A socio-pragmatic investigation of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) blessings formulas in Egyptian Arabic

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Abstract

This study reports on how the formulas of invoking blessings on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Egyptian Arabic have largely departed from their semantic/referential religious meanings to express various pragmatic functions. The data is composed of 390 formulas occurring in natural speech, and it was analyzed depending on the Speech Acts Theory (SAT) by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1976) and the Politeness Model (PM) suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987). The results show that the pragmatic functions expressed through the formulas include six functions: Warding off the evil eye, stopping misbehavior, attracting attention, holding the floor, hesitation and mitigating sarcasm. The results also show that the formulas of invoking blessings on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) positively correlate with age but negatively correlate with education; the older and less educated speakers are, the more formulas are used. Neither the speakers' gender nor residence type (town versus the countryside) triggers significant differences in using more or fewer formulas.

Keywords: pragmatic functions, religious expressions, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) blessings formulas, Egyptian Arabic, Speech Acts Theory, Politeness Model

صيغ الصلاة على النبي محمد (ﷺ) في عربية التخاطب في مصر: دراسة في علمي اللغة الاجتماعي والتداولية

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مستخلص الدراسة

تتناول هذه الدراسة التحول الذي طرأ على استخدام صيغ الصلاة على النبي محمد (ﷺ) في عربية التخاطب في مصر إلى تأدية وظائف تداولية تعَدَّت إلى حد بعيد المعاني الدينية التي تكتنف هذه الصيغ. وقوام الدراسة عينة تكونت من 390 صيغة وُجِدَت على ألسنة المصريين في مواقف عدة، واستند تحليلها على نظرية أفعال الكلام التي وضعها أوستن (1962) وطورها سيرل (1969، 1976) وعلى نموذج التأدب الذي اقترحه براون ولفينسون (1987). تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن صيغ الصلاة على النبي محمد (ﷺ) تعبر عن ست وظائف تداولية هي: درء الحسد، وطلب الكف عن الإساءة، وجذب الانتباه، والاستئثار بالكلام، والتردد، وتلطيف السخرية؛ كما تظهر أن استخدام هذه الصيغ يتناسب طرديًا مع عمر المتحدث وعكسيًا مع مستواه التعليمي، إذ يزيد عدد هذه الصيغ بين كبار السن ومن انخفض مستواهم التعليمي. أما نوع المتحدث ـ ذكرًا كان أم أنثى ـ ومحل إقامته ـ حضرًا كان أو ريفًا ـ فليس لأي منهما تأثير ذي دلالة فارقة في زيادة أو نقص عدد هذه الصيغ.

الكلمات الرئيسة: الوظائف التداولية ـ التعابير الدينية ـ صيغ الصلاة على النبي محمد (ﷺ) ـ عربية التخاطب في مصر ـ نظرية أفعال الكلام ـ نموذج التأدب

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1. Introduction

Religion has a key effect on Arabs' lives as is clear in the Gallup Survey (Crabtree, 2010) where adults from all the Arab countries surveyed confirmed that religion is a vital component in their lives. One clear aspect of this effect of religion in some Arab countries lies in the differentiation of speech relying on religious affiliation as is clear in Iraq (Blanc, 1964) and Bahrain (Holes, 1987) where differences exist at numerous linguistic levels. Another aspect of the major effect of religion in Arabs' lives is evident in their spoken and written interaction that is full of religious expressions regardless of their religious affiliation (Piamenta, 1979; Abboud, 1988; Morrow, 2006). Therefore, Clift & Helani (2010) believe that "an Arabic speaker could scarcely conceive of a conversation where the name of God would not appear" (p. 358), a fact evidenced by Castleton (2006) who proved that *Allāh* is the most frequent content word in Arabic[1].

Muslim as well as Christian Egyptians observe religion carefully; this is reflected in their linguistic behavior (Abboud, 1988), especially at the lexical level, in non-religious speech. In their folk songs, formal meetings, family gatherings, weddings, funerals, business deals, etc., Muslim Egyptians abundantly use religious expressions such as *in shā' Allāh*[2] 'if Allāh wills so', *mā shā' Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed'[3], *ilḥamdu li-llāh* 'praise be to Allah', *Allāh yibārik fīk*[4] 'may Allāh bless you', *ṣalli 'an-nabi* 'invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet'[5], *win-nabi* 'by the Prophet', *wi-dīny* 'by my religion', etc. Similarly, Christian Egyptians' speech is full of

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[1] I am so grateful to Adel Refaat Mahfouz and Wesam Ali El-Sayed for reading and commenting on the first draft of this article.
[2] Examples are transliterated throughout following the ALA-LC Romanization rules (Library of Congress, 2012), with a few exceptions (esp. *laam* assimilated to sun letters) to reflect colloquial pronunciation.
[3] Translation of religious expressions is semi-literal.
[4] Examples that have more than one variant are given only in the 2nd masc., sing. speaker form unless otherwise clarified.
[5] Every reference to 'Prophet' throughout is equal to 'Prophet Muhammad'.

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religious expressions such as *nushkur ir-Rabb* 'we thank God', *nushkur il-Masīḥ* 'we thank Christ', *wil-Masīḥ il-Ḥayy* 'by Living Christ', *b-ism iṣ-Ṣalīb* 'by the name of the Cross', *maggid Sīdak* 'glorify your Lord', etc.

Religious expressions used in Arabic speech are employed in different contexts. In religious contexts, they are used in their semantic meanings; namely, for thanking, invoking, glorifying, swearing, etc. In non-religious contexts, these religious expressions function pragmatically as speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) that must be interpreted in terms of the speech context, the interlocutors' shared culture and the type of social distance between them. Social distance refers to the formality level and solidarity degree between the speaker and the hearer, i.e. whether they have a small distance as is the case between relatives and friends or a large distance as it is between acquaintances and strangers (Hudson, Detmer, & Brown, 1995). Serving as speech acts, these religious expressions largely depart from their semantic meanings. Several of them could express the same speech act, or the same speech act can be achieved through more than one expression. For example, a father expressing his happiness with the high score his son got in school and trying to ward off the evil eye might say *magmū' kibīr, mā shā' Allāh* 'it is a good score, what Allāh has willed' or *Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad, magmū' kibīr* 'oh, Allāh, bless our Master Muhammad, it is a good score'. Also, *Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad* can be used as a hesitation marker as is used by a father struggling to remember the address of a doctor's clinic after his son had an accident, saying, while rubbing his forehead, *il-'iyāda fī 'imāra, Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad, 'imāra khamsa* 'the clinic is at Block, oh, Allāh, bless our Master Muhammad, Block 5'.

2. Theoretical framework

In this paper, religious expressions in Arabic non-religious speech are mostly explored from two perspectives: SAT (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976)), and PM (Brown & Levinson,

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1987). Following is a brief review of the two theories followed by a review of the main studies that explore Arabic religious expressions.

SAT (Austin, 1962) explains what can be achieved through utterances. Speech acts are the utterances that turn into communicative actions; they involve three sorts of acts: *locutionary* act (utterance meaning), *illocutionary* act (pragmatic function intended), and *perlocutionary* act (what the utterance achieves or leads to). Examples of speech acts include offering an apology by saying 'Sorry', requesting information as in 'Could you tell me the way to the train station?', etc. These speech acts can be direct such as ordering someone to do the dishes by saying 'Sami, do the dishes now'. Here, the hearer has no doubt that the utterance is an order, i.e., the relationship between the utterance and the pragmatic meaning is clear. However, speech acts can be indirect as making the same order by saying 'Sami, can you do the dishes?'. The pragmatic function here is not an inquiry regarding Sami's ability to do the dishes as the interrogative form may suggest, and an answer such as 'yes, I can' would be understood as implying the ability to do the dishes but unwillingness to do so. Searle (1969, 1976) divided illocutionary acts into five types: directive (e.g., ordering, requesting, inviting, advising), commissive (e.g., promising, pledging, threatening, swearing), assertive (e.g., guessing, confirming, denying, reporting, concluding), declarative (e.g., firing from work, declaring war, christening), and expressive (e.g., thanking, welcoming, apologizing, congratulating).

Speech acts are related to politeness. The politeness theory has been a broad area in pragmatic studies. Politeness in linguistic terms is showing consideration of self-esteem called *face*, a term offered and defined by Goffman (1967) as the "positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). Although Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) suggested models detailing politeness, the Brown and Levinson's 1987 model is the most widely used (Watts, 2003). Brown and Levinson (1987) divided face into positive and negative, with positive face

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identified by a want to connect with others versus negative face associated with a want to be independent. If an act, verbal or non-verbal, goes contrary to the interlocutor's face want, it is called a face-threatening act (FTA). As Watts (2003) puts it, "Brown and Levinson view politeness as a complex system for softening face-threatening acts" (p. 50) by describing some politeness strategies employed to minimize the effects of FTAs as follows:

1) On-record politeness without redressive action in which a) the speaker does not exert any effort to minimize the FTA or use any mitigation as in urgency in 'Call the ambulance now!' or b) the speaker has power over the addressee as represented by efficiency in 'Fix the mistake in the annual budget report immediately';

2) Positive politeness where the speaker attempts to minimize the FTA to the addressee's positive face by making him/her feel good about himself/herself, his/her possessions, and interests as in complimenting 'Your bike is really cool. Where did you buy it?' and showing sympathy 'Hey, mate. You aren't the only one to fail this test';

3) Negative politeness where the speaker tries to minimize the FTA to the addressee's negative face by reducing imposition or any expected offense as in apologizing 'Sorry to stop you, but can you let me know how I go to the train station?' and being indirect (i.e. using an indirect speech act) as in 'Would you mind closing the window?';

4) Off-record in which the speaker tries to evade responsibility by saying something ambiguous that could be interpreted differently, thus leaving the addressee to interpret the message himself/herself as in saying 'It is hot here' which the addressee could infer as an implied request to open a window or turn on a fan; and

5) Non-performance which invloves no use of any FTA to avoid offending the ddressee.

The choice of a politeness strategy, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), relies on (1) social distance (i.e. how far speakers are formally or informally related), (2) power (i.e. the social status of each speaker), and (3) the imposition level. Although Brown and Levinson

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(1987) claim that their model is based on universal principles, they emphasize that face in any society "is subject to cultural specifications" and that "notions of face naturally link up to some of the most fundamental cultural ideas about the nature of the social persona, honour and virtue, shame and redemption and thus to religious concepts" (p. 13). This confirmation is significant in Arabic speech where politeness is shaped by religion (Bouchara, 2015; Daoud, 2017; Samarah, 2015); thus, religious expressions are used in Arabic as speech acts or politeness strategies to augment social solidarity. For this to happen, these expressions are used among those who share the same socio-cultural norms; namely, those with the same religious affiliation in a community with a shared culture. Thus, a religious expression used among Sunni Muslim Egyptians, for instance, reflects not only religion (Islam) but also denomination (Sunni) as well as native culture (Egyptian). The same expression is not expected to be used in its pragmatic function among non-Sunni Muslims or non-Muslims in Egypt, or non-Egyptian Sunni Muslims.

3. Literature review

Some studies exploring the pragmatic functions of religious expressions in Arabic speech deal with one expression serving different functions. In this regard, *in shā' Allāh* 'if Allāh wills so' was studied in Arabic-speaking communities, Arab communities living abroad, or non-Arabic-speaking communities. Relying on Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts, Farghal (1995) investigated this expression in Jordanian Arabic (henceforth JA) and concluded that it serves as a directive (e.g., requesting), commissive (e.g., promising and threatening) and expressive (e.g., thanking and apologizing) speech act. A more recent study by Mehawesh and Jaradat (2015) on using the same expression in class conversations in Jordan asserted that it has a crucial, contextual role – by flouting Grice's (1989) quality principle – via indicating wondering, threatening, prohibition and wishing. In Levantine (mostly Syrian) Arabic, *in shā' Allāh* along with its cognates was found to be used as a marker to bring a topic to an end and

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move to another (Clift & Helani, 2010).

Outside Arab countries, *in shā' Allāh* is used to mitigate one's commitment to do a future action and the negative effects on the hearer, reject an offer indirectly or express uncertainty as is the case among Arabs living in the US (Nazzal, 2003). Even outside Arabic-speaking communities, the expression was found to function as a commissive and assertive speech act (promising, planning, concluding, suggesting, and boasting) in teachers' social media interactions in Indonesia (Al-Rawafi & Gunawan, 2018), and as a pragmatic device in Iran for showing religious identity, wishing, encouraging, delaying an answer, cursing or empowering the speaker (Pishghadam & Kermanshahi, 2012).

Migdadi, Badarneh and Momani (2010) examined *mā shā'a Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed' in JA where the expression is used as a compliment, an expression of happiness, an act of modesty, a marker of sarcasm, a conversational backchannel, a mitigating device in FTAs (e.g., criticism, complaint, refusal), and a marker of community membership to avoid the evil eye. *Wallāhi* 'by Allāh' was also found to function as a mitigating device to decrease imposition involved in FTAs such as criticizing in non-religious speech in Egypt (Mughazy, 2003) and Jordan (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018).

Other studies tackling religious expressions focused on a group of expressions serving different pragmatic functions. For instance, Ferguson (1983) investigated the grammatical (syntactic and semantic) and pragmatic characteristics of 31 religious expressions (which he called 'God-wishes') used in Syrian Arabic as politeness formulas including *Allāh*, directly or indirectly, as in "*Alla yihannīk*" (p. 219)[6] 'may Allāh grant you happiness'[7], "*Alla ykhallīk*" (p. 221) 'may Allāh keep you' and "*sallim diyyātak*" (p. 224) 'may [Allāh] protect your hands'. Ferguson categorized the expressions into patterns related to formulas used in exchanges before

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[6] Transliteration was edited to suit the transliteration standards adopted here. 'you' is the 2nd, masc., sing. form.
[7] Translation is mine.

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or after a crisis, in begging and thanking, and in health inquiries.

Jaradat (2014) studied invocations including *Allāh* and the phonological changes that occurred to it in JA and concluded that some of the invocations acquired new meanings, especially "astonishment and seeking protection and guidance" (61). Al-Saeedi (2019) explored some Allāh expressions in televised speeches in Iraq and found that they are used as multifunctional devices in building up an extended turn, changing a topic, and holding/giving the floor. Al-Rojaie (2021) analyzed what he termed *invocative formulas* including Allāh in Najdi speech and found that they are used in a wide array of pragmatic functions including ending a conversation, persuading, hedging, mitigating, seeking protection from envy, approving, doubting, emphasizing, respecting, honoring, and expressing emotions, ambiguity and sarcasm.

Al-Saeedi (2012) explored religious expressions in French-Arabic codeswitching in Algerian TV talk shows and found that they are used as conversational devices to switch to Arabic to keep an interaction going on, hold the floor, and change a topic. Although Kamel's (1993) analysis of formulaic expressions in Egyptian Arabic (henceforth EA) was not exclusively on religious expressions, he listed a large number of them in different contexts, especially those that he classified as (sub)speech acts of thanking, welcoming, congratulating, condoling, lamenting, and preventing (e.g., preventing envy). Mughazy (1999) studied evil-eye formulaic compliments in EA and found that religious formulas were among those mostly used as responses that ranged from complaining about the object of compliments, back complimenting, avoiding the compliment, and humor. The religious formulas used by Mughazy's participants included numerous ones including *Allāh* (e.g., *Allāhu Akbar* 'Allāh is Greater' and *mā shā'a Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed'), Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (e.g., *Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala in-nabi* 'oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet') and the Cross (e.g., *b-ism iṣ-Ṣalīb* 'by the name of the Cross').

Migdadi and Badarneh (2013) examined the pragmatic functions expressed by the formulas of invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (which they call 'prophet-praise formulas') in naturally occurring speech in JA. They concluded that these formulas are used to serve different functions: place-holding, seeking protection from the evil eye, expressing success, and intensifying the basic message of the utterance. Commands and questions containing these praise formulas were found to terminate disruptive or undesirable activities, elicit involvement and agreement, and claim the floor.

All these studies concluded that these religious expressions have largely drifted from their semantic/religious meanings to express pragmatic functions based on their contexts and the shared beliefs, values, and expectations among the interlocutors. In serving the pragmatic functions clarified above, these religious expressions also function as face-saving strategies; their formulaic forms allow them to be used, in Brown and Levinson's terms, as "ready-made ways of dealing with potential face-loss situations" (1987, p. 235). Therefore, disregarding the pragmatic meanings of these religious expressions could lead to cultural misunderstandings such as those in learning Arabic as a foreign language (Davies, 1987), and translation from Arabic (Stock, 1997; Farghal & Ahmed, 1997). Despite the importance of studying the pragmatics of these religious expressions in Arabic speech, they are still understudied. The present paper is aimed at contributing to filling this gap.

4. Objectives of the study

The present study is aimed at exploring the pragmatic functions expressed by the formulas of invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as used in naturally occurring speech in EA. *Invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)* in Arabic is الصَلَاة عَلَى النَّبِي *aṣ-ṣalāh 'ala an-nabi Muhammad*. The noun صَلَاة *ṣalāh* is derived from the verb صَلَّى *ṣalla* means 'to pray' as in Islamic prayers. But when the verb صَلَّى *ṣalla* is followed by the preposition عَلَى *'ala*, it functions like a phrasal verb meaning to 'bless' or 'invoke for blessings'

(Siddiqi, 2021). In this light, this study can be considered an update of Kamel (1993) and Mughazy (1999) where some of these expressions are given and as an extension of Migdadi and Badarneh (2013) in a larger speech community. The study relies on SAT (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1976) and the PM (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The formulas of invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are varied and could be direct or indirect (i.e., via deleting the Prophet's name). They are also so frequent in EA and should be understood as including any reference to invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), whether it is a name or description. Since these formulas are different and abbreviating or acronymizing each will be awkward to read, and since the study is aimed at exploring their pragmatic functions rather than syntactic structures, all of them are acronymized as SAN (S for *ṣalli* 'invoke [Allāh] to bless', A for *'an* 'lit. on' and N for *nabi* 'Prophet'). The syntactic structure will be tackled only if it has to do with the pragmatic functions expressed.

Investigating SAN formulas is also justified by their function as different speech acts and politeness strategies depending on the context, socio-cultural norms, and social distance among interlocutors. Also, if these formulas are taken literally or out of context, they could be misunderstood and cause communication problems.

Although EA includes many regional varieties (Behnstedt & Woidich, 1985) that seethe with socially induced variation (Haeri, 1997; Miller, 2003, 2005; Ornaghi, 2010; Sadiq, 2016), the pragmatic functions of SAN formulas as used by Egyptians are not expected to be different. The differences expected relate to the users' social backgrounds.

The research questions that this study attempts to answer are:

1) What are the social criteria that motivate speakers to use SAN formulas (e.g., gender, age, educational levels, residence type) in EA?

2) What are the pragmatic functions expressed by SAN formulas in EA?

3) Why are these formulas used rather than other direct speech acts?

4.1 Why Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)?

The frequency of SAN formulas in EA is justified by many reasons. For Muslims, invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is an act of obedience to the command of Allāh as in the Qurʾān (Sūrat al-Aḥzāb: Verse 56). This verse reads:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ ۚ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا﴾

⟨Inna Allāha wa malāʾikatahu yuṣallūna ʿala an-nabiyyi yā ayyuhā al-ladhīna āmanū ṣallū ʿalayhi wa sallimū taslīmān (56)⟩

⟨Indeed, Allāh confers blessing upon the Prophet, and His angels [ask Him to do so]. O you who have believed, ask [Allāh to confer] blessing upon him and ask [Allāh to grant him] peace.⟩ (Sahih International, 1997)[8]

Also, numerous Ḥadīths ʿProphetic Traditionsʾ recommend Muslims to invoke Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) such as this Ḥadīth:

حَدَّثَنَا أَنَسُ بْنُ مَالِكٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم "مَنْ صَلَّى عَلَيَّ صَلاةً وَاحِدَةً صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ عَشْرَ صَلَوَاتٍ وَحُطَّتْ عَنْهُ عَشْرُ خَطِيئَاتٍ وَرُفِعَتْ لَهُ عَشْرُ دَرَجَاتٍ."

Ḥaddathana Anas bin Mālik qāla: qāla Rasūlu Allāhi ṣalla Allāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallam "man ṣalla ʿalayya ṣalātan wāḥidatan ṣalla Allāhu ʿalayhi ʿashra ṣalawātin wa-ḥuṭṭat ʿanhu ʿashru khatīʾātin wa-rufiʾat lahu ʿashru darajātin." (al-Nasāʾī, 915 AD, Ḥadīth No. 1297)

Anas reported God's Messenger as saying, "If anyone invokes a blessing on me once, God will grant him ten blessings, ten sins will be remitted from him, and he will be raised ten degrees."[9]

Accordingly, invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is an act that leads a believer to get blessed, have his/her sins forgiven, and be rewarded with Paradise. In other

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[8] Translation of all Qurʾānic verses referred to are those of Sahih International (1997).
[9] See Ḥadīth 922 at https://sunnah.com/mishkat:922

Ḥadīths, more benefits of invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are given, including getting a close place to the Prophet (PBUH) in Paradise, getting free from worries, having prayer accepted, etc. (Abdullah, 2021). Egyptians are also known for their love for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and his family and companions, a large number of whom are buried in different areas in Egypt and for whom *moulids*[10] (religious festivals) are held on their dates of birth. The huge number of *Hadrahs* (Sufi gatherings), folk songs and passionately recited poems across Egypt focusing on invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is evidence of this love.

For all the previous reasons, it is not surprising that Muslims in Egypt find that SAN formulas are effective tools to achieve several acts in daily life (e.g., trading, marriage, settling disputes). Thus, the semantic meanings of these formulas are only marginally related to the pragmatic functions accomplished through them. This is facilitated by the socio-cultural norms and shared expectations among Muslim interlocutors. In pragmatic terms, SAN formulas have become pragmaticized, i.e., they have gone through the pragmaticization process via which "fully propositional (or semantic) meanings" develop into "meanings that are more textual/discourse-oriented … and/or interpersonal", with "semantic bleaching" of the propositional meanings being accompanied by "pragmatic strengthening" (Claridge & Arnovick 2010, p. 179).

5. Methodology

Data was collected from natural speech containing 465 SAN formulas used at homes, workplaces, universities, schools, state-owned agencies, private companies, etc. 66 instances were removed from the dataset due to either missing information regarding the context or because they were used as religious expressions without performing a pragmatic function. This

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[10] Google Arts & Culture has some multimedia on *moulid* celebration in Egypt at https://tinyurl.com/2p8mtwkr.

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reduced the dataset to 390 formulas. 5 female and 4 male colleagues/students helped the

researcher in collecting the data from five governorates in Egypt (Minya, Sohag, Cairo,

Alexandria, and Kafr El Sheikh), thus allowing collecting representative data of Egyptians in

general. All helpers are native speakers of EA. The data includes some small differences in

pronunciation, but this is due to regional differences among the interlocutors and was not found

to affect the pragmatic functions expressed by the formulas collected.

Every SAN formula recorded was accompanied by the full utterance where it was used,

the context, the addressee's response, and the social criteria of both interlocutors (including

gender, age, education, residence type, and the relationship between the interlocutors). The

formulas collected were classified, depending on the social profiles of those who used them, in

terms of education to three levels (non-educated, below university, and university and beyond),

residence type into urbanites and villagers, and age into young (18-30), middle-aged (31-50)

and old (50+). Most of the addressees' social profiles were complete, but sometimes the

addresses comprised of a group of people (e.g., wedding audience); so, they were considered

as a collective addressee.

Besides the information regarding the context and interlocutors' social profiles, the data

collectors provided their interpretation of the pragmatic function expressed by the SAN

formulas collected. The researcher then classified the functions against the information

provided regarding the context, social distance between the interlocutors, social power, and the

socio-cultural norms prevalent in Egypt. The researcher also divided the functions under broad

headings in terms of the types of speech acts and politeness strategies.

6. Results

6.1 SAN formulas by the speakers' social profiles

Analysis of the data led to the results given in Table 1 which sums up the frequency by

percentage (N 390). As is clear, using SAN formulas correlates negatively with education but

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positively with age; the lower the educational level and the older the age, the more SAN

formulas are used. Although females use SAN formulas more than males and villagers more

than urbanites, the differences are not large. The speakers have not been classified into different

socio-economic classes because *social class* is generally not an easy term to define in linguistic

studies and is community-bound. In Egypt, education can largely be used to mark social class

(Haeri, 1997; Sadiq, 2016).

Table 1. Frequency of SAN formulas by the speakers' social profiles and percentage

		Frequency by % (N 390)							
		Age						Total	
Education	**Residence**	**Young (18-30)**		**Middle-aged (31-50)**		**Old (50+)**			
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female		
University and beyond	Urbanite	0.77	1.03	1.54	1.79	2.56	2.82	**10.51**	**22.56**
	Villager	1.03	1.54	2.05	1.79	2.56	3.08	**12.05**	
Below University	Urbanite	1.54	1.79	1.79	2.56	3.08	3.59	**14.36**	**30.51**
	Villager	1.79	1.79	2.31	2.05	4.36	3.85	**16.15**	
Non-educated	Urbanite	1.28	1.28	3.08	2.82	6.67	6.92	**22.05**	**46.92**
	Villager	1.54	1.79	4.1	4.36	6.67	6.41	**24.87**	
Total		**7.95**	**9.22**	**14.87**	**15.37**	**25.9**	**26.67**	**100**	
		17.18		**30.26**		**52.56**			

6.2 Pragmatic functions of SAN formulas

For space consideration, only the frequent pragmatic functions expressed via the SAN

formulas will be discussed below. Every function is given supported by examples and the

context where it was used.

6.2.1 Warding off the evil eye

Across Egyptian streets, rear-view mirrors in a huge number of trucks, private cars,

taxis, and *tuk-tuks* (auto rickshaws) have amulets or stickers with religious phrases like *mā shā'*

Allāh 'what Allāh has willed' to ward off the evil eye. Drawings of the *Fatima Hand*[11] (open

right hand with the five fingers outstretched) are engraved on walls in poor slums in town and

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[11] Also known as *khamsa wi khimeisa* in EA. The hand amulet has roots in many cultures as a symbol of protection from envy (Apostolos-Cappadona, 2005). Many Egyptians also believe that the five fingers refer to the five verses in Sūra 113 in the Qur'ān, which is centered around seeking protection from all evil, including envy.

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the countryside. Females, old and young especially in poor areas, wear gold talismans with *mā shā' Allāh* inscribed on them. Inside Muslims' houses, portraits of Sūrat al-Falaq[12] are hung on walls. Such belief in the power of the evil eye to harm someone and methods to combat it are as old as people in Egypt. In this regard, Egyptians are no exception in the Middle East where fearing envy is a common social phenomenon (Abu-Rabia, 2005; Dundes, 1981).

In their respective accounts of evil-eye practices in Upper Egypt and Delta, Blackman (2000 [originally published 1927]) and Fakhour (1972) confirm that the target of the evil eye lies in family, achievements, personal traits, and precious possessions and that compliments on these could be interpreted as envy unless religious formulas hedge the compliment (as cited in Mughazy, 1999[13]). Among these formulas are some referring to Allāh as the source of giving protection such as *mā shā' Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed' and *Allāhumma lā ḥasad* 'oh, Allāh, no envy intended', or Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) such as *ṣalli 'an-nabi* 'invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet' and its numerous variants. Here are some examples including SAN formulas.

(1) At home, a middle-aged woman speaks to her female friend of her age, after the latter's son did not get a score enough to join a state-owned medical school.

khalāṣ, dakhkhalūh gamʿa khāṣa ḥatta law ha-tidfaʿu shiwayyit filūs ziyāda, w-abūh – **Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi** *– mish faʾīr yaʿni.*

No problem, let him join a private medical school even if you pay some extra fees, and his father – *oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet* – is not poor, I guess.

(2) At home, an old man asks his nephew, a young man, how the latter could buy a good apartment while he is still young.

huwwa inta ya Sāmi – **biṣ-ṣala 'an-nabi!** *– ishtarēt shaʾʾa fil Qāhira il-Gidīda kida izzāy?*

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[12] See Sūrat al-Falaq at https://quran.com/113.
[13] Mughazy gives different dates: Fakhouri (1984) and Blackman (1986).

How could you, Sami – *with Allah's blessings on the Prophet!* – buy an apartment in New Cairo?

(3)   At home, a middle-aged man expresses his admiration for the skill of his very old mother in making a nice dessert.

ṣalāt in-nabi aḥsan! ēh ish-shughl il-ʿāli da ya mama!

Allāh's blessings on the Prophet are better! Wow! Super work, mom!

(4)   At home, an old mother, opening the door for her daughter on the latter's wedding day, showers salt grains over the heads of the audience gazing at the dazzling bride.

b-ismillāh, Allāhu Akbar, **ṣalāt in-nabi, ya ṣalāt in-nabi**. *ḥaṣwa fī ʿēn illi ma yi-ṣalli* **ʿan-nabi**. **ṣallū ʿan-nabi**, *ya gadaʿ minnak luh.*

In the name of Allāh, Allāh is the Greatest. *Allāh's blessings on the Prophet, oh, Allāh's blessings on the Prophet! May a stone get into the eye of who does not invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet. Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet*, guys.

(5)   In a children's clothes store, a young saleswoman tells a female a middle-aged female customer that she should look for clothes for her well-built, though young, boy at young people's clothes stores.

ṭab **salli ʿan-nabi** *ya ḥabibti, wi-ʾulīli libs ish-shabāb fēn ʾabl is-sāʿa* **khamsa** (raising her hand with the five fingers outstretched)

Okay, *invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet*, honey, and tell me where the young people's clothes are before it's *five* o'clock.

The most frequent SAN formulas in the dataset are those serving as speech acts to ward off the evil eye. As in the examples above, these formulas are of two types: A) the speaker uses a SAN formula himself/herself; or B) the speaker asks the addressees to use a SAN formula.

In case A (Examples 1-3), the speakers' comments can be considered compliments; thus, they are expressive speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1976). But because these

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compliments relate to highly valued possessions or attributes, they could be easily interpreted as envy, which is a serious FTA in Egyptian culture. Due to the small social distance between the interlocutors (they are all friends or relatives), the speakers themselves use the SAN formula *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* and *ṣalāt in-nabi aḥsan!* as if they try to keep their addresses or possessions, achievements, and skills safe. In this case, these formulas are considered politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to redress the addressees' negative face and keep solidarity with them. In example 1, the speaker does not want to look envious of her friend's husband for his fortunes; in example 2, the uncle speaking to his nephew does not like to appear as someone who hates his young nephew's achievement (unexpectedly buying an apartment in an expensive area); and in example 3, the son speaking is concerned about his mother's skills at her very old age.

In case B, the speakers directly ask the addressee/s to use a SAN formula as they try to keep their family members safe from the evil eye, especially examples 4-5 represent two prominent cases where envy is expected: weddings and boys' sound health. As is clear, the social distance between the interlocutors is large (they are not friends or relatives, or they are a large audience including friends and relatives as well as strangers as expected in Egyptian weddings). In example 4, the speaker uses a batch of six religious phrases to avoid the disruptive effects of the evil eye to protect her daughter (the bride), by using Allāh first in 1) *b-ismillāh* and 2) *Allāhu Akbar* then switching to four SNA formulas given powerfully: 3) *ṣalāt in-nabi*, 4) *ya ṣalāt in-nabi*, 5) *ḥaṣwa fi 'ēn illi ma yi-ṣalli 'an-nabi* and 6) *ṣallū 'an-nabi*. It is noticeable here that the mother used the first four formulas as assertive formulas to prevent herself, even unwillingly, from envying her daughter. Formula 5 is a cursing one; therefore, the wedding audience uttered *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* directly (performative act) so that the curse did not afflict them. The last formula used by the bride's mother is a direct call to everyone *minnak luh* to praise the Prophet. The same applies to example 5 where the mother is

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afraid of the saleswoman's eye to bring harm to her son's health, thus justifying the mother's

direct call to the saleswoman to praise the Prophet. The two ladies' fear and anxiety in examples

4 and 5 that their family members can be harmed motivate them to use such directive speech

acts (Searle, 1976). It is worth mentioning that the mother in example 5 also raised her hand

outstretched (thus, reminding of the Fatima Hand) and mentioned '*five* o'clock', the number

that is believed to work against envy due to its common interpretation as a reference to the five

verses in Sūrat al-Falaq (see more details in Footnote10).

Attempting to ward off envy communicated through SAN formulas in the examples

above and the numerous ones reported in the data were all decided upon by replacing them

with equivalents in non-religious plain language. The SAN formulas in examples 1-3 were

replaced by phrases similar to 'I do not want to envy …' and the ones in examples 4-5 by 'do

not envy …'.

Using SAN formulas in Cases A and B were reported regarding Egypt (Kamel, 1993;

Mughazy, 1999) and Jordan (Migdadi & Badarneh, 2013). Although the same pragmatic

function is used in Najd, Saudi Arabia, it is achieved there via other religious expressions such

as *mā shā' Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed' and *tabāraka ar-Raḥmān* 'Blessed be (Allāh), the

Merciful' since remembering Allāh is considered the "best and strongest defense possible

against the evil eye" (Al-Rojaie, 2021, p. 16). The lack of using SAN formulas to ward off the

evil eye in Najd can be explained by the common belief in some conservative communities that

invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet to avoid envy is considered *bid'a* (heretical innovation)

because only Allāh is to be sought for protecting people from envy (Huda, 2020). However,

those who use any SAN formula in Jordan or Egypt do so out of their love for the Prophet

(PBUH) whose name, even without any verbs related to invoking Allāh for blessings such as

ṣalli or any of its variants, is a relief and a source of blessings. Thus, the Prophet's name alone

is used in some expressions to avoid envy such as *ism in-nabi ḥārsu* 'may the name of the

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Prophet protect him' often used to refer to successful young men and boys by anyone or even by their mothers.

6.2.2 Stopping misbehavior

According to Migdadi & Badarneh (2013), imperative SAN formulas act as FTAs involving criticism, reprimand, or disagreement; however, the threat in these formulas is internally redressed by their positive content as invitations to the addressees to "take a meditative pause to perform an act of worship" by invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet, thus mitigating the face threat in the utterance where the SAN formula is used (81-82). Accordingly, SAN formulas involve what could be called a deacceleration effect and serve as politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to save the addressees' negative face and not lose solidarity with them. SAN formulas acting in this way were found very frequent in the dataset, as directive speech acts where the social distance is small as in examples 6-9 involving interlocutors who are long-term colleagues, family members, or neighbors, and as expressive speech acts where the social distance is large as in example 10 involving two strangers.

(6) At work, a middle-aged woman responds to her middle-aged female colleague's claim that a male colleague is accepting bribery to finish some documents for some customers more easily than others who do not bribe him.

ṣalli 'alli ha-yishfa' fīki. shuftīh bi-'nēki?

Invoke Allāh to bless [the Prophet] who will intercede [Him on the Day of Judgment] for you. Have you seen him yourself?

(7) At home, an old woman speaking to her infuriated middle-aged son, advising him to reconsider his rash decision to divorce his wife.

tab ṣalli 'an-nabi il-'awwil. di bint ghalbāna. ṣalli 'an-nabi; inta 'andak 'iyāl.

Okay, *invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet* first. She is a poor woman. *Praise the*

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Prophet; you have children.

(8)   At home, a middle-aged wife speaks to her furious middle-aged husband after she

had bought an expensive coffee machine.

ṣalli 'an-nabi 'alēh iṣ-ṣalātu wis-salām. *ana h-adfa' nuṣṣ taman il-makana.* **ṣalli**

'an-nabi *ba'a.*

Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet, blessings, and peace be upon him. I will pay half

the price of the [coffee] machine. *Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet*, okay.

(9)   At the stairs of a block of apartments, an old man speaks to his neighbors who are

fighting verbally and physically.

ṣallū 'an-nabi *ya gamā'a.'ēb kida! in-nās kullaha sam'āku.*

Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet, guys. Shame on you! All people can hear you

[fighting].

(10)   In an open market, an old man sees a young man trying to steal some fruits. The old

man looks from the corner of his eye at the young man and says:

Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala kāmil in-nūr, gamīl il-akhlā'.

Oh, Allāh, bless the [Prophet, who is] the perfection of light, [the one] with sublime

manners.

All the SAN formulas in examples 6-10 serve as speech acts stopping misbehavior, and the

equivalent could be 'do not backbite' in example 6, 'calm down' in examples 7 and 8, 'stop

fighting' in example 9, and 'do not steal' in example 10. However, each example has its unique

features. In example 6, the SAN formula is associated with *ha-yishfa' fīki* 'will intercede [Allāh

on the Day of Judgment] for you'. The Prophet's intercession is confirmed in many Ḥadīths

(al-Bukhārī, 810 AD)[14] and it is a major reason for Muslims to invoke Allāh to bless Prophet

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[14] See Ḥadīth 7510 at https://sunnah.com/bukhari:7510

Muhammad (PBUH). Raising the intercession issue, the speaker refers to reward and punishment in the Hereafter, a reprimand to the addressee that she could be deprived of the Prophet's intercession if she does not stop backbiting her male colleague. This is a severe FTA that is redressed by the request to invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet and be reminded that she is a Muslim whose manners must prove her religion according to which backbiting is forbidden[15]. This is indeed a favor to any Muslim so that s/he stops incurring *sayyi'āt* 'bad deeds'; anyone in the position of the addressee in example 6 hardly rejects the request to invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet.

A similar strategy is used by the speaker in example 10 where the social distance is large. The speaker does not know the addresses; so, he opts for the expressive act, reminding the young man who was about to steal fruits of the Prophet's sublime manners regarding forbidding theft (al-Nasā'ī, 915 AD)[16]. The SAN formula he used, thus, was aimed at pragmatically functioning as a scolding formula: the Prophet (PBUH) was of sublime manners, and he forbade stealing; so, stop stealing. Repetition of the SAN formula as in examples 7 and 8 suits the addressee's infuriation; the more SAN formulas/politeness strategies are used, the more effect they have. It is to be noticed here that the speaker in example 8 used the full SAN formula *ṣalli 'an-nabi 'alēh iṣ-ṣalātu wis-salām* 'invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet, blessings, and peace be upon him', reminding the addressee of *salām*, which is a broad word in Arabic based on the root س.ل.م referring to *peace*, *safety* and *recovery*, all of which are represented in a wide range of formulaic expressions in EA (Kamel, 1993, pp. 175-177).

6.2.3 Attracting attention

Not far from most mosques in large cities are scattered *'ir' sūs* (licorice) drink sellers moving from one busy street to another, carrying their ice-filled copper containers, banging

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[15] see Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, Verse 12 at https://quran.com/49?startingVerse=12
[16] See Ḥadīth 4900 at https://sunnah.com/nasai:4900

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their cymbals, and calling for thirsty people to buy a licorice drink. In these busy streets, the

cymbals are not enough; numerous sellers use cymbals or other rattling instruments (e.g.,

drums, whistles, tambourines) to attract buyers' attention. All these could be banged

simultaneously, rendering them indistinguishable. To make themselves and their merchandise

more visible, some sellers use a SAN formula or more to attract attention more effectively. The

same holds true for train peddlers, who usually sell cheap stuff on commuting trains. The SAN

formulas in such contexts are usually used in a high pitch. Some examples include:

(11)   In a busy street, a middle-aged man selling licorice calls:

illi yi-ḥibb in-nabi yi-ṣalli 'alēh wi-yishrab min 'andi. ya Rabb illi yi-shrab min

'andi yi-shrab ma'a in-nabi fil ganna.

Who likes the Prophet [should] invoke Allāh to bless him and have a drink from me.

Oh, Allāh, make the person who has a drink from me have a drink with the Prophet

in Paradise.

(12)   On a cart in a busy street, a middle-aged man selling clothes calls:

illi yi-ṣalli 'an-nabi yi-ksab! khud minni aḥla libs b-arkhas si'r.

Who invokes Allāh to bless the Prophet wins! Buy from me the best clothes for the

cheapest prices.

(13)   On a commuting train, a young man is selling falafel, and it seems that no one is

willing to buy from him. He calls:

ṣalāt in-nabi maksab! kassibtak ṣala 'al-ḥabīb, kassibni w-ishtiri minni wa-law

sandawitsh.

Invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet is a win! I made you win by making you *invoke*

Allāh to bless the Beloved [Prophet]. Help me win and buy from me even a

sandwich.

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(14) A middle-aged man selling watermelons on a cart in a rather quiet street is calling

people in apartments on both sides of the street, saying:

illi yi-ṣalli ‘an-nabi yi-ksab! ḥamār w-ḥalāwa ya baṭṭīkh!

Who *invokes Allāh to bless the Prophet* wins! Oh, red and sweet watermelons!

Brown & Levinson define negative politeness as "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" and they believe that it minimizes the imposition an FTA causes (1987, p. 129). In the examples above (11-14), the addressee is composed of a large group of people either heading to work, engaged in an errand or traveling, or at home watching TV, reading, cooking, etc. Accordingly, calling them or trying to attract their attention directly could 'hinder' their freedom and/or 'impede' their attention, which means it is an FTA causing imposition.

To redress the addressees' negative face while still attracting their attention, the sellers opt to rely on using a SAN formula that functions as a politeness strategy that maximizes the addressees' benefits and minimizes imposition on them. This is why all the sellers link invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet by verbs referring to love (*illi yi-ḥibb in-nabi* 'who loves the Prophet'), enjoyment in Paradise (*yi-shrab ma‘a in-nabi fil ganna* 'have a drink with the Prophet in Paradise'), winning (*ṣalāt in-nabi maksab* 'invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet is a win' and *kassibtak ṣala ‘al-ḥabīb* 'I made you win by making you invoke Allāh to bless the Beloved [Prophet]). It is customary in such situations that buyers come to the seller asking to buy whatever s/he sells while invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet. The researcher was one of those buyers one day and dared ask another buyer whether the licorice seller's use of a SAN formula made him decide to have a licorice drink. The buyer said, "I was going to buy a cola, but I said: this licorice seller made me gain some *ḥasanāt* 'good deeds' by invoking Allāh to bless the Prophet; so, I decided to have a licorice drink instead."

Maximizing the addressees' benefits and minimizing the imposition on them is well

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represented in example 12 where the addresses have the 'best clothes' for the 'cheapest price'.

The verb *yi-ksab* 'to win' in *illi yi-ṣalli 'an-nabi yi-ksab* 'who invokes Allāh to bless the Prophet wins' is important here as it highlights that if none is going to buy any clothes (tangible benefit), it is very easy to gain good deeds (a non-tangible benefit). The seller could also attract his addressees' attention without calling them directly, thus saving their face and minimizing his imposition on them by using a SAN. The falafel seller (example 13) deserves attention because it seems that the man was upset. Instead of uttering any swear words as expected from most train peddlers in such context, he opted for another strategy in which there is no loser. It is a win-win situation: 'I made you, train passengers, win by making you invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet and gain good deeds. So, help me win by buying even a sandwich'. The performative act embodied by many passengers' starting to buy some falafel sandwiches proved that the SAN had a great effect.

The syntax of the SAN formulas in all examples (11-14) does not include any imperative form; they are phrased either as a verb in the indicative mood (examples 11-13) or as a noun (example 14). This proves that the sellers succeeded in choosing the way they phrased their requests from the addresses (to utter a SAN formula), thus achieving a high level of saving face, while succeeding at attracting attention.

6.2.4 Holding the floor

Similar to Migdadi & Badarneh's (2013) results regarding SAN formulas pragmatically used to hold the floor in JA, numerous SAN formulas were found in the dataset expressing the same function (i.e., someone declaring that he/she has something to tell), especially by young people interrupting elders focusing on doing something. Since interruption is an act that threatens negative and positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 65), the speakers try to redress it via using SAN formulas to save their face and that of the addressees. Asking the addresses to invoke Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), even if it is a directive speech act (Austin,

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1962; Searle, 1976) in the imperative form, is a great deed for which the addresses will be rewarded if they respond to positively (by uttering a formula like *Allāhumma ṣalli ʿan-nabi* 'oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet'). The shared culture between the speakers and addressees mitigates the uneasiness degree caused by the imperative form.

The SAN formulas serving to hold the floor are similar in one way to those used to attract attention (section 6.2.3) but differ in another. The speakers here mostly rely on the intrinsic power of SAN formulas to have their addressees' full attention and to pave the way for some requests they are going to make. They also wait for responses from their addressees, which adds another FTA to the first (i.e., interruption). The following examples clarify how.

(15)   At home in an Upper-Egyptian village, a young man speaks to his father and uncle about a topic different from that they are already involved in.

ṣalli ʿan-nabi ya -būya inta w-ʿammi. ana ʿāwiz asḥab qarḍ mil bank w-aʿmil mashrūʿ

Invoke Allāh to bless *the Prophet*, father, and uncle. I want to get a loan from the bank and start a project.

(16)   At home, two old parents are speaking on a topic, and their young daughter speaks to her father regarding a male colleague who would like to propose to her.

baba, ṣalli ʿan-nabi kida ʿashān ʿayzāk fī mawdūʿ muhimm.

Dad, *invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet* because I want to talk to you about an important topic.

(17)   At home, a young son (S) speaks to his old father (F), who is also a widower, while watching TV.

S   *bāba, ṣalli ʿan-nabi.*

Dad, *invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet*.

F   *'alēh iṣ-ṣalātu wis-salām*. *fīh ēh ya Hāni?*

On him are Allah's blessings and peace. What is up, Hāni?

S   *zīd in-nabi ṣala.*

Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet once more.

F   *alf ṣala 'alēk ya nabi*. *'āyiz ēh? itkallim ya -bni.*

One thousand times [of Allāh's blessings are] on you, Prophet. What is going

on? Go ahead, sonny.

S   *wāḥid ṣaḥbi gabli vīsa kwayyisa giddan lil-Kuwēt. ēh ra'yak?*

A friend of mine brought me a very good job offer in Kuwait. What do you

think?

(18)   At a noisy wedding, someone (in a high pitch) holding a mike speaks to the wedding

audience.

ṣallu 'an-nabi ya jamā'a. samma'ūni ṣalāt in-nabi. il-'arīs wil-'arūsa 'amalu ḥadsa

bil-'arabiyya bas humma kwayyisīn wallāhi.

Invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet, everyone. Make me hear you *invoking Allāh to*

bless the Prophet. The bridegroom and bride's car has broken down, but they are

fine, I swear.

Although the social distance between the young speakers and old addressees in examples 15-

17 is small (i.e., family members), the topics are embarrassing. Taking a loan (example 15) is

considered a big issue by many Egyptians, especially in Upper Egypt where people are

generally more religious and conservative towards bank interests. Although Egyptians like for

their daughters to get married, the financial problems that families go through in preparing their

daughters for marriage are daunting. Thus, the girl (example 16) finds it difficult to tell her

father that a colleague is proposing to her. Since old parents like to have their children close to

them, the young man (example 18) is embarrassed to tell his father, a widower, that he wants

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to leave him alone and take up a job in Kuwait; thus, the son asks his father to invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet not once but twice. The father's reply "*alf ṣala 'alēk ya nabi* one thousand times [of Allāh's blessings are] on you, Prophet" is quite common in Egypt and expresses anticipation of a topic that a person is against. In all these examples, the SAN formula does not only mean 'pay attention to me' but also 'be patient because I am going to speak about an issue that you are against or one that will cost much money'.

In example 18, the speaker's call to the wedding audience to invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet and his assertion that he wants to hear them doing so (*samma'ūni ṣalāt in-nabi*) expresses different acts: a) listen to me, b) be quiet and c) I have bad news to tell you. The SAN formula here serves to make the wedding audience, after uttering an invocation to Allāh to bless the Prophet, quiet and give the young man a good opportunity to start telling them the bad news.

6.2.5 Hesitation marker

Gilquin (2008) points out that hesitation is an essential feature of natural speech and that it has a vital pragmatic function since it, by marking a delay, guarantees that the speaker can maintain his/her turn without being interrupted. While hesitation is achieved in some languages such as English using dummy words (e.g., 'like', 'sort of', 'well', 'er', 'em'), it is often achieved in Arabic depending on religious expressions such as (in EA) *yā Allāh* 'oh, Allāh', *yā dīn in-nabi* 'oh, the religion of the Prophet', *lā ḥawla wa-lā quwata illā b-illāh* 'there is no power or strength except with Allāh' or *subḥāna Allāh* 'Glory be to Allāh', *Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad* 'oh, Allāh, bless our Master Muhammad', *Allāhumma ṣalli 'ala sidna in-nabi* 'oh, Allāh, bless our Master, the Prophet', or *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* 'oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet'. Fatalism is clear in these religious expressions as they suggest that the ability to remember something depends on divine (Allāh's) power; so, invoking Allāh directly could be used to facilitate retrieving information. This is supported by some verses in

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the Qur'ān asserting that forgetfulness is from the devil and that remembering Allāh activates memory, including Verses 24[17] and 63[18] of Sūrat al-Kahf and Verse 63[19] of Sūrat al-Anʿām. Sometimes, invoking Allāh is done indirectly through invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) whose name is taken by a large number of Muslims in Egypt as a shield to drive away the devil, the source of forgetfulness. Thus, they rely on the Prophet's name when they forget something to plead to Allāh through His Prophet so that the information they are after is retrieved. Accordingly, using a SAN formula can be considered a hesitation marker. Here are some clarifying examples.

(19)   At university, a middle-aged female professor asks one of her male young students about a platform for designing free websites.

fīh gūgil saits, w-fīh mawqiʿ kuwayyis ismu (rubbing his head), ***Allāhumma ṣalli ʿala Sayyidina Muhammad,*** *… wībli.*

There is Google Sites and there is a good website called (rubbing his head), *oh*, *Allāh, bless our Master Muhammad, …* Weebly.

(20)   At home, an old mother asks her young daughter about the date of her brother's return from the USA, and the daughter replies.

yimkin fī shahr, ***Allāhumma ṣalli ʿan-nabi,*** *… shahr Yunyu.*

Possibly in the month of, *oh*, *Allāh, bless the Prophet, … the month of June.*

(21)   At home, an old mother asks her young daughter about the time she is meeting her fiancé tomorrow, and the daughter replies.

nisīt wallāhi ya māma. ya lahwi! da bi-yizʿal ʾawi lamma awṣal mitʾakhkhara.

Allāhumma ṣalli ʿala Sayyidina Muhammad, *… iftakart! is-sāʿa talāta.*

I forgot, mom. Oh, my God! He gets upset when I am late. *Oh*, *Allāh, bless our Master Muhammad,* … I remembered! 3'oclock.

(22)   At a governmental agency, a young man replies to an old woman's question regarding how to file a complaint.

*tirūḥi ḥaḍritik ʻand madām Magda fī id-dōr it-tālit, wi baʻdēn madām Maha fī id-dōr il-… **Allāhumma ṣalli ʻala sidna in-nabi,** id-dōr il-khāmis wil-mudīr ākhir ḥāga.*

You [should] go to Madam Magda on the 3rd floor, then Madam Maha on the, … *oh, Allāh, bless our Master, the Prophet,* the 5th floor and finally the manager.

As can be seen from these examples, the speakers try to remember precise information denoting a name (examples 19 and 20: *Weebly* and *June*) or number (examples 21 and 22: *3'oclock* and *the 5th floor*). Replacing this information with something else is misleading. Thus, the speakers try hard to remember the precise information. Commenting on similar examples involving SAN formulas in JA, Migdadi & Badarneh (2013) assert that using these formulas "can be considered as a positive politeness strategy" and that they are "oriented to the positive face of the addressee", serving as a "membership marker that implies that both participants value the norms and beliefs of the culture to which they belong" (p. 71). Similarly here, the SAN formulas in examples 19 and 22 are oriented to the addressee's positive face: the speaker's use of any SAN formula (by invoking Allāh to bless Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) is an indirect request to the addressee who, complying with the socio-cultural norms of Muslims' culture in Egypt, will himself/herself invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet by using a formula like *ʻalēh iṣ-ṣalātu wis-salām* 'Allāh's blessings and peace be upon him'. This greatly expected act will not only give the speaker some time to collect the information s/he is after while the addressee is busy uttering the SAN formula but will also reward the addressee.

6.2.6 Mitigating sarcasm

Impoliteness involves "communicative behavior intending to cause the "face loss" of a

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target or perceived by the target to be so" (Culpeper, 2008, p. 5). This entails that an impolite

act depends on the speaker's intention, the addresses' understanding, and their relationship.

Culpeper (1996) offered a group of impoliteness strategies, largely parallel to the politeness

strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987), including bald-on-record impoliteness, positive

impoliteness, negative impoliteness, off-record impoliteness, withhold impoliteness, and

impoliteness meta-strategy (sarcasm or mock politeness). According to him, sarcasm is

achieved through using an FTA "performed with the use of politeness strategies that are

obviously insincere" (Culpeper, 1996, p. 356). For instance, congratulating someone for his

failure in a test by saying "super result, mate!" is an act of sarcasm since it is not sincere,

considering the context. In EA, SAN formulas, especially *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* 'oh, Allāh,

bless the Prophet', are used to mitigate sarcasm. Without the context, these formulas could be

understood as speech acts to ward off the evil eye, as can be seen in the following examples.

(23)   At home, a middle-aged man speaks to his old mother-in-law, describing the terrible

        mess he found in the apartment yesterday.

        awwil ma dakhalt ish-sha''a la'itha ēh? **Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi**, *ḥāga fulla!*

        When I entered the apartment, I found it, guess what? *Oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet*,

        wonderful!

(24)   An old mother-in-law asks her middle-aged daughter-in-law about the present her

        husband, who is going through some financial problems, bought her on their

        marriage anniversary. The daughter-in-law is very sad and refers to a very cheap bag

        that her husband brought her. She (weeping) says:

        gōzi ḥabībi gabli shanṭa, **Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi**, *raw'a.*

        My lovely husband brought me a bag, *oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet,* great.

(25)   At a governmental office, an upset middle-aged female staff member speaks to her

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middle-aged female colleague about a badly written report.

it-taqrīr illi katabtīh ya Nagham, **Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi***, wāḍiḥ wi-yit'iri fī di'ī'a*

waḥda.

The report you wrote, Nagham, *oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet,* is clear and could be

read in only one minute.

(26)   At home, an agitated old man speaks to his old wife about their son's participation in

a folklore dance festival he did not know about, while the mother was aware of.

Hishām, ibnina, **Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi***, khad il-markaz il-awwal fī mahragān ir-*

ra'ṣ ish-sha'bi. ana fakhūr bīh bi-gadd.

Hishām, our son, *oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet*, came first in the folklore dance

festival. I am really proud of him.

The given context of all the examples shows that the speakers are upset by something terrible:

the awful mess in the apartment in example 23; a valueless marriage anniversary gift in

example 24; a bad report in example 25; and participation in a notorious festival (from the

father's point of view) in example 26. This shows that the speakers are not sincere in using the

SAN formula[20] *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* 'oh, Allāh, bless the Prophet' along with words and

phrases that semantically express admiration (*ḥāga fulla* 'wonderful'; *raw'a* 'great'; *wāḍiḥ wi-*

yit'iri fī di'ī'a waḥda 'clear and could be read in only one minute'; and *ana fakhūr bīh bi-gadd*

'I am really proud of him'). Thus, in Culpeper's terms, these words and phrases "remain surface

realisations" (1996, p. 356).

Criticizing spouses in front of mothers-in-law is considered a severe FTA in Egyptian

culture. So, the upset husband's criticism of his wife's inability to clean the apartment

(example 23) and the sad wife's criticism of her husband's cheap marriage anniversary gift

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[20] In similar contexts in EA, *mā shā' Allāh* 'what Allāh has willed' is used even more than *Allāhumma ṣalli 'an-nabi* (Kamel, 1993), and this is similar to the function this expression achieves in JA (Migdadi, Badarneh and Momani, 2010).

(example 24) are both FTAs. Likewise, criticizing workmates or spouses is another FTA in Egyptian culture. Accordingly, a workmate's criticism of the poor skills of a colleague (example 25) or a husband's criticism of his wife's withholding information from him about their son's taking part in an event that he is against (example 26) are confrontation acts involving the addressees' face loss. The SAN formula that all the speakers use helps them to save the addresses' face by mitigating the sarcastic tones in their criticism. Their addressees would not refuse to invoke Allāh to bless the Prophet, and this could make them less troubled, having taken some time in invoking Allāh's blessings and being aware of the benefits of that act.

The SAN formulas in all the examples above could be equivalent to 'calm down even if you see that I am angry and sarcastic about what you/your son/daughter did', and the context shows that the speaker is (from his/her point of view, at least) is right. Without a SAN formula in any of the examples above, the sarcastic tone would be very high and considered too impolite.

7. Conclusion

It has been shown that the SAN formulas in EA have largely departed from their semantic meanings to express various pragmatic functions. However, this does not mean that the semantic meanings are completely absent in these formulas; rather, they reinforce the pragmatic functions.

According to their frequency in the data collected, the pragmatic functions expressed through SAN formulas have been categorized under six broad functions: warding off the evil eye, stopping misbehavior, attracting attention, holding the floor, hesitation, and mitigating sarcasm. Other functions were also obtained, including eliciting agreement, expressing admiration without an intent to envy, apologizing, and ending a discussion. These have not been discussed in detail for space considerations and low frequency. In this context, the results

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obtained are generally similar to several studies reviewed in section 3, all of which confirm the multifunctionality of religious expressions in Arabic speech, acting as ritual formulas and as non-religious speech acts or politeness strategies.

The obtained results are largely similar to Migdadi & Badarneh's (2013) results regarding SAN formulas in JA. In both JA and EA, SAN formulas are used to express warding off/seeking protection from the evil eye, stopping misbehavior/ terminating disruptive or undesirable activities, holding/claiming the floor, and marking hesitation/place-holding. Also, as in JA, the function of eliciting agreement was found in EA, but it is not frequent in the data and, thus, has not been discussed in detail. Expressing success reported in JA was also found in EA but in contexts where envy was expected; thus, it was included in the 'warding off the evil eye' function. Intensifying the message reported in JA has not been found in EA. Conversely, attracting attention and mitigating sarcasm reported in EA were not found in JA.

The brief sociolinguistic results regarding the social profiles of those who used SAN formulas in EA show that such formulas are used more by old and less educated people, regardless of their gender or residence type. Compared to the old and less educated who often observe religious rituals and use numerous SAN formulas to achieve both religious and non-religious speech acts, the young and highly educated do not (consistently) do either. This reminds of Ferguson's (1983) results concerning religious expressions in Syrian Arabic (that he called 'God-wishes'); he found that young people used those expressions as politeness formulas much less than the old, attributing this to the effects of urbanization, secularization and Euro-American influence. If this was obvious then of Arab youngsters, it is much more prominent now, especially among young, highly educated young people in Egypt.

The separate discussion of each section above may have explained why each SAN formula was used concerning its capacity as a speech act or politeness strategy. But why are SAN formulas generally used rather than other speech acts or politeness strategies in EA? This

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could be explained by the power religion has in Egyptian culture and Egyptians' love for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) whose name or descriptions are reflected in numerous aspects of culture (songs, folk poetry, religious celebrations, etc.). Also, the benefits that Egyptians get for invoking Allah's blessings on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (details in section 4.1) must have a role in the wide circulation of SAN formulas. Linguistically, as 'prefabricated' formulas similar to formulaic expressions used in EA, SAN formulas are "sure and safe avenues for successful linguistic communications" (Kamel, 1993, p. 247). This suggests that they facilitate communication and help the interlocutors express their thoughts and emotions much better.

The study is limited by the number of SAN formulas obtained; more formulas could reveal more functions or augment those reported. Another limitation is the five speech communities where the formulas were observed, although observing more speech communities is not expected to uncover different community-bound findings.

The significance of the study lies in the assertion that the pragmatic functions expressed by SAN formulas in EA (and by extension religious expressions in general in Arabic) are greatly expected to cause communication problems if understood only in their semantic capacity. These problems are expected to occur in many fields, including translation from Arabic, teaching/learning Arabic as a foreign language, cultural studies, media production, etc. Therefore, numerous studies are required to explore the multifunctionality of religious expressions in Arabic in different settings and varieties.

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