of course, the use of ‘insha’a Allah’ is not limited to the Arab community. Many studies have been carried out to identify how the Arab contexts of ‘insha’a Allah’ differ from or are similar to those of non-Arab Muslims. Pishghadam & Kermanshahi (2012) revealed that Iranians use this expression not only to convey the aforementioned Arab meanings but also to express other meanings such as encouraging or stigmatizing others. Susanto (2006) found that in the Indonesian and Javanese contexts, the expression is used in order to convey politeness. Susanto also indicated that this expression was associated with certain lexical words; thus, in certain contexts, ‘insha’a Allah’ is used to show hesitation or confirmation or to make suggestions.

What motivated this piece of research is that the researcher found that this term is also used by L2 learners of Arabic. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on the pragmatic functions of the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’ as manifested in the speech of Arabs and Muslims rather than the speech of those for whom Arabic is a second language. Based on the pragmatic speech-act theory, a pilot study was conducted to investigate the different (non-literal) pragmatic illocutionary and perlocutionary functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in the speech acts of seven participants who speak Arabic as a second language. In addition, this study examined the use of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ from the intercultural perspective of those L2 learners of Arabic.

Thus, this study is considered to be the first:

- (1) to shed light on non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers’ misunderstandings of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ before they become familiar with it, and to examine whether these misunderstandings are eliminated or altered after they become familiar with it;
- (2) to contribute to the fields of intercultural communication and pragmatics regarding the practical functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in the speech acts of non-Arab, non-Muslim people who have lived (or have been living) in an Arab country for the purpose of marriage, work or study, and
- (3) to attempt to enrich the current literature by implementing the intercultural-pragmatic approach with language learning to provide a better understanding of

the different meanings of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’; especially that none of these meanings are provided in any dictionary of Arabic.

Theoretical Framework

Intercultural Pragmatics in the Speech Act Theory

The field of pragmatics is important in second language research because it is concerned with the context in which language is used. There are two strands to this context: the first is the linguistic context, which takes into account the preceding discourse and helps the hearer to understand the utterance; the second is the situational context, which is the non-linguistic milieu that enables the speaker/hearer to recognise that a question like *Can you pass the salt?* is a request, and that the request demands some kind of action (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2011). Accordingly, the relationship between the listener, hearer, context and background knowledge is an important factor in interpreting the pragmatic functions of speech acts that correlate with what people intend to do or say.

Searle (1969, p. 16) defines speech acts as “the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication”. Searle (1979) and Searle & Vanderveken (1985) clarify that in certain contexts people tend to give indirect responses to serve particular functions. These functions are supposed to rely on mutual knowledge shared between the speaker and the hearer, and how the hearer interprets what the speaker says. Kasper & Rose (2001) point out that the importance of communication between the hearer and speaker is based on how the interlocutors communicate their speech act, and why they use different pragmatic techniques in the form of directness and indirectness strategies. The use of such strategies is deeply rooted in a specific culture and varies cross-linguistically.

The strategies of directness and indirectness are classified into three ranks of speech act: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. On the one hand, the locutionary act corresponds with the literal meaning in conveying the meaning of speech (Searle, 1979; Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). The illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act, on the other hand, represent indirect ways of saying something. For example, the illocutionary act serves multi-faceted functions such as making request, giving warning, making predictions and promising (ibid). The perlocutionary act is recognised by its effect on the hearer (Austin, 1962; Kissine, 2008). Thus, when someone says to someone else: *It’s noisy here*, the hearer

will understand the literal meaning that the place where the interlocutors are at that moment is noisy; this represents the locutionary act. Yet the illocutionary act may imply, for example, that the speaker is asking the hearer to move with him or her to a quiet place. If the hearer is convinced of what the speaker wants, the perlocutionary act is performed (ibid).

As far as pragmatics in the speech act is concerned, Gilmore (2011, p. 787) points out that the communicative competence of second-language learners is strongly associated with pragma-linguistic competence, which is the “speaker’s ability to understand or convey communicative intent appropriately in a given context based on a knowledge of phrases typically used by native speakers to express speech acts such as apologies, requests, refusals, and so on”. By developing their pragma-linguistic competence, learners can reduce or avoid the pragmatic failure, which is the outcome of a learner’s misunderstanding of the pragmatic meaning of what is being said in a certain situation (Thomas, 1983).

Based on Giles & Smith (1979), Cai & Rodríguez (1996-1997) and Kim’s notion (2001; 2017) of intercultural adaptation, L2 learners’ pragmatic speech act is expected to go through a process of adaptation in the host community during which they need to adjust their linguistic behavior. In addition, during this process of intercultural communication, L2 learners need to acculturate and later assimilate into the dominant host culture by incorporating its social and cultural norms (Kim, 2017); otherwise, learners might fail to communicate successfully.

From the intercultural perspective, pragmatic failure may hinder a learner’s understanding of the whole utterance and affect their intercultural communication in a negative way. Yule (1996) suggested that what needs to be communicated is more than what needs to be uttered. During his stay in Saudi Arabia, Yule (1996) found that when he was asked *How are you?* he would answer, in the same way as the Saudis, *Praise be to God* instead of *Fine* or *OK*, because that was the conventional way to behave. In this way, the speaker attempts to tune his or her speech to the context, which correlates with the social, religious, ethnic or even professional background of the hearer (Jacob, 2001).

Previous Studies in Intercultural Pragmatic Communication

Recently, researchers have shown an increased interest in the pragmatics of speech act from the perspective of intercultural communication. A good example of this can be found in

Cuesta & Yousefian's article (2015) that investigated how courtesy expressions were used in response to the evil/greedy eye in both Arabic and Persian cultures. There is a culturally based belief in Islamic communities that a compliment about one's appearance and possessions might attract greed or envy through what is referred to as the *evil eye*. However, the use of some courtesy expressions is believed to protect people from any harm that might be brought on by the 'evil eye'. Cuesta & Yousefian analyzed the Arabic and Persian courtesy expressions that were utilized in both cultures to prevent the evil eye. They found that the two cultures resort to protective expressions but those expressions carry cultural differences. For example, in Persian, the courtesy expression *eyes are not salty* is used to prevent envy as the adjective *salty* has a negative meaning associated with greed and jealousy (ibid). In Arabic, on the other hand, the expression *my eye is cold on you* is used as the adjective *cold* has a reverse effect against fire and heat that might be caused by the *evil eye* (ibid).

Another study that aimed to shed light on intercultural pragmatics was conducted by Gaşior (2015). The primary goal behind Gaşior's study (2015) was to find out how the expressions *I think* and *I know* in Irish English illocutionary speech act are culturally different from the Polish speech act. Polish L2 speakers of English seemed to respond to opinions and facts in the same way as the notion of opinion is a result of fact. In that way, they transfer the principle of frankness as a direct strategy in response to the expressions *I think* and *I know*. In Irish English contexts, the distinction is made between opinions and facts. Based on the Irish culture, opinions are the outcome of certain beliefs while facts are not subject to negotiation. Thus, in Irish if the communicative function of the expression *I think* encodes opinions, then subjectivity is avoided which is not the case with situations that signal facts (Gaşior, 2015).

Shishavan & Sharifian (2016) examined the illocutionary act of refusal by Iranian learners of (Anglo-)Australian English. Refusal in Iranian culture and Anglo-Australian culture tend to be indirect; however, the L2 participants seemed to be influenced by their L1 which; consequently, led them to intercultural miscommunication when using English. According to Shishavan, and Sharifian, the Iranian participants' miscommunication was related to their L1 cultural and social codification of refusal as it is mainly based on *ritual politeness* and a *state/feeling out-of-respect*.

Another study in the domain of pragmatic intercultural communication was conducted by Widiana, Marmantoand & Sumarlam (2017). This study aimed to investigate the advice giving strategies of Javanese and American from a cultural perspective. The findings indicated that the cultural system in Javanese and American greatly influenced the strategies used when giving advice. These strategies are classified into support, suggestions, and prohibition. More specifically, Widiana et al. (2017) found that the Javanese participants preferred direct strategies in the form of *consoling* when giving advice. In contrast, the American participants tend to convey the communicative act of advice giving by resorting to the illocutionary force of *counseling*.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the pragmatic functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in the speech acts of non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers and to explore how they perceive the different illocutionary and perlocutionary functions of the expression. It also aims to examine the motivations for these non-native speakers of Arabic to use the expression in their intercultural communication with Arabs. Thus, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Have non-Arab, non-Muslim people’s attitudes towards Arab people’s use of ‘insha’a Allah’ changed after becoming familiar with the expression?
2. What are the motivations for non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers to use the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ when addressing native speakers of Arabic?
3. How does non-Arab, non-Muslim people’s use/recognition of the different pragmatic functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ reflect their communicative competence in relation to their intercultural communication with Arabs?

Methodology

This piece of research reports on a pilot study which is qualitative in nature. It was carried out to help the researcher to find out why people who speak Arabic as a second language use the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in its different contexts.

Ethical Considerations

In the current study, the names of the participants were coded as this helped in recognizing the kind of examples provided by the participants of the study. For convenience, the coding

of participants' names took the form of two letters followed by a number if necessary. The first letter of each code refers to the nationality of the participant, while the second refers to their gender: M and F for male and female, respectively. When more than one participant had the same nationality and gender, a number was given to each participant to distinguish between them. For example, if two American participants were women (American female = AF), the first participant was given the code AF1 and the second was coded AF2.

Furthermore, the researcher obtained permission from the participants to use their data in the form of quotations (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000).

Participants and Setting

This research was carried out in Jordan over a period of six weeks with participants who:

- had learnt Arabic as a second language;
- had lived, or has been living, in an Arab or Muslim country for the purpose of marriage, work or study; or
- had mingled with Arab in the L1 participant's community, and
- were from a non-Islamic religious background.

There were seven participants: three men and four women. There were two participants from Serbia (SF and SM), one from Bulgaria (BF), one from Canada (CF), two from America (AM1 and AM2) and one from Nicaragua (NF).

The participants were recruited as they all spoke Arabic as a second language. The participants had been aware of the expression 'insha'a Allah' for at least four years, either in their home country or in the Middle East. Two of the participants had studied the Arabic language as adults at a university in their home country, while the remaining five had learnt Arabic in the Middle East. Five participants had spent between four and twenty years in the Middle East. One participant had spent only two months in the Middle East but finished her bachelor degree in Arabic in her home country. She also had Arab friends from the Arab community there.

It should be noted that three of the female participants were married to native speakers of Arabic. In addition, these three female participants spent more time in the Arab world than the other participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher constructed a semi-structured questionnaire (see appendix) to elicit data from the participants of the study. The questionnaire consisted of twelve open-ended questions to provide the participants with the opportunity to answer each question freely (Creswell, 2014). It is expected that this type of questions would help the researcher to obtain more detailed explanation and rich data in order to answer the three research questions of the study.

More specifically, the questionnaire aimed to obtain factual data about the literal linguistic meaning of the expression under investigation and behavioural data (Dörnyei, 2003; Mackey & Gass, 2005) in relation to the participants' acquisition of the pragmatic-intercultural functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah'. It also aimed to obtain attitudinal data related to the participants' attitudes, opinions and beliefs (ibid) when hearing Arabs using the expression 'insha'a Allah'.

Thus, to answer the three research questions of the current study, the data obtained from the participants via the twelve open-ended questions were categorized into these types of data: factual, attitudinal and behavioural. Then, the three types of data were analysed to identify:

- the expressions equivalent to 'insha'a Allah' in each of the participants' mother tongues (factual);
- whether the participants' attitudes towards Arabs' use of 'insha'a Allah' changed after becoming familiar with the expression (attitudinal);
- the motivations for non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers to use the expression; (attitudinal);
- the pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' in the participants' speech acts (behavioural);
- the pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' as recognized by the participants when hearing Arabs using it (attitudinal) and
- whether the participants' use/recognition of the different pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' reflect their communicative competence in relation to their intercultural communication with Arabs (behavioural and attitudinal).

Results

Expressions Equivalent to ‘Insha’a Allah’ in other Languages

The participants were asked to clarify if their L1s have expressions similar in their core meanings to the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’. All the participants showed that the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ is similar in its core meaning to expressions in their mother tongue; that is, the expressions have a similar literal meaning. CF gave two examples of similar expressions used in English as illustrated by sentences CF1 and CF2:

CF1: God willing, the patient will get better.

CF2: Hopefully, I can get that report to you before tomorrow.

It was found that the American participants used the same expressions: *God willing* and *hopefully*. However, they are not normally used with the strict interpretation of the *will of God*, as would be the case with a person of the Muslim faith. In America, the expression *It’s in God’s hands* is used, too. AM1 seemed to be fully aware of the literal religious meaning of the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’ in that “the phrase is a recognition to an individual’s submission to the will of Allah, and the fact that nothing in one’s life happens without it being part of His plan”.

Furthermore, SM believes that the Serbian expression *ako bog da* is used in the cultural sense – unlike the Arabic form, which is more religious. Other equivalent expressions are *so dios* and *dai boje* in Nicaraguan and in Bulgarian, respectively. However, all the participants pinpointed that the difference between their L1 use and the Arabic use lies in the variety of the Arabic contexts of ‘insha’a Allah’, which occur more frequently than in the equivalent expressions in other languages.

Changes in Attitudes towards Arabs’ Use of ‘Insha’a’ Allah’ as a Result of Becoming Familiar with the Expression

In the questionnaire, the seven non-native, non-Muslim speakers of Arabic as a second language were asked about their first impression of the Arabic expression ‘insha’a Allah’ when they first heard it from Arab people. They were also asked to clarify their attitudes towards the Arabs’ use of the expression ‘insha’a’ Allah’ before and after becoming familiar with it.

After analysing the data obtained from the participants, it was found that the participants' first impression of the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah' reflected their misunderstanding, which led them to feel uncomfortable about the expression at first. The participants attributed this misunderstanding to three main factors: cultural differences, language barriers and lack of contextual experience. These factors were experienced by three participants. Those participants stated that the first time they heard Arab people using the expression, they thought that 'insha'a Allah' was supposed to be used according to its literal meaning. In view of that, some of them seemed not to like the way the Arabs used it. For example, when BF and NF first heard 'insha'a Allah' they associated it with the intention to break a promise.

In addition, CF associated the use of 'insha'a Allah' with insincerity when answering a question. Nevertheless, after years of experiencing the different contexts of the expression, the participants realised that people use it in many ways. For example, CF stated that:

My first impression of the phrase ['insha'a Allah'] after coming to the Middle East was that it seems to not give any directness or validity when answering a question. Living in the Middle East and interacting with Arabic speakers made me understand that it seems to have its broad usage based more on traditions/customs of the Middle East than on its actually [*sic*] meaning.

Therefore, what the participants initially interpreted as "breaking promises" was eventually seen as an indirect strategy to express refusal politely.

None of the participants showed any objection to Arabs' use of 'insha'a Allah', even when Arabs code-switch and use it when speaking in the participants' native languages. As a result, the seven participants showed a positive acceptance of Arabs' use of the expression.

According to them, this positive acceptance occurs not only because of its religious (literal) meaning, which they share with Muslims, but also because of the participants' experience with the different non-literal Arabic contexts of 'insha'a Allah'. Furthermore, the participants made clear that they have become more able to recognise that Arabs use 'insha'a Allah' out of habit, simply because it is convenient or because it is part of their cultural heritage or core language behaviour, which is, according to BF, "culturally oriented".

The Motivations behind the Participants' Use of the Expression 'Insha'a Allah'

The participants were asked to explain their motivations behind the use of the expression 'insha'a Allah' when communicating with Arabs, and if they think that they can resume using it when going back home.

Though the participants do not use the expression as often as Arabs do, the seven participants appear to use 'insha'a Allah' for the following reasons:

- (1) to reflect their politeness and diplomacy;
- (2) to express their respect and understanding of the Arabic culture;
- (3) to show that they have adapted to the Arabic language skills and behaviours; and
- (4) to integrate with others in order to communicate successfully.

More specifically, two of the participants added that they sometimes use 'insha'a Allah' to avoid hurting other people's feelings. Each of them gave her own justification: CF explained that she would use the expression only if she did not have a more appropriate answer. In line with CF, BF stated "I use inshallah [insha'a Allah] when I truly believe that I can't promise anything". On the other hand, NF demonstrated that her use of it is habitual: she declared "I usually use it, without thinking, as a habit".

It should be emphasised that the participants' attitudes towards using the expression after returning to their home countries were clear. While one of them believed that it was acceptable to continue using the expression when returning home, the others expressed their doubts; they believed that they would resort to using equivalent expressions in their mother tongues. Of course, their doubt is justifiable, as it is difficult for those who are from a completely different culture, and who have never mingled with Arabs or Muslims in their native communities, to grasp the different pragmatic functions of the expression. This can be attributed to the fact that what is culturally accepted in one society may not be culturally accepted in another (Rizk, 2003), especially if this occurs in a non-native setting.

Participants' Use of and Familiarity with the Pragmatic Functions of 'Insha'a Allah'

This section and the section that follows provide the different types of speech acts which are realised by seven L2 speakers of Arabic with a variety of language backgrounds. The participants were asked to explain the different meanings of the expression 'insha'a Allah' by providing different situations of that expression. These situations represent examples of social

contexts usually used by the participants when communicating with others. To be more specific, most of the participants provided detailed explanations of some of the contexts that they mentioned, while some gave examples of situations revealing the different pragmatic instances of ‘insha’a Allah’. They also include situations as recognized by the participants when hearing Arabs using it.

After analysing the data and examples of the situations provided by the participants, the findings showed that the participants recognised or used the expression ‘insha’a Allah’ to convey literal and non-literal meanings in their intercultural communication with Arabs. All the participants (100%) demonstrated their familiarity with the literal meaning of the expression, which denotes total submission to God; however, less than half of the participants (43%) used it to convey that meaning.

The non-literal meanings were used as an indirect strategy to serve many functions related to pragmatic illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. Hence, six illocutionary and two perlocutionary pragmatic functions were identified.

All the illocutionary functions are set out in table 1, along with the percentages of participants who are familiar with these functions and the percentages of participants who use them.

Table 1: *Participants’ familiarity with and use of the illocutionary pragmatic functions of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’*

Illocutionary speech act	Familiarity with pragmatic function (%)	Use of pragmatic function (%)
Refusal	29	57
Uncertainty	86	71
Confirmation	29	43
Expressing a hope or wish	57	57
Reconsideration	29	29
Request	0	14

Table 1 shows that the participants seemed to be familiar with most of the common illocutionary meanings of the expression ‘insha’a Allah’. These meanings are associated with several functions, such as showing uncertainty, as recognised by six of the participants (86%). This is followed by the function of expressing a hope or wish, which was recognised

by 57% of the participants. Also, each of the following speech acts were recognised by two participants (29%): refusal, confirmation and reconsideration.

Furthermore, table 1 reveals that the participants were able to use the expression according to its different pragmatic functions. For example, the results demonstrated that 71% of the participants utilised 'insha'a Allah' to show uncertainty about whether something was likely to happen. The two second most commonly used functions were refusal and expressing a hope or wish, each of which was utilised by 57% of the participants. The third most commonly used function was confirmation (43% of participants), followed by reconsideration (29% of participants).

However, the perlocutionary acts were used and recognised by only one participant. Those perlocutionary acts serve two pragmatic functions: encouraging and comforting.

The Pragmatic Functions of 'Insha'a Allah' in Social and Cultural Contexts

This section presents some social contexts of the expression 'insha'a Allah' as provided by the participants in their intercultural communication with Arabs. Hence, data analysis is based on how the participants as second language speakers of Arabic interpreted the different communicative functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' in the host Arabic community.

Some of the illustrative examples of 'insha'a Allah' as manifested in the speech acts of the participants demonstrate how the expression is utilised to convey the meaning of uncertainty. For example:

- (1) Wife: What time is the electrician coming?
 Husband: Insha'a Allah, sometime today.

The situation above implies that the husband does not know exactly when the electrician is coming; thus, he uses 'insha'a Allah' to show his uncertainty in an indirect way. This makes us question why people would answer with 'insha'a Allah' rather than saying *I don't know*. One possible explanation is that people sometimes try to find a way to avoid indulging in a long conversation with others by convincing them not to occupy their minds with something that may or may not happen. In this way, the wife might understand from her husband that she, for example, can leave the house to go shopping and wait for a call from the electrician instead of wasting her time waiting for him.

Another function is to express the speaker's reconsideration of a request. In other words, the speaker resorts to using 'insha'a Allah' as a strategy to avoid giving a direct answer because he or she has not yet made up his or her mind about what answer to give. This means that the speaker needs more time to decide whether to accept or refuse the request. The following situations are representative of this function:

- (2) Son: Dad, can I go out with my friends?
Father: Insha'a Allah. (The father did not answer the question)
- (3) Wife: Do you want to go out at 6pm?
Husband: Insha'a Allah.

Another pragmatic function of 'insha'a Allah' is to show refusal. In this way, it is used to give a negative answer. None of the participants provided an illustrative example of a situation in which this function is used. Yet one of them provided an explanation of how to convey this function. The participant pointed out that she uses 'insha'a Allah' to refuse when her son asks for her permission to play out with his friends.

Conversely, 'insha'a Allah' is also used as an affirmative answer to express confirmation. Consider the following situations:

- (4) Wife: Shall we go out at 6 pm?
Husband: Insha'a Allah.
- (5) Woman: Do you have red apples at the store?
Grocery man: Insha'a Allah.

Thus, instead of providing a direct answer like *Yes*, the husband and the grocery man used the expression 'Insha'a Allah'.

One point to emphasise is that the same expression can be used to perform completely different speech acts, even though the contexts appear to be similar. Although similar to previous examples, the uses of 'insha'a Allah' in examples 6 and 7 serve different pragmatic functions in the speech act: the first shows confirmation from the husband, while a change in tone in the speech of the husband in the second example shows that his intention is to reconsider the request:

- (6) Wife: Shall we go out at 6 pm?

- Husband: Insha'a Allah. (Showing confirmation)
- (7) Wife: Do you want to go out at 6 pm?
Husband: Insha'a Allah. (Uncertainty: evading an answer)

What enable people to decide that each context implies a different meaning is the situation and the speaker's tone of voice, which reveal the speaker's intention.

Another pragmatic illocutionary function of the expression 'insha'a Allah' was found in the speech act of one female participant. BF utilised the expression as a request. Some of the illustrative examples that she provided are as follows:

- (8) When she asks her husband to:
take her out for dinner
stop smoking
play sports
replace the furniture in the house
take the family on holiday abroad
calm down
go to the doctor to check his health

The final pragmatic illocutionary function of the expression 'insha'a Allah' is to express a hope or wish in various situations. For example:

- (9) Insha'a Allah the patient will get better.
(10) Happy birthday my dear Insha'a Allah always happy...we love you.

In spite of the fact that the participants did not provide enough examples regarding the perlocutionary acts, the examples that were provided showed that sometimes, an expression of hope is associated with a certain state in order to carry out perlocutionary acts, such as encouraging and comforting. In other words, the intended meaning of the illocutionary speech act from the speaker's perspective is recognised by the hearer as a perlocutionary act. For example, BF, who suffered because of the war in Syria, said that she used to utilise the expression not only when talking to others but also when talking to herself. In this way, she was using 'insha'a Allah' to encourage and comfort herself in the hope that everything would be all right. For example:

- (11) Insha'a Allah we wake up alive... Insha'a Allah my children reach school safely... Insha'a Allah my husband comes back earlier.

Discussion

In light of the previous analysis, the researcher has found that the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah' has equivalent expressions in the Serbian, English American, English Canadian, Nicaraguan and Bulgarian cultural contexts. These L1 cultural contexts share with Arabic the direct or literal meaning of the expression 'insha'a Allah'. However, the Arabic expression is different from these L1 contexts in that it is used to convey multi-faceted indirect meanings.

It has been revealed that the intercultural pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' as recognised by non-Arab, non-Muslim speakers of Arabic as a second language serve six illocutionary speech acts and two perlocutionary speech acts. The findings observed in this study mirror those of the previous studies that have examined the use of this expression by Muslim or/and Arabic people (Nazzal, 2001; Susanto, 2006; Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2012; Mehawesh & Jaradat, 2015).

The results also show that the percentage of participants who used some of the pragmatic functions was higher than the percentage of participants who were familiar with them. This can be explained by the fact that the aim of the questionnaire was not to ask the participants to provide a particular example of each function but rather to elaborate on how the participants (a) interpreted the expression 'insha'a Allah' when hearing native speakers use it (familiarity); and (b) used that expression when communicating with native speakers. Thus, the analysis of data was based on examining the illustrative examples or the explanations of the relevant social contexts that were provided by the participants. Accordingly, the types of pragmatic functions were identified.

Another finding is that three of the female participants showed more awareness of the different uses of the expression, which may imply that gender plays an important role in the recognition and use of the different functions of 'insha'a Allah'. However, it is important to bear in mind that (a) each of these three female participants is married to a native speaker of Arabic; (b) there were more female participants than male participants in this study; and (c) these three female participants spent more time in the Arab world than the fourth female participant and the other male participants.

The results provided an answer to research question one by focusing on the participants' reactions and attitudes toward the L1 Arab speakers' use of the expression 'insha'a Allah' before and after becoming familiar with it. Research question one is repeated below:

1. Have non-Arab, non-Muslim people's attitudes towards Arab people's use of 'insha'a Allah' changed after becoming familiar with the expression?

An interesting finding revealed that the participants' first impression of the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah' reflected their misunderstanding; especially the functions that imply *refusal* and *consideration*. The participants attributed that to cultural differences, language barriers and lack of contextual experience. However, after experiencing the different contexts of the expression, the participants realised that these meanings are deeply rooted in the Arabic culture.

In addition, the participants showed no objection when Arabs code-switch and use 'insha'a Allah' when speaking in the participants' native languages. This raises an important question: Do Arabs tend to use the expression as a way of intruding on other cultures? Undoubtedly, a language is a way of communication and people have always attempted to find ways to express their thoughts. The factors that help people from different cultures to communicate with each other are related to shared knowledge or a strong sense of awareness of the cultural differences between themselves and others. These factors enable people to communicate successfully; without them, biased judgements will create a barrier between themselves and others.

The analysis of the data reveals that Arab speakers show a kind of pragmatic failure when they use the expression 'insha'a Allah' when communicating in a second language. However, one should bear in mind that the pragmatic function of code-switching as a communicative strategy is necessary (Wei, 1998). This is due to the fact that this strategy is used to convey a variety of social meanings in bilingual settings (Baredo, 2000) according to different speech acts in an unconscious way. Thus, Arabs may code-switch to their native language while using a second language, not only because this is a natural phenomenon of the linguistic behaviour of speakers of a second language but also because certain expressions are unique from a cultural perspective.

In order to answer research question two, the participants' motivations behind using the expression 'insha'a Allah' were clarified. For convenience, research question two is repeated below:

2. What are the motivations for non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers to use the expression 'insha'a Allah' when addressing native speakers of Arabic?

In the results section the participants identified three main motivations behind their use of the expression 'insha'a Allah'. These motivations seem to reflect their respect and understanding of the Arabic culture. On one hand, they seem to utilise this expression as a politeness strategy when the situation signals refusal as a way of evading an answer. On the other hand, they utilise it as a diplomacy strategy when the situation signals reconsideration of a request. In addition, the participants revealed that one of their main motivations behind the use of this expression is to communicate effectively with Arabs because of their deep understanding of the importance of adapting to the Arabic language skills and behaviours.

Accordingly, the participants' use of this expression seems to shape their intercultural communication with Arabs. In other words,

'Learners engaged in intercultural language learning develop a reflective stance towards language and culture, both specifically as instances of first, second, and additional languages and cultures, and generally as understandings of the variable ways in which language and culture exist in the world' (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino & Kohler, 2003, p. 46).

Furthermore, data analysis provided an answer to research question three which is repeated below:

3. How does non-Arab, non-Muslim people's use/recognition of the different pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' reflect their communicative competence in relation to their intercultural communication with Arabs?

Related to research question three, the results indicate that all the participants have shown deep understanding of the different contexts of the expression 'insha'a Allah'. The participants' use of and familiarity with the pragmatic functions of 'insha'a Allah' indicate that their communicative competence in Arabic as a second-language is strongly associated

with their pragmatic competence. Interestingly, this correlation provides evidence that the participants can reduce or avoid the pragmatic failure, which is the outcome of a learner's misunderstanding of the pragmatic meaning of what is being said in a certain situation (Thomas, 1983). As a result, the non-Arab, non-Muslim participants' use/recognition of the different pragmatic functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' reflects their deep understanding of that expression in relation to their successful intercultural communication with Arabs.

Further explanations to research question three reveal that the social contexts that the participants provided signify the intercultural pragmatic meanings of the expression 'insha'a Allah'. The intercultural pragmatic theory takes into account the close relation between language, culture and social contexts. Thus, 'the act of...responses need to be understood in the corresponding cultural and pragmatic code, [by] considering the beliefs and values of each speech community [which] cannot be interpreted apart from social and cultural context' (Cuesta & Yousefian, 2015, p. 131). Accordingly, data analysis is based on how the participants interpreted the different communicative functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' in the host Arabic community.

In sum, the participants' familiarity with and use of the expression 'insha'a Allah' is an indication of their acculturation or assimilation process that is manifested in their social and intercultural communication (Kim, 2001; 2017) with Arabs.

Conclusion

This qualitative study makes a contribution to research on understanding the different illocutionary and perlocutionary functions of the expression 'insha'a Allah' in the speech acts of L2 learners of Arabic from an intercultural perspective. Therefore, this study does not only explore the powerful role of language use but also the culture that frames any language. Furthermore, the data collected has revealed that, like native speakers of Arabic, the participants use the expression unconsciously as an indirect strategy according to its various pragmatic functions. In other words, the participants seem to use 'insha'a Allah' out of habit as a reflection of their behaviour in the second language during their intercultural communication with Arabs. Also, the results showed that the participants' motivations for using it reflect their deep understanding of the importance of integrating with Arabs in order to communicate successfully.

The significance of any qualitative study with a few participants is to focus on a particular description and subject matter rather than to generalize the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014). Thus, the reader should bear in mind that this piece of research reports on a pilot study and the collected data was based on investigating the speech of seven participants via a semi-structured questionnaire. However, the limited number of participants in this study needs to be acknowledged as it was not possible to explore all the different pragmatic functions that the participants acquired. The participants' poor recognition of the pragmatic perlocutionary functions points to the need for more clarification of their responses; their answers, though useful, need more explanation and supportive data. There is, therefore, a definite need for further research (a) to investigate the extent to which other non-native, non-Muslim Arabic speakers are familiar with other pragmatic functions of speech, particularly the perlocutionary speech acts, and (b) to provide in-depth explanations with regard to second language learners' attitudes towards the Arabs' use of this expression 'insha'a' Allah' before and after getting familiar with it. This can be achieved by conducting a large-scale research by means of oral interviews and by examining a larger number of natural conversations between Arabs and native and non-native Arabic speakers who are from different religious backgrounds.

This research can serve as a base for future studies with regard to syllabus design by implementing the intercultural-pragmatic approach with language pedagogy. It would be interesting to investigate how learning strategies and classroom materials that should be used with second/third language learners of Arabic can (a) enhance learners' communication skills and (b) help them in correlating the target meaning with the real use of language in the process of intercultural language learning.

What is more, there is a need to investigate the importance of updating the Arabic-English language learning dictionaries by including the versatile meanings of the cultural expression 'insha'a Allah' as well as other cultural expressions that are based on discourse and pragmatics. These dictionaries overlook the importance of such terms which posit serious problems for second/third language learners of Arabic not only because they are unique from the cultural perspective but also because their meanings change according to specific contexts.



Biodata

Asma Mohammad AL-Hawi is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Central Lancashire, Cyprus. Before joining UCLan, she earned a Master's degree in Linguistics at the University of Jordan, Amman. Her research interests include language acquisition, pragmatics and semantics.

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Appendix

A questionnaire to survey foreigners' familiarity with and use of the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah'

-Gender:----- Age:----- Origin:-----

-For how long have you lived/been living in the Arabic World?-----

-Where did you learn the Arabic language?-----

-How many years have you spent learning the Arabic language?-----

-How do you identify your proficiency level in Arabic? (*Please circle*)

- Low level
- Intermediate level
- advanced level
- highly advanced

Please answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge

1- When did you first hear the expression 'insha'a Allah'?

2-Do you have a similar expression from your culture? What is it? To what extent is it similar/different from the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah'?

3- What was your first impression of the Arabic expression 'insha'a Allah' when hearing it from Arab people? If it was bad, do you think that mingling with Arabs make you change your mind? Why? Why not?



4- Why do you think that Arabs use it with you?

5- Do Arabs usually use it when they talk to you in your native language? Why?

6- Do you feel comfortable when Arabs code switch/use this expression when talking to you in your first language? Why? Why not?

7-To what extent do you think that Arabs' usage of that expression has a religious/cultural basis?



8-How do you think Arab speakers feel when you use the expression 'insha'a Allah'?
Why do you use this expression with them?

9-Do you think that you can resume using this expression when going back home?
Why? Why not?

10- What are the different meanings of that expression that you are familiar with?



11-What are the different situations of that expression that you hear from others?

12-What are the different situations of that expression that you usually use?

Thank you