

The Pragmatics of Religious-based Expressions in Arabic



Introduction

Various religious based expressions have found their way into the daily Arabic discourse, demonstrating how the language has rich roots tied to the culture, history and religion. With gaining an understanding of the locutionary and illocutionary forces that religious phrases in Arabic hold, learners' communicative competence can be expanded.

In order to assist teachers and language learners of Arabic, various sources that can be served as educational materials have been curated with the focus on three religiously-based expressions: 1. Alhamdulillah 2. Insha'Allah 3. Masha'Allah

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Praise God!

02. Insha'Allah انشاء الله
God willing

03. Masha'Allah ماشاء الله
My, what God has willed!



وَنَرَعْنَا مَا فِي صُؤْرِهِمْ مِنْ غَلٍّ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ وَقَالُوا
الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ
هَدَانَا اللَّهُ

“We will remove whatever bitterness they had in their hearts. Rivers will flow under their feet. And they will say, “Praise be to Allah for guiding us to this. We would have never been guided if Allah had not guided us (...)”

Surah Al-Ar'af, Verse 43

Alhamdulillah / الحمد لله

Alhamdulillah “Praise God” (hamdulillah for short)

This formula is used in a variety of situations:

- In response to being asked ‘How are you?’

It could stand on it’s own or be paired with another word:

كيف حالك “How are you?”

بخير الحمد لله “Well, alhamdulillah”

- Expressing joy/excitement for a good outcome
- Expressing contentment
(e.g. with life situation. Seeing the silver-lining. Perhaps not wanting to appear ungrateful/entitled)
- Can be said upon finishing a task/arriving at a destination

Alhamdulillah / الحمد لله

Response to 'How are you?'

These people use alhamdulillah along with other expressions to say how they're doing

Phone call
Responses may be short
and formulaic



Asked twice (shlonek,
shu akhbarek)
He asks back



Notice she mentions
difficulties but sees
brightside



Responses might be
more elaborate and
actually express how
they are doing



A exchange of greetings is presented on this discord channel where users exchange “how are you” and respond with الحمد لله



Arriving at a destination/completing an activity
Here people use alhamdulillah when reaching their destination or finish an activity.

Reaching destination
Finishing vlog



Gratitude at resolving a difficult situation / achieving a good outcome
These examples show people express gratitude at overcoming difficulty.
They are more emotional and expressive and often repeat alhamdulillah many times to express themselves.

Enthusiasm, expressing gratitude at recovering from difficulties
Returning to Youtube



Exclamation at uncovering buried item
Notice: people echo hamd in response to align with speaker's sentiment



Excitement at finally reaching Austria



Expressing contentment at situation in life

Each of these examples show a different example of how people express contentment with life. Or how they emphasize the value of contentment



You should see the bright side of thing
Instead of looking at the negative.
Egyptian concept of alhamdulillah

Rebuilt his life
Content with what he's got

Instructing to say 'hmd' for what you have in life
Rather than being unsatisfied



Matchmaker
Youtube channel

People describing their lives over the phone





وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكَ غَدًا (*) إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ
اللَّهُ

And never say of anything, “I will definitely do this tomorrow,”
without adding, “if Allah so wills!”
Surah Al-Kahf, Verses 23-24

The Locutionary meaning of Insha'Allah

Insha'Allah has held a semantic meaning of adhering to the might of God when one makes plans for the future, and acknowledging that its only under God's will that the occurrence for the future event will happen.

However, the expression has seen various pragmatic shifts across Arabic dialects.

- For instance, Insha'Allah can be used pejoratively, when utilized with a rise in intonation to demonstrate unwillingness or doubts in fulfillment of a plan or event.
 - Saudi Arabic: إن شاء الله بكرة
 - Iraqi Arabic: إن شاء الله نشوفك بعدين
 - Libyan Arabic: إن شاء الله خير

Insha'Allah has many illocutionary meanings:

Directive

Involves the expression being used for questioning, ordering, commanding, or requesting.

02

Commissive

Involves the expression being used for promising, offering, or threatening.

01

Assertive

Involves the expression being used for affirming, believing, denying or concluding.

03

Expressive

Involves the expression being used for apologizing, congratulating, and hoping.

04



Insha'Allah as a commissive

Promising

Example in Jordanian Arabic: “إن شاء الله بشفك بكرة” “I will see you tomorrow”



The man is ending the conversation on the phone and using the expression is making a promise that the woman will see this clip tomorrow.

Threatening or daring

Accompanied by a rise-fall intonation on the word, and rising intonation at the end of the utterance.

Example expressive of hope in Libyan Arabic:

“إن شاء الله تجي هني مرة ثانية”

“I hope you’ll come back again” (The last word in utterance ends with a high-low intonation.)

The same utterance can be a dare/threat with a change in intonation “إن شاء الله تجي هني مرة ثانية”

Commissive: Planning/Promising

These examples show people agreeing to future commitments, agreements, or requests

Or uncertainty....

Insha'Allah can be used to show commitments to plans or requests....



Her dad asks if she can help with his case (Justice 1)

23:07 إن شاء الله ولو اني وايد مشغولة بس انت مع الأمر I'm so busy, but anything for you, Dad.



Three people talking. Man leaves conversation. The other man calls to him as he leaves. He mutters insh. functions as a noncommittal agreement/promise.

7:44 Excuse me. سمحوني.

7:45 ماتنساش يا اسماعيل. Don't forget.

7:46 إن شاء الله. I won't.

cucumber 12/28/2021

i know i know 🥒 but!! if that happens then dont forget!!

लुलूम की फानकलुब अभिलाषा सदस्य 12/28/2021

إن شاء الله 🥒

Through the usage of emojis and code switching we can see that the second user presents agreement, however there's a mutual understanding of the low likelihood of what "happen" occurring

Insha'Allah as a directive

Ordering

Example: **إن شاء الله تنفيذ أوامرك**
“I would like you to carry out your orders”

A Tag Question

Example: **“إن شاء الله مش زعلان”** “You are not upset are you?”

“إن شاء الله انك رسبت الفصح؟” “You didn't fail the exam, did you?”

Requesting

Example: **إن شاء الله ببيض وجهنا**
“We would like you to give a good image of us”

A rising-falling intonation on Insha'Allah demonstrates the expression being accompanied as a tag question.

These expression constitute as directives as they urge the interlocutor to respond or perform something.

Insha'Allah as an assertive

Affirming

جبت الكعة - Did you bring the cake?
اه ان شاء الله - Yes



He asks him if it comes to spicy sauce

1:57:57 الله. - زيت حار يا عم "ربيع"،؟ - إن شاء
-Spicy sauce, Uncle Rabih, right?
-Yes.

These examples show ways Insha'Allah can affirm what someone said

(Justice 1)

Farah is asking to a family member for evidence, but she's says she can't remember anything. Insh. indicates mitigated response (it would have been rude to say 'no, it wasn't helpful')

28:46 شكراً، "منال". Thanks, Manal.
28:48 هل عرفت شيئاً؟ You learn something?
28:49 إن شاء الله. I think so.



Insha'Allah as an expressive

These examples present the psychological state of a speaker, conveying their wishes, gratitude, or apologies.

Apologizing

Example: “إن شاء الله بسيطة”

“Hopefully, it was something minor”

This phrase is used as an opening to an apology, and can also serve as a “soother”

Thanking Formula

عقبالك ان شاء الله

In Libyan Arabic this expression is used as a thanking response to being congratulated

Hoping

“ان شاء الله اخوك بينجح في الامتحان

I hope your brother passes the exam



Backchanneling

Aligns with her wish

He's saying the inshallah for her



(Justice 1)



ياالله انشاءالله يا رب ان هذه

القضية تنتهي على خير. I just hope that it all ends well.

18:44 إن شاء الله. I hope so too.



وَلَوْ لَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتَكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنْ
تَرَنْ أَثْمًا أَقَلَّ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَوَلَدًا فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَنْ يُؤْتِيَنَّكَ خَيْرًا مِّنْ
جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتُصْبِحَ صَعِيدًا

رَلَقًا ٣٩

If only you had said, upon entering your property, 'This is what Allah has willed! There is no power except with Allah!' Even though you see me inferior to you in wealth and offspring, perhaps my Lord will grant me 'something' better than your garden, and send down upon your garden a thunderbolt from the sky, turning it into a barren waste.

Surah Al-Kahf, Verses 39-40

Masha'Allah

'My, what God has willed!'

The phrase can be used for various functions, centered around the meaning of admiring

- Compliments
 - It can stand on its own or modify a compliment.
 - It has the function of avoiding the possibility of envy/warding off the evil eye.
 - It can increase solidarity with complimentee.
 - When modifying a compliment it is an intensifier
- Expressive
 - It can be used as an expressive exclamation, expressing things such as joy.
- Sarcasm
 - It can show irritation or annoyance, counter to the positive expectation of the phrase.
 - This usage can be face-threatening
 - Can be used within contexts of humor

Masha'Allah as a compliment

These examples show Masha'Allah functioning as a compliment or praise.
This can be a solidarity building action that doesn't risk the evil eye.

Whispers A boss is complimenting his employee's good attitude during a meeting

Episode 2

3:51 شركة خاصة بالتطبيقات، My own app development company!

3:53 أنت عارف أن هذا حلم حياتي. You know, that's always been my dream.

3:56 كأنك تقرا إلهي في راسي. It's like you read my mind.

3:58 شففت، أقولك مجنونة شغل بتحب الشغل وعشان كده أنا متمسك فيها، See? I told you she's crazy about her work.

That's why I hold on to her. You're fantastic, Arwa.

4:02 ما شاء الله عليك يا "أروى" ما شاء الله عليك. - ["أروى" تضحك] That's why I hold on to her. You're fantastic,

Arwa. Truly amazing!

Episode 3 An aunt is complimenting the appearance of her niece

24:13 [تضحك] تعالي حبيبتي، come here.

24:17 كبرتني ما شاء الله وصررتي عروس شوفك. You're all grown up, and so pretty!

24:20 Why don't you come here and give your aunt a hug!
ليه ما تسلمي على عمته؟

24:23 تعالي. Come.

Masha'Allah as a Protective Invocation to the Evil Eye

Showing all the food they
gathered for the video meal.
Indicates gratitude to avoid
appearing boastful.
Joy and warding off 3ayn



A young girl to her father's friend:

دار جرانة ماشاء الله عندهم فلوس وهلبة سيارات
وقلة كبيرة

“Our neighbors, Masha'Allah, have
a lot of money, a lot of cars, and a
big villa



Masha'Allah as an Exclamation

Expression of joy

A woman is saying a prayer after helping a mother deliver a baby.

51s [صراخ مولود] - بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، الله أكبر. In the name of God! God is Almighty!

1:07 الله أكبر، الله أكبر. God is Almighty!

1:20 [باندھاش] الله أكبر! بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم! God is Almighty! In the name of God!

1:23 ما شاء الله! ما شاء الله! God bless!



Part of prayer before uncovering turkey

Masha'Allah in sarcasm

Here Masha'Allah can show sarcasm or humor.
This usage can serve as a face threatening act.

The Student Cop A teacher is talking to a new student in front of the class

35:07 ما شاء الله! انت جت لنا من انهي المصيبة؟ من 3 يا افندم - What disaster brought you to us? -Three, sir.

35:10 نعم يا أخويا؟ - قصدي 3 مصائب يا افندم. -What? -I mean three disasters, sir.

35:13 جامعة القاهرة، وجامعة الإسكندرية، وجامعة جنوب الوادي. The University of Cairo, the University of Alexandria and the University of South Valley.

35:17 ما شاء الله! اترددت من 3 جامعات! يا حاجة تشرف والله! Wow! You've been expelled from three universities? What an honor!

A father walks home to his daughter with friends over

46:37 ما شاء الله يا هانم! Really, young woman?

46:39 أحولت البيت إلى ملهى؟ You turned the house into a bar?

46:41 ماذا جاء بك الآن؟ What brought you here?

46:42 - ألا يجب أن تتصل قبل أن تجيء؟ - أتصل لأجيء إلى بيتي! -Call before you come! -Call before I come to my own house?