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A Cross-Cultural and Linguistic Review of Thankfulness and Gratitude Expressions in Jordanian Arabic

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ABSTRACT

Thankfulness and gratitude are used as politeness strategy to thank others and to show respect and admiration for what they do for those who need help or support. The present study aims at reviewing the thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic as a politeness strategy from a sociolinguistic point of view. The study shows the different types of thanking and gratitude expressions, their numeral structure, their linguistic formation and their semantics.

Introduction

Politeness is not just saying thank you, it is a way of living and building good relations. It is part of our nature as human beings to like kindness and politeness because it is the right and short way to have intimate contact with others. Politeness involves different human disciplines such as condolences, greetings, apology, welcoming, and of course thanking and gratitude. According to Leech (2014: 4- 8) there are eight characteristics of politeness: first, politeness is not obligatory. People can be nonpolite: they normally will not behave politely unless there is a reason to be polite. Second, there are varying gradations of polite and impolite behavior. Third, there is often a sense of what is normal recognized by members of society, as to how polite to be for a particular occasion. Four, how far politeness will occur, or whether it will occur at all, depends on the situation. Five, there is a reciprocal asymmetry in polite behavior between two parties, A and B. Six, aspect of politeness is that it can manifest itself in repetitive behavior, which is to a lesser or greater degree ritualized. Seven, it is fairly central to politeness that it involves the passing of some kind of transaction of value between the speaker and the other party. Eight, politeness has the tendency to preserve a balance of value between the participants A and B.

The expressions of thankfulness and gratitude as a politeness way of living in Jordanian Arabic are affected to a very certain degree by the religious and cultural background of the society. Islam and the Arab culture have a noticeable print on the ways in which Jordanians show thankfulness and gratitude. It is of high social importance to thank others and show gratitude for them.

The present paper investigates, from a cross-cultural pragmatic view, the types, the formation and the semantics of thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic. It shows that Jordanians invoke Islamic religious lexicons, traditional Arabic ones and to a very limited extent western borrowed thankfulness expressions in their daily politeness discourse. By focusing on the speech act of thankfulness and gratitude, this study attempts to prove that these expressions are ordinary day-to-day events. Based on data collected, Jordanians thank one another by using religious vocabulary and praises. It is noted that the Islamic religious thankfulness and gratitude expressions are only used by Muslim Jordanians whereas the other expressions are used by all Jordanians either Muslims or Christians.

The study shows that the number of thankfulness and gratitude is somehow big with various forms that are derived from one thanking expression as *shukran* and *jazak Allah kheir*. It shows too that the western thanking words are used by young generations and those with high education or of the upper class in the society.

Literature Background

Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac (2013: 268-269) investigates socio-cultural constraints that influence the ways men and women linguistically communicate gratitude in the culture of Jordan. They added that the main empirical aim of this paper is to provide a better insight into the relation between situations, strategies and gender in the culture of Jordan. This study focuses on the relation between participants' gender, the linguistic communication of gratitude and the values and attitudes attached to the linguistic communication of gratitude. It examines the ways Jordanian women and men express gratitude and whether they exhibit differences in terms of the frequency and the types of strategy used. Al-Khawaldeh (2014:16) added that expressing gratitude is especially significant as a part of the speakers' pragmatic repertoire, since it is an extremely common communicative act which plays an essential role in maintaining positive rapport. Bataineh (2013) expands on the language-/culture-specific research through investigating the strategies used to offer congratulations, thanks, and apologies by Jordanian native speakers of Arabic and American native speakers of English. She added that Jordanian native speakers of Arabic responded to formulas of congratulations with an expression of gratitude. These formulas either took the form of a simple (*šukran* (Thank you)) or an elaborate prayer in which God is appealed to preserve or bestow health or more worldly goods on the interlocutor, as in the example ('*allah ysalmak* (May God preserve you!)). Farenkia (2012: 1) pointed out that it is very common to express gratitude for any type of help or verbal gifts (advice, compliments, offers, etc.). Responding to gratitude expressions is also a universal practice. However the strategies used to express appreciation and to respond to thanks are language and culturally specific. Even within the same language or cultural setting some differences emerge due to region, age, gender, social status, ethnicity, etc. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986: 167) clarified that the language function of expressing gratitude is used frequently and openly in a wide range of interpersonal relationships: among intimates, friends, strangers, and with superiors and subordinates. When performed successfully, the language function of expressing gratitude can engender feelings of warmth and solidarity. Failure to express gratitude (or express it adequately) can have negative social

consequences—sometimes resulting in severing the relationship of speaker and listener.

Kumar (2001:114) assured that expressions of gratitude in the normal day-to-day interactions between the members of a society seem obviously to fall in the category of the “social” use of language. Expressions of gratitude and politeness are a major instrument the use of which keeps the bonds between the members of a society well-cemented and strong.

Statement of The Problem

Politeness is a demanded strategy in all situations. People are generally thankful for any favor or help they get from others. The present study aims to explore the expressions of thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic from a sociolinguistic perspective.

The Significance of The Study

The present study claims to be a pioneer in targeting the expressions of thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic. It aims to shed light on the different thankfulness and gratitude expression used by Jordanians in daily speech. The study is a linguistic analytical review which also aims to give those who are interested in Jordanian Arabic a close view of how thankfulness and gratitude are formulated.

The Delimitation of The Study

The present study is limited to the thankfulness and gratitude expressions used in everyday talks in Jordanian Arabic.

The Questions of The Study

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- A. What are the expressions of thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic?
- B. How are these expressions used in Jordanian Arabic?
- C. How are these expressions formulated in Jordanian Arabic?

The Methodology of The Study

As a sociolinguistic study, the present study aims to have a descriptive analytical view of thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic. The data were collected from different Jordanian places and sources. Jordanian Arabic daily newspapers, news websites, Jordanian TV and radio programs and series, Facebook, Twitter, Snapshot, and WhatsApp groups were sources for gathering the needed data. Besides, informants (mainly the researcher’s students at the university where he teaches), family members and friends were another source for the data. The students were very valuable source of data because they come from all Jordan and of different social backgrounds. The researcher himself as a member of the target society was another source for data. Data were gathered from schools, colleges, universities, private and public gatherings without informing the speakers about the purpose for collecting them. In addition to these sources, published papers and theses about thankfulness and gratitude were of great support in preparing the present paper. After gathering the words from the informants and the other sources, they were written down and classified to find out their types, formulation and use in Jordanian Arabic.

Discussion and Analysis

Jordanian Arabic has a number of thankfulness and gratitude forms that are used by different social classes of the society. The following is discussion and analysis of these forms and expressions:

1. Shukran (Thank You) and Related Expressions

The most used word for thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic is the Arabic word shukran; thank you. It is used formally and informally by all people. It is either used individually or accompanied by other expressions following it. The word jazeelan; very much is the most frequent word to

company shukran. The words iktheer or ikteer; so much, the two pronunciations show the social background of the user as the first one is mainly used by Jordanians who live in rural and Bedouin areas, whereas the second one is mainly used by Jordanians who live in the capital city of Amman and the other main Jordanian cities, are used after shukran too. In certain cases, the word iktheer is doubled after shukran accompanied by the expression barak Allah feek; may Allah bless you. The word ilak or lailak; for you comes after shukran. Other words that come after shukran are the social and informal titles of address [a'mi, a'mmu; (paternal) uncle, khal, khalu; (maternal) uncle, a'mmeh, a'mtu (paternal) aunt, khaleh, khaltu; (maternal) aunt, jeddi, jiddoh; grandfather, jeddeh; grandmother, khayyuh; brother, khayyeh; sister, yummah; mother; and yabah; father]. When someone wants to thank another person for a favor, he made for him but he/she does not know the name of that person, the thankful word shukran is usually accompanied by one of these kinship words particularly the titles a'mi, a'mmu, khal, khalu, khayyuh, and khayyeh).

Other thankful and gratitude words and expressions are mashkoo; you are thanked for the males and mashkooah for females with mashkureen and mashkurat as masculine and feminine plural respectively. The male expression shaker ilak and the female one shaker ilek; I am thankful for you are also used in Jordanian Arabic. These two expressions are sometimes used with the word iktheer or ikteer which comes in between. The number a'lf; one thousand is also used with shukr; thanks, as a'lf shukr; one thousand thanks. The word shaker; I am thankful is accompanied with the titles of excellency as shaker ma'leek, u'toftak, doaltak I am thankful for your Excellency. It is also used with lutfak; kindness as shaker lutfak; I am thankful for your kindness. The thankful expression shaker ihtimamak; I am thankful for your concern is also used to show gratitude for an officer who helps others. The thankful and gratitude expression khales alshukr, deep thanks is common in Jordanian Arabic. The excellency titles u'toftak, ma'leek, doaltak are used by Jordanians in an intimate way to thank people. These titles are formally used to address managers, ministers and the prime minister respectively but they are also used to thank ordinary people as a symbol of more respect.

The Ottoman Turkish thankful expression tashakurat, many thanks are used by Jordanians in a limited way especially between friends as an intimate expression of thanking and gratitude. Other related expressions are khales alshukr; deep thanks, and ashkurak; I thank you. Ashkurak jazeel alshukur; I strongly thank you is also a very strong thankful and gratitude expression.

2. Jazak Allah Khear

One of the most used thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic is the religious derived expression Jazak Allah Khear; May Allah reward you with good thing. It is narrated that Prophet Mohammad said if you say to someone "jazak Allah khear"; it will be so much thanking that you offer him. Other derived expressions are jazak Allah khaeran, jazak Allah kul khear, Allah yjzeek ilkhear; which all have the same meaning of may Allah reward you with good thing. Expressions as Juzeta khairan (for singular), juzeetum kharan (for plural); may you be rewarded with good thing are also used.

3. Allah in Thankful and Gratitude Expressions

The divine attribute Allah 'God' is present in many thankful and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic. Expressions as baraka Allah feek; may Allah bless you, Allah yibarik feek, Allah bless you, Allah yibarik baumrak; may Allah bless your age are used for thanking and gratitude.

Jordanian Arabic also has similar expressions with the divine attribute Allah for thankfulness and gratitude. The expressions Allah ya'teek ila'feh; may Allah give you good physical health, Allah ya'teek ilquuah wisehha; may Allah give

you power and health, Allah ydeem a'leak ilsehha; may Allah keep your health are all used for thankfulness and gratitude.

Praying to Allah to keep his blessings and the health, the fortune, the family and position of the person who makes favor for others or help them is very common expression of thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic. One thanks another person by saying Allah yikhalilak iwladak; may Allah keep your children. Expressions as Allah yikhaleek, Allah yhfadhak, Allah ya'zzak, Allah ydemak; May Allah keep you; may Allah protect you; may Allah give you more power, may Allah keep you for long time respectively are very common thankfulness and gratitude expressions. Allah yzeekak min na'neehu or Allah yzeedak min fadhluh; may Allah give you more of his grace, may Allah give you more of his fortune are also used.

Other related thankfulness and gratitude expressions are Allah ydeemak foaq roosna; may Allah keep you above our heads which means may Allah keep you as our master, Allah yi'mmer beatak; may Allah bless your home i.e. may Allah bless your own life and family. Allah ydeem a'zzak; may Allah preserve your glory, Allah ya'llei maratbak/ maqamak; may Allah raise your rank/position are also thankful and gratitude expressions. Allah ykathther kherak, may Allah increase your welfare, Allah ytawwel u'mrak/ emud bu'mrak, may Allah give you long age, Allah yqawwek; may Allah strengthen you, Allah ykathther min amthalak; may Allah make others like you are all thankful and gratitude expressions. Other thankfulness and gratitude expressions are Allah yikhali awladak/I'yalak; may Allah preserve your children, Allah yisallem u'mrak; may Allah bless your age.

4. Rabbi (my Lord) in Thankful and Gratitude Expressions

The word Rabbi (my lord) is also present in a number of thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic. This word is used in the personal singular pronoun 'my' Rabbi; my lord, or with the plural one 'our' Rabbna; or Rabna our lord. When someone helps another person or makes him favor, the one being helped expresses his thankfulness and gratitude by saying: rabbi yia'mmer beatak; may my Lord preserve your home (i.e. it is a pray to Allah to fill the family of that person with prosperity). Rabbi edeem i'zzak; may my Lord keep your glory, rabbi ea'lli maratbak; may my Lord raise your rank, rabbi yzedak min na'yymuh Kaman wa Kaman; may my Lord give you more and more of his graces, rabbi ytawwel u'mrak; may my Lord give you long age, rabbna ya'lli mikdarak/ maratbak; may may our Lord raise your position/ ranks are all used for thanking and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic. The word Rabbna or Rabna is also used instead of Rabbi in these expressions without any change in the meaning of these expressions.

5. Taslam (being kept) and Related Expressions

The word taslam "being kept" is used for thankfulness and gratitude in Jordanian Arabic. When someone makes favor for another one or help him, the one being helped thanks that person by using this word. Other related expressions are Allah yisalmak, may Allah keep you, taslam khtheer; may you be kept so much. Taslam adeak; may your hands be kept, Yslamu (i.e. your hands) be kept, Yslamu (i.e. your hands) ikhtheer; be kept so much, Yaslamu haldyyat; may your hands be kept, Yslamu halanamel; may your fingers be kept, Yaslamu haladean; may your hands be kept, yaslam halshawareb; may your moustache be kept. Other thankful expression is used with the word 'rasi; head' like a'ala rasi tislam; on my head may you be kept. This expression means that the person who made the favor is highly appreciated.

The word shawareb "moustache" has high social position in the Arabic tradition in particular and the Jordanian social one because it is a symbol of manhood. When a male uses this word as an oath or as an expression of thankfulness and

gratitude, it means that he is very serious in his oath and in his thankfulness. It is noted here that the body parts “womb, hands, head and moustache” are the most used ones because they are considered of high social value in the Arabic tradition and of course the Jordanian one. The thankful and gratitude expression ‘yslām ilbatin illi jabak; may the womb that beget you being kept’ is common in Jordanian Arabic.

Intimate expressions such as *taslam ya ghali*; may you be kept dear, *taslam ya qalb*; may you be kept my heart, *taslam ya hub*; may you kept my love are used in Jordanian Arabic by the very close friends for thankfulness and gratitude. *tislam i'yynak*; may your eyes be kept, is used as a thankful expression when one asks for something from a person who replies by saying *min u'yyuni*; from my eyes, the one who asks for that something thanks him by saying *tislam u'yynak*. When one praises the clothes of someone, the owner of the clothes replies *imqaddam*; it is offered for you (i.e. I present my new clothes to you), the one who praises replies *tislam ma yelbasha aa'z minnak*; may you kept and no one wears it except you or *tislam wi yislam sahbha*; may it and you be kept. When a person builds a new house, his relatives and friends visit him to congratulate him for it, so as an intimate expression of friendship, one says to the owner of the new house *mubarak ildar*; may the house be blessed, the owner says *Allah yibarek feek tislam*; may Allah bless and keep you, the friend replies *tislam witaslam ildar weshabha / wa'helha*; may you be kept and may the house and its owners/ dwellers be kept.

When someone makes favor for others or when a brother visits his married sister and gives her money or a present, she thanks him by saying *reatak salim ghallabet halak*; may you are kept you tire yourself. The expression *ma badi iyyak ghear salim*; I only want you to be kept is also used as thankful and gratitude expression by sister to her brother and others.

6. Western Thankfulness and Gratitude Expressions

Because of the direct and indirect contact, mass media and various means of communication, a number of western thankfulness and gratitude expressions are used in Jordanian Arabic. Thank you, thank you very much, thanks, and merci and commonly used by many Jordanians. These expressions are mostly used by Jordanian young people and by those who lived in western countries. The one being thanked might reply saying welcome or you are welcome or by using the Arab word *ila'fu*; welcome.

7. Miscellaneous

In addition to the above-mentioned expressions of thankfulness and gratitude, Jordanian Arabic has other ones. *Ma ni'dam ha anaml*; may we not lose these fingers is used as thanking expression. It means may the one who helps us live long. Other expressions are *mamnoon lak iktheer*; I am very grateful for you, *mamnoon lak*; I am grateful for you. *Khales alihtiram*; deep respect, *khales iltaqdeer*; deep appreciation, *khales ala'rfan*; deep gratitude and *taqabalu fai'q alihtiram waltaqdeer*; respectfully yours are thankful and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic. *Hatha min lutfak*; this is of your kindness, *hatha min fadhlaK*; this is of your grace are also used as thanking and gratitude expressions. Other expressions are *kulak thoaq*; you are all sense, and *hatha min thoqak*; it is of your sense where the words *thoaq* or *thoqak* are pronounced *zoaq* or *zoa'* in Jordanian Arabic. *Habeeb qalbi* or *a'lbi*; the lover of my heart is also a thankful expression. *Ala shawarbi*, *ala ilshawarb wallah*; on my moustache and on the moustache, I swear by Allah are expressions for thanking and gratitude. *Ma qassar*; he was not failing in performance, and *ma qassart*; you are not failing in performance are thankful and gratitude where the first expression is said in front of the one being thanked or in his absence whereas the second is normally said to the thanked person directly to him.

The Numeral Structure of Thankfulness and Gratitude Expressions

It can be said that the numeral structure of thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian is as following:

1. One Word: Shukran; thanks.
2. One Repeated Word: Shukran Shukran; thanks thanks.
3. Two Words: Shukran Jazeelan; thank you very much.
4. Three Words: Allah Yjzeek Ilkhear; May Allah reward you with good thing.
5. Four Words: Jazak Allah Kul Khear; May Allah reward you with all good things.
6. Five Words: Shaker Iktheer ilak ma qassart; I am thankful for you' you were not failing in your performance.
7. Six Words: shukran ktheer ktheer barak allah feek; thank you very much may Allah bless you.
8. Seven Words: allah ykhalylak awladak wetshofhum mitkharjeen min iljama'h; may Allah keep your children and may you see them graduate from university.

The Linguistic Formation of Thankfulness and Gratitude Expressions

The study shows that the linguistic formation of thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic are as the following:

1. One Noun: Shukran; thanks
2. Noun + Noun: Alf shukur; one thousand thanks
3. Noun + Adjective: shukran jazeelan; thank you very much
4. Verb+ Noun+ Noun: jazak Allah khayran ; may Allah reward you with good thing.
5. Preposition + Noun: a'la ilshawareb; on the moustache.
6. Verb + addressing article (ya) + Noun: tislam ya basha; may you be kept Oh, Pasha (it is a title of honor in Jordanian Arabic).
7. Noun + Verb: Allah yikhaleek; May Allah keep you.
8. Noun + Verb + Noun: Allah yajzeek ilkhear; may Allah reward you with good thing.
9. Noun + Verb + Preposition + Noun: Rabbi ya'lli min maqamak; may my lord rank you high.
10. Verb + Noun: Yislamu adeak; may your hands be kept.

The Semantic Structure of Thankfulness and Gratitude Expressions

The present study comes to the following semantic structures thankfulness and gratitude expressions in Jordanian Arabic:

1. Standard Arabic Expressions: shukran.
2. Religious Background Expressions: Jazak Allah Khairan.
3. Western Borrowed Expressions: thank you.
4. Intimate Expressions: tislam ya hub.
5. Social Traditional Expressions with a body part: a'la shawarbi.

Conclusion

Thankfulness and gratitude expressions are not restricted to one culture; they are universal way of etiquette and politeness. Actually they ease communication between people. The present study aims to shed light on the different thankfulness and expressions used in Jordanian Arabic from a cross-cultural and linguistic view. The study shows the types, the formation, the numeral structure and the semantic structure of these expressions. In fact, such studies would give non-Jordanians a good view of how Jordanian people thank each other.

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