UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Adding *Allah* to *Alhamdulilah*:
The Use of Arabic God-phrases for Performative Functions

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor John Haviland, Chair

Phrases that reference the name of God, God-phrases as I refer to them, are frequent and ubiquitous when it comes to Arabic speakers. In this paper, I explore the function and use of Arabic God-phrases. Due to their structure and the ideologies behind them, God-phrases have performative functions in the conversation. I argue that it is the integration of God's name that adds authority to the speaker within the context of a dialogic interaction. With this authority, the power of the speaker can be wielded in many directions, such as guiding or influencing action in the recipient or the speaker. Additionally, given the integration of "God" into these phrases, I will also look at the performativity of God-phrases for non-Arabic speaking Muslims who may

also integrate Arabic God-phrases into their everyday speech. I argue that even for them, God-phrases also rely on the power in the name of Allah to create a sense of authority. Using excerpts and examples of the use of God-phrases, I will demonstrate a variety of functions accomplished through the integration of God-phrases. Also in the paper, I explore the relationship between God-phrases and dedication and submission to Islam, as well as their opposite extreme in the case of blasphemy. Religiosity and piety do not rest simply on the use of God phrases, but rather rely on the holistic integration of behaviors and actions. Through an alignment between religious ideology and behaviors/actions, like the use of God-phrases, one works toward piety.

Introduction

It is difficult to listen to an Arabic conversation and not hear at some point a phrase that includes *Allah* (literally translated to 'the God') or *Ilah* ('God'). Occurring as interjections, greetings, phrases of gratitude, and curses, these Arabic 'God-phrases' (phrases that include an explicit or implicit[1] reference to God) can be found throughout conversations. Young children and Arabic language learners alike quickly adopt a repertoire of such phrases and are coached to produce appropriate phrases in the "correct" contexts. In each case, language learners internalize the situation in which the phrase occurs, learning when and under what circumstances to say specific phrases.

Take for example, the Arabic phrase *al-hamdu li-llah*[2] (containing the Arabic root h/m/d meaning "to praise, commend, laud" plus the name of Allah – 'praise is to Allah') (Wehr, 1994: 238). Arabic speakers quickly learn to recite this phrase in a variety of contexts. It serves as a reply to "How are you?" as a method of answering that a person is well. It also can be heard after something good happens, or something bad is avoided, as a way of noting that one is thankful for the present outcome. In certain Arabic-speaking communities *al-hamdu li-llah* marks the end of a meal, indicating that a person "is full." While the same phrase frequents a diverse span of situations, in each case, it takes on a contextually specific meaning. What remains

[1] Implicit phrases can be shorter versions of longer explicit God-phrases. They can also be phrases that have lost the reference to God over time.
[2] See the Appendix for a complete list of God-phrases examined in this paper with literal translations and guides to potential conveyed meanings.

common regardless, is the structural root of the name of God, and the ideological belief that thanks are due to Allah.

In this paper, I will explore the function and use of Arabic God-phrases. Due to the structure, that is their integration of the name of God, and the ideology behind them, that is, the belief about why to recite the name of God, these God-phrases have performative functions in the conversation. I argue that it is the integration of God's name that adds authority to the speaker within the context of a dialogic interaction. With this authority, the power of the speaker can be wielded in many directions, such as guiding or influencing action in the recipient or the speaker. Additionally, given the integration of "God" into these phrases, I will also look at the performativity of God-phrases for non-Arabic speaking Muslims who may also integrate Arabic God-phrases into their everyday speech. I argue that even for them, God-phrases also rely on the power in the name of Allah to create a sense of authority. Using excerpts and examples of the use of God-phrases, I will demonstrate a variety of functions accomplished through the integration of God-phrases. Also in the paper, I explore the relationship between God-phrases and dedication and submission to Islam, as well as their opposite extreme in the case of blasphemy. Religiosity and piety do not rest simply on the use of God phrases, but rather rely on the holistic integration of behaviors and actions. Blasphemous acts lie on the metalinguistic awareness of the link between ideology and use of God-phrases. Through an alignment between religious ideology and behaviors/actions, like the use of God-phrases, one works toward piety. While on the other hand, behaving with a disjuncture between religious

ideology and actions (especially the use of God-phrases), can potentially be labeled as blasphemous.

Methodology

This project began in my experiences living in the Middle East, specifically in Jordan, from July 2007 until October 2008. A few examples, as well as the inspiration for this paper, of how these God-phrases are used in everyday Arabic come from the time that I lived in Jordan. But, in order to collect a larger pool of God-phrases and better see their use within a speech context, I will draw on data excerpted from a number of Arabic language films. While film provides a very rehearsed and scripted look at conversation, it also reflects common and accepted standard ranges of Arabic speech, including a pool of God-referent language. This reflects, to a certain extent, what is widely understood and employed by most Arabic speakers. Given the nature of the phrases, which includes an explicit reference to God, the variety of characters across the films provides what can be assumed as a *range* of religious devotion, as well as a diversity of religious backgrounds, from religious to secular, Christians to Muslims. The films also span various contextually spaces and situations, allowing these God-phrases to be seen in light of how they are used in context.

The three main Arabic films, from which the examples in this paper come, are *The Syrian Bride*, *The Lemon Tree*, and *Caramel*. Given the tremendous diversity of the Arabic-speaking world, all three of these films take place in the general region

know as The Levant. Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine/Israel, share many commonalities in language, often called Levantine Arabic. While each country, as well as *within* each country, Arabic reflects many differences, Levantine Arabic shares many commonalities, especially in terms of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and verb conjugation. Regardless, there are many patterns in use (including of God-phrases), specific to localities (such as which God-phrases are expected or obligatory and under which circumstances). In spite of this, most all of these phrases are used across the region, and all would be understood. Also reflective of that diversity, the films replicate the multi-lingualism of the Levant, mixing English, French, and Hebrew, in with the Arabic.

The Syrian Bride and *The Lemon Tree* both focus on struggles and political disputes with Israel. They are also produced by the same Israeli filmmaker, Eran Riklis. *The Syrian Bride*, produced in 2004, addresses the separation of families and communities by the border between Syria and Israel in the Golan Heights. Since the bride lives on land technically under the jurisdiction of Israel and her groom resides in Syria, she must leave everything and everyone behind in order to marry. In *The Lemon Tree*, produced in 2008, a Palestinian woman finds her lemon grove the target of demolition when the Israeli defense minister moves in on the other side of the border. She and her lawyer work all the way up to the Supreme Court to fight the order, but only manage a reduction in the size of the demolition. The third Arabic film, *Caramel,* is a Lebanese film produced in 2007 starring and directed by Nadine Labaki. It tells

the story of a group of women working together at a Beirut salon. As they each face difficulties in their personal lives, they help and support each other through them.

It is easy to notice some of these same Arabic God-phrases in use by even non-Arabic speakers. In these cases, most often they are tied in via the legitimacy of religion, specifically Islam. The pool of God-phrases generally reflect a mix of native-language God-phrases as well as Arabic ones. Since most language also contain many God-phrases, it seems natural that Muslim may rely on both languages and language ideologies. To examine further circumstances of use of Arabic God-phrases, I examined two non-Arabic language movies featuring Muslim populations. *Brick Lane,* is a 2007 film produced in the United Kingdom and is based on the book by Monica Ali. *Brick Lane* is a predominantly English language film about Bangladeshi immigrants in England facing discrimination due to their assumed affiliation with "extremist" Muslims. The second is an Iranian film *The Song of Sparrows*, a 2008 film by Majid Majidi. In this film, a father begins working in Tehran in order to better provide for his family. It takes an accident and injury to make him see how materialistic his life has become.

Given the fact that these God-phrases directly invoke God, it is interesting to examine the impact of religion on their use. Thus, I have also included a look at the use of God-phrases in contexts where religion is more highly salient. This includes the first two seasons of the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's (CBC's) comedy sitcom *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. The series takes a comedic spin on the daily workings of a small community of Muslims in rural Canada trying to get along with non-Muslim

and often Muslim-hating neighbors. Given the mosque's location inside an Anglican church, a lot of tension (and comedy) results in the meeting of the two religions. Another large source of material comes from the disagreements between the conservative and liberal members *within* the mosque, including for example, whether a barrier should be placed between the prayer space of men and women.

Finally, I draw on examples from a controversial Syrian soap opera that ran during the most recent *Ramadan* (early August to early September, 2010). *Ma Malakat Aymanukum* (literally translated 'whom your right hand possesses') takes its title from chapter 4 of the Qur'an, surah *Nisa'a* (The Women); in the passage the Qur'an lists which categories of women are off limits for sexual relations (including sisters, aunts, etc) (1987: 4.23-24). According to the Qur'anic commentary, the possessions of the right hand are captives of religiously sanctioned war, and even if they are married, are within the permitted category for sexual relations (Ali, 1987: 187). The series, *Ma Malakat Aymanukum,* tells the stories of a group of school friends, all living in Damascus, dealing with issues facing many urban, Middle Eastern, young women, including work, marriage, school, but also how to integrate Islam into their lives, and controversially, extra-marital affairs. The director of the show, Najdat Anzour, directly addresses what he sees as the challenges of Islam. He says, "the show presents the idea of religion as a double-edged weapon. If religion is not taken correctly, it could be easily exploited by certain groups to separate members of the same community and create hostility and sectarian violence" (qtd. in Karam,

2010). While Anzour claims the show is taken from true anecdotes, the series has also upset many Muslims for what they feel are inaccurate depictions of Islam.

Speech Acts Theory

Before moving on to how these God-phrases are used in conversation, it is important to pause and take a closer look at how these phrases carry out a performative function. According to Austin in his book of lectures, *How to do things with Words*, language has a performative function in which "the utterance of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action" (1975: 5). This is seen most clearly in phrases like "I do", in which the pronouncement of the phrase itself, initiates the action of marriage, given the correct environmental circumstances and conditions (Austin, 1975:5). It is the power of speech to "do" or act, rather than merely report on that action that Austin examines. This trait of language allows God-phrases to not simply "describe some state of affairs" (Austin, 1975:1) as in bringing God into the discussion, but rather, with speech acts, God-phrases accomplish something for the conversation.

Take for example the performative qualities of the phrase, *in sha-llah*, (if God wills it). *In sha-llah* generally occurs in discussions about future events, ideologically rooted in an acceptance of the human inability to predict the future, and instead recognition that only God can know. Thus, *in sha-llah* commonly occurs as a response to positive predictions about the future. In the film *Caramel*, one of the main

characters, Nisrine, who works at the salon is preparing for her wedding. A customer asks Nisrine, "Is everything ready for the wedding?" She replies, "Everything's fine. I've still got a small matter to sort out. But it will be alright, *in sha-llah*" (*Caramel*). Ending with *in sha-llah* does not simply report or describe the will of God, it *acts* partly to distance Nisrine from the action, putting it in the hands of God, and at the same time, serving to reassure Nisrine that everything will work out. Most importantly, it acts to close the issue or concern being discussed. It indicates to the listener that the "small matter" is no longer up for debate or further investigation. The conversation can move on and not further dwell on the matter.

In some manifestations, *in sha-llah* is similar to the English performative "I promise." This commonly occurs in response to an invitation or request. Also in the film *Caramel*, Nisrine demonstrates her gratitude to a local policeman by inviting him to visit the salon, saying "we'll give you special treatment" and later, with her goodbye, "we'll be expecting you." Both times, he replies with "*in sha-llah*" (*Caramel*). Much like, "I promise," *in sha-llah* acts to place the speaker under obligation to some action. Yet unlike "I promise" and rooted in the ideology of *in sha-llah*, in which the authority is placed on God, *in sha-llah* also somewhat distances the speaker from commitment. Just like in the previous example, it acts to end the pleas from the interlocutor, as *in sha-llah* marks acceptance, but is also excuses the speaker if the obligated action is not completed. Regardless of if this is from an insincere pronouncement of *in sha-llah* or if unforeseen things came between the desire and the outcome, the invocation of God prevents censure at the lack of commitment. Much

like Austin suggests in his theory of speech acts, insincere performatives might be done "in bad faith" but are not false or void (1975:11). Thus *in sha-llah* accepts a commitment (barring the 'will of Allah'), yet can easily be said insincerely.

In some Arabic-speaking communities, the phrases *bismi-llah* and *al-hamdu li-llah* buffer the act of eating, the former marking the beginning of the act, and the latter, the end. While Austin remarks that speech acts are often accompanied by other actions, they often *lead* the action (1975: 8). In the case of eating, *bismi-llah* immediately proceeds the beginning of eating. While of course meals can begin without it, when it does occur, it acts to notify or even invite others to begin eating. In fact, hosts often use the pronouncement of *bismi-llah* to initiate the beginning of a meal for guests, or parents may start feeding a baby with *bismi-llah*. Young children are often coached to "say *bismi-llah*" using the imperative command before they begin. In a similar way *al-hamdu li-llah* acts to end further partaking in food and notifies to the rest of the group that others can eat the rest of the food.

Interacting layers behind God-phrases

God-phrases are a clear example of how language cannot be understood simply in terms of decontextualized meaning. Instead, language is the meeting of structure, pragmatics (language in use), and ideology (Silverstein, 1995:514). When the phrases are examined in terms of all three aspects, they take on the power and function to perform certain actions in the conversation.

Looking too narrowly at God-phrases, especially in terms of their "literal" meaning can paint a limited picture of their function. Literal meaning can be defined as the meaning or understanding of an utterance without any context, that is in "null context" (Searle, 1978:207). This would be equivalent to looking at God-phrases simply as the sum of the component words making up each phrase. For example, if one were to look at the earlier examined phrase, *al-hamdu li-llah* in terms of the 'literal' meaning, it would break down into the meaning 'praise is to God':

al *hamdu* *lilah*

article: "the" verb: root h/m/d "to praise" "to God" (Wehr, 1994: 238)

But God-phrases are not simply the sum of the parts. The meaning of each phrase comes from how it is used as well as the ideologies behind why it should be recited, such as the idea that good things are the result of God and recitation of *al-hamdu li-llah* accepts that belief.

According to Searle, literal meanings, that is meanings in "zero context" do not exist. Rather, meanings exist 'relative to a set of background assumptions" which can be of an infinite amount (1978: 220). These background assumptions are what determine whether the necessary conditions in order to make the speech be true of the sentences have been fulfilled (Searle, 1978: 214). Thus, it is not that literal meaning does not exist, but instead that it cannot be separated from these assumptions. Searle provides the idea that background assumptions about God-phrases cannot be removed from the phrases themselves. Many of these assumptions are linked to the ideologies behind their use, which I will return to shortly.

But, there is also evidence that literal meaning plays a role in understanding meaning. Clark and Lucy look at requests in which the conveyed meaning differs from the literal meaning (1975: 56). This can be seen as something like 'Must you play drums in the house?' would be interpreted in its 'conveyed meaning' as 'please don't play drums in the house' rather than the literal 'is it necessary for you to play drums in the house?' Based on experiments of response times, Clark and Lucy conclude that due to a delay in response times, participants appeared to first construct literal meanings before weighing them against the context to determine validity and when invalid, move on to conveyed meaning (1975: 68). This is important in the case of God-phrases, for which the structural presence of the name of God can be influential before moving to a contextual meaning.

Clark and Lucy also conclude that most of these requests are "systematically related in meaning", that is, the conveyed meaning *emerges from* the literal meaning, rather than being two unrelated meanings. They contrast this to idioms which have two literal meanings, such as "kick the bucket" meaning both to hit a bucket with the foot but also to pass away (1975: 69). God-phrases, unlike idioms, lack a second conventionalized, literal meaning. Rather conveyed meaning must be derived from context, although it seems to be related to the 'literal' meaning, a point I will pick back up. Hearing a God-phrase without knowing the context would only give a literal meaning (plus any underlying assumptions, as Searle suggests). But it lacks a widely accepted second literal meaning, unlike an idiom. There is also a relationship *between* the literal and contextual meanings. At some level the contextual meaning emerges

from the literal meaning. In cases where the God-phrases are calling on God to protect or bless the interlocutor, there is a clear path to the conveyed meaning of marking gratitude. Calling on the strength or greatness of God (or even just the name of God) leads to calling on God for support when caught in a frustrating situation. God-phrases are also related at the ideological level. For example, a saying of the Prophet Muhammad is that one should say *bismi-llah* ('in the name of Allah') "when starting to eat (and drink). If you do not invoke, Satan joins you in eating; before you eat, he eats" (Al-Ghazali qtd. in Piamenta, 1979: 35). Thus, the recitation of the name of God and keeping away negative things like the devil are linked together.

This gap between literal meaning of a God phrase and its contextual meaning is not unique to Arabic. This frequently occurs in many other languages as well. Take English, for example. In the past, *goodbye* was actually in the form *God be wy you* in the past (Clark and French, 1981: 1). Other examples include *gee* and *zounds* coming from Jesus and Christ's wounds (O'Connell and Kowal, 2008:134). In these cases, the explicit and direct reference to religious aspects have not only been forgotten, but their linguistic structural marker has historically faded. According to Saussure, "no society, in fact, knows or has ever know language other than as a product inherited from preceding generations, and one to be accepted as such" (1966: 71). As language is a product of the time before, this past of phrases such as "goodbye" carry with them the once explicit God-reference. At the same time, Saussure acknowledges that this history remains elusive in the moment of use. "Succession in time does not exist insofar as the speaker is concerned…[the linguist] can enter the mind of speakers only

by completely suppressing the past" (Saussure, 1966:81). In some English God-phrases, such as *God bless you,* often heard after sneezing, the speaker may state the "god" part, while remaining unaware of the connection to historical circumstances. Asking for the blessings of God for a sneeze is an old tradition going back to many classical societies. Aristotle is said to have believed that sneezing was a "divine sign" (Hotaling et al., 1994:63-64). Around 1619, Pope Gregory VII encouraged the recitation of "May God bless you" after an outbreak in Italy where people died suddenly after sneezing a few times (Kavka, 1983:2304). The Pope acted on the belief in the omen of sneezing's relation to coming death, thus the turning to God for potential intersession. Like most Arabic God-phrases, *God bless you* maintains the explicit reference to God. Yet the historical origins need not account for their use. Taking Saussure's insight that language *in use* neglects the historical development of each unit of speech, God-phrases in Arabic are an integral part of everyday speech, a necessary and common aspect of speech for all Arabic speakers. But, language can often "do" and "act" in ways beyond the role of conveying information. The reason that they are able to "act" is through the combination of linguistic structure and ideology in use.

Looking more deeply at the way language structure, use, and ideology come together in God-phrases, I will begin by looking at structure. The appendix of this paper includes a chart of all the God-phrases being described, showing their structure, use, and ideology. All God-phrases are united by a structural use of the name of God, *'alla* or *ila*. Examples of such God-phrases include the pattern *'alla y____ak*

('God____you') where a verb fills in the blank, with common examples such as *'alla ysallmak* ("may God keep you safe") and *'alla yustor 'alek* ("may God protect you") (Piamenta, 1979). While majority of the God-phrases in Arabic retain the phonological reference to God (*ila*) or *the* God (*'alla*), there are some cases when the reference to God is implicit, not explicit. Ferguson examined cases when the reference to God has been removed. According to Ferguson, the removal of the reference to God tends to occur most often with the verbs *sallem* (to keep) and *kattar* (to increase) as in the common expressions *sallem diyyatak* '[may God] keep your hands' or *katter xerak* '[may God] increase your welfare' (1983: 78). While the reference to God is frequently omitted, the understood [may God] remains relevant especially with the high frequency of other expressions including *'alla*, some of which could be substituted in its place. This is most clearly demonstrated by rare examples of the name of God being *re-introduced* into these phrases through an alteration in the structure. In the film *Caramel, katter xerak* is used once, but it takes the form *katter xerak 'alla*, with the explicit reference to God reinserted. Thus, while a small selection of God-phrases merely *imply* the reference to God, majority of the phrases maintain the explicit phonetic reference to the name of God structurally within each use.

According to Silverstein's tri-fold approach to perspectives on language, the pragmatics, or usage of language, is another important component of understanding language. Language cannot be seen merely as independent structures, but rather through its dialogic use. It can be used to accomplish "things" (as in speech acts of Austin) or to index, or suggest something about the speaker (Silverstein, 1995:515). In

the use of God-phrase, the speaker not only converts words into actions, as discussed earlier with speech act theory, but employing God-phrases indicates the speaker is *the kind* of person that uses God-phrases. Depending on type, frequency, and context around use, God-phrases may suggest an attempt at creating a religiously devoted persona, as will be explored later in the paper. But, the use of God-phrases can also suggest the opposite as well, in the case of blasphemous uses of such phrases, also explored later. Thus, through use, God-phrases serve an indexical function, demonstrating something about the speaker. The mere structure of God-phrases alone cannot paint a picture of the speaker. It is through *usage* that one comes to understand the purpose of the speaker.

In addition to structure and use, language is rationalized based on underlying ideologies. These ideologies provide a logic for how language should be used and what is considered correct or incorrect, even if these theories are not put into practice (Silverstein, 1995:515). These are some of the background assumptions linked to every God-phrase that Searle noted prevents a completely decontextualized meaning from existing. While these ideological ideas may not be drawn on with conscious awareness or may be explicitly ignored, they drive patterns and logic of language use. In the case of the use of God-phrases, most of the ideologies emerge from religious texts and traditions. According to the Qur'an, while material riches can distract from *dhikr* or remembrance of God, it is still part of mankind's responsibility. "O ye who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the remembrance of God. If any act thus, the loss is their own" (Qur'an, 1987: 63:9). Broadening the definition

of *dhikr* beyond just mentioning the name of God, the editor also includes good actions and "good thoughts"; he also notes that the ramifications and "loss" mentioned in the Qur'an effect "spiritual growth" (Ali, 1987:1552). This ideology behind the purpose of reciting the name of God not only helps mankind avoid excessive materialism, but helps them advance along their spiritual path. A second source of ideology is the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad[3], which touch on the importance behind God-phrases. One such saying of the Prophet captures what God say:

> 'I fulfill My servant's expectation of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me in his heart, I remember him in My heart; and if he remembers Me in public, I remember him before a public [far] better than that. If he draws nearer to Me by a handsbreadth, I draw nearer to him by an armslength; and if he draws nearer to Me by an armslength, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I come to him running.' (qtd in Graham, 1977:127)

Based on this Hadith, the benefits of *dhikr*, that is remembering the name of God, exponentially increase from the effort it takes. Remembering God is depicted as part of a dialogue with God, and part of the effort and practice of search. Encompassed in this category of remembrance are mentioning the name of God throughout the day (not just prayer), including the same God-phrases examined in this paper. Finally, a third source of ideology comes from theological interpretation. Traditional theological schools are rooted in the belief that "the human power to perform acts was not one's

[3] As a caveat with all Hadith, there is often controversy over their authenticity and thus acceptance. This is because they are said to be something the Prophet said or did (remembered via a line of potentially non-credible people). This hadith (often called *hadith qudsi* or divine hadith) reports to be the words of God, yet was not revealed as part of the Qur'an.

own, but came from God" (Nanji, 1991:112)[4]. Using this traditional interpretation of the power of God, God-phrases recognize ultimate power in the hands of God, not man. Especially as mankind "acquires responsibility for their actions" that is, are "accountable" (Nanji, 1991:112), integrating God-phrases recognizes God's will in all outcomes.

Many of the ideologies for God-phrases listed above emerge from religious and theological study. But even without their study, most Muslims hold some common ideologies: that it is the important remember and mention God, to give thanks and seek strength and help from God, and to recognize that God holds power over what happens and what is prevented from occurring (such as saving from disaster). These ideologies can be seen in how and under what contexts God-phrases get used, such as after good things occur, when something tragic occurs, and when one is saved from something very tragic. While children may not fully grasp the ideologies behind God-phrases, they are socialized to begin using them in appropriate contexts. Parents enact ideology through behaviors and practices, as they teach young children about the recitation of God-phrases. Using the imperative command, children learn to enact the correct structure of God-phrases (this is, the correct order and pronunciation) in their appropriate usage (under the correct circumstances). Even while ideology drives the linguistic behavior of parents, the ideology may not necessarily be fully apparent to the children until a later age. As Ochs points out, children learn the "social meaning"

[4] There is some disagreement and debate over this, especially how to deal with evil actions of man and reconcile with punishment from God. If all actions are attributed to God, then God controls man's actions and then punishes him for them. This alternative view is most famously debated historically by the Mu'tazili School of thought (Nanji, 1991:112).

of God-phrases as "children acquire knowledge of relations between linguistic features and contexts of use, they acquire knowledge of *expectations* associated with these relations" (1988:13). Children quickly pick up on when to use which God-phrase and which is appropriate in different contexts.

During my time in Jordan, as a newcomer to the culture, I, along with my younger neighbors, was taught to repeat religious phrases via the imperative command. Before eating, we were told to "*gullu Bi-smi-llah"* "(you pl.) Say: *Bi-smi-llah* 'in the name of God'". This can be one way of gently reminding children of appropriate ritual behaviors, such as the repetition of God-phrases (Haviland, 2009:28), teaching them to be proficient in culturally specific behaviors. In his piece "The Limits of Awareness," Silverstein discusses "metapragmatic transparency" where there is a high correlation (not necessarily equivalence) between the literal utterance and the pragmatic function (2001: 395). Silverstein's example of a phrase close in literal and pragmatic function is a lecturer saying, "I promise to stop talking soon" verses something with less transparency like "Just a few more minutes" (2001: 395). God-phrases have low metapragmatic transparency given the gap between how it is used and what it means. Yet, interestingly, imperatives are high in metapragmatic transparency (Silverstein, 2001:398). In the case of teaching God-phrases via the imperative, instead of strengthening the relationship between what the phrases do and what they mean, or even the ideology behind them, the imperatives reinforce the connection between the God-phrase and where they are used. Thus, a child is being encouraged to think of God-phrases first and foremost for where and when to use

them. Due to this, a situation such as hearing a child negating a God-phrase to counter the contextual meaning is understandable. One 12 year old native Arabic speaker in Jordan occasionally negated the God-phrases (ideologically used to thank God for a meal) that conveyed contextually that the speaker is full. His pronouncement of "*mish al-hamdu li-llah*" ('not *al-hamdu li-llah*') was about negating the contextual use (being full), and not negation of the sentiments of *al-hamdu li-llah*. The way he is taught to use the phrase encourages him to connect it to its usage and not necessarily the ideology.

Chapter 1: Function of God-phrases in dialogue

Grammatically, most God-phrases serve as interjections. Kockelman pulls together four criteria to define interjections; they are conventional lexical items, they are not part of any other word class, they usually lack additional inflections or derivations, and they are often anomalies to the language (2003: 469-470). In spite of their length, God-phrases often fit in the category of interjections, holding conventionalized structures and patterns and do not seem to fit into other word classes. While God-phrases seem to have multiple related derivations (like *sm-alla, ism-allah, ya allah*) some emerge from different roots, in spite of the phonological similarities. But this goes back to the structural similarity that makes them all God-phrases. Like the interjections that Kockelman discusses in Q'eqchi' Maya, these Arabic phrases take on discursive functions as well. One example is the case of *walla* (literally 'by God') which can serve to preface denial, or refusal of a request, similar to *ah* addressed by Kockelman (2003: 474). For example, in the show *Ma Malakat Aymanukum* a mother scolds her daughter for not going running in the morning before school, to which she replies in Arabic, "*walla,* I forgot." This interjection marks the beginning of an excuse of what she was supposed to do. Taking Kockelman's example of *ay dios*, God-phrases can mark accidents or misbehavior, especially with children; and similar to in Q'eqchi' Maya, the length of the phrase can indicate severity (2003: 476). A common phrase heard when an accident occurs, such as something being knocked over is *"Allah"* or "*sm-alla"* (literally "God" and "the name of God" respectively) (examples seen in the film *Caramel)*. In the case of greater frustration or

a more severe situation, the length can increase to "*Ya Allah"* (oh God) or even "*La ilaha illa-llah"* (There is no God but Allah) (*Caramel)*.

One of the major uses of these God-phrases is greetings. Especially in the case of the non-Arabic data, the majority of such phrases were greetings, specifically *as-salamu alaykum*, which can be used both to greet people and before departing. In the film *Brick Lane* half (19/38) of the God-phrases in the film are either *salamu alaykum* or its reply. And, aside from *allah*, *as-salamu alaykum* and the reply *wa 'alakum-s-salam* were the only Arabic God-phrases used in the film. Many of the phrases come in what Schegloff and Sacks call an "adjacency pair" (1973), with a specific reply used in conjunction. Especially in the case of Arabic, a more general response to *as-salamu alaykum could* be used (like *ahlan* 'welcome') to encompass greetings without relying on the paired responses, more often than not, speakers reply with the standard, expected response for that context. In the case of *The Syrian Bride*, the God-phrase *alla ybarik fik* is the adjacency pair of *mabruk* (congratulations), especially common at weddings. While *mabruk* frequently gets no reply, it rarely gets any response other than *alla ybarik fik*. A few times (with non-Arabic speakers), it is replaced with *shukran*, a more general thank you, but this is rare. This shows that God-phrases are largely conventionalized and dictated by culturally established adjacency pairs.

Given the strong pairing of God-phrases with expected and appropriate responses, their use has a strong dialogic tendency. According to Ferguson, the challenge with Arabic God-phrases, or as he calls them, "God-wishes," rests in the gap existing between the literal translation of the phrase and the meaning it gains specific

to the context in which it is used. He states, “this difference between meaning and use holds for all of language but it is especially sharp in such expressions such as politeness formulas where the referential meaning may be minimal and the use is often almost automatic on the proper occasion" (1983: 69). Ferguson not only addresses the automaticity of responses adopted by an individual, but also the distancing of God-phrases as they mean outside of specific contextual meanings. The speaker answers without thinking and simply fills in the correct answer for the context. Although God-phrases are rooted in an ideology about the importance of calling on God in order to bless one’s interlocutor, the usage as greetings or farewells becomes predominant.

1.1 Ritualization

As was seen in the section above, God-phrases often occur in very expected contexts, especially as replies. This ability to predict which God-phrases will occur and when suggests that God-phrases are in many ways ritualized. Ritual communication works along socially accepted ways of behaving, doing something because one must, even when one does not necessarily feel that way (Basso and Senft, 2009:7). Aside from a little overlap and flexibility[1], there are strict, community-wide guidelines for when phrases can occur. For example, one would never hear *astaghfir-allah* (literally “I seek refuge in God”) after something good or worthy of praise; rather it comes after actions that are sinful or inappropriate, either by oneself or others.

[1] Phrases with parallel structure and meaning can be used interchangeably, but this does not occur for all phrases because many are part of adjacency pairs.

Another characteristic of ritual is that due to its formulaic nature as well as the repetition, it can be anticipated (Basso and Senft, 2009:1). The most clear examples are in the case of adjacency pairs. It is easy to reply with a God-phrase when it is the culturally expected response. For example as discussed earlier, the congratulatory phrase *mabruk* has a standard reply of the God-phrase *Alla ybarik fik* ('God bless you'), especially expected at weddings, where *mabruk* is expected. One of the bride's brothers comes to the wedding with his Russian wife. Although she speaks no Arabic, she learns a few "important" Arabic phrases. She practices them in the taxi ride over and they include *marhaba* (hello), *keif halek* (how are you?), and *mabruk* (congratulations). For the sake of the wedding, *mabruk* is an essential phrase to know.

Aside from response pairs, God-phrases can still be anticipated. One of the best examples is the phrase *alla yirhamu / yirhamha* (God have mercy on him / her) said after the mention of someone who has passed away. This is expected, occasionally even demanded after the mention of someone who has died. I even observed an Arabic teacher getting frustrated at a class while waiting for someone to follow the ritual, after the mention of a relative that had passed away. The expectations can be very high to provide the ritual phrase. In the case of less serious situations, an incorrect or absent phrase can bring laughter or embarrassment, such as Canton describes after incorrect use of an Arabic greeting for a community in Yemen (1986). This can work to perhaps shame a person into correct use. Like many other culturally-regulated practices, repeated negligence can potentially effect community

integration, although incorrect or missing God-phrases alone may not lead to this outcome.

The demand to seek blessings for the dead is strong and the phrase itself is often echoed by others as well. In the film *The Lemon Tree,* one of the farm workers, Abu Hussam retells a story to Salma about her late father, translated from Arabic:

> *Abu Hussam:* Once we ate apricots, he spat out the pit, and within a week it grew into a huge tree.
>
> *Salma:* Come on, Abu Hussam
>
> *Abu Hussam*: Pity, he died too young. ***Alla yirhamu*** **(God rest his soul**)
>
> *Salma****: Alla yirhamu*** **(God rest his soul**)

It is not enough to simply tell a story that honors his memory, one is still expected to ask for mercy on him from God. And Salma mimics the ritual by repeating the phrase. This repetition by others hearing it is common, reiterating the sentiments on the deceased, and this effect of echo and response is a feature of ritual prayer (Haviland, 2009:28). It not only heightens the sentiment and prayer, but it allows the person repeating to also partake in the ritual of respect for the dead. For young children, it forms a method of practice and reinforcement so they will eventually learn the rituals on their own initiative.

1.2 Building community

While God-phrases cover many functions in speech, their performance can act to create an 'imagined community' and serve as a method of distinction between an insider and outsider. In this case a community need not necessarily share a common language or background, but are assumed to accept some common ideology and way of being-in-the-world. Because God-phrases are intricately connected to ideologies behind their use, hearing someone recite such a phrase can suggest at least a theoretical overlap in ideology.

The use of God-phrases can be used to immediately and quickly establish a connection with new people, creating a bond of community where none existed before. In the first season of the comedy series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, almost half (48%) of the God phrase *as-salamu alaykum* occur outside of the "sacred" space of the mosque. This high percentage indicates that using the phrase outside of religious setting helps to create or reinforce community even outside of a space where that community was already a given. Because the ideology behind God-phrases is so integrated in religious teaching, the community is more taken for granted in sacred space, making God-phrases more influential in creating a bond of shared ideology *outside* of this space.

In her book *From my Sisters' Lips*, Na'ima Robert describes how this same God-phrase helps her bridge the distance with people she had never met before. Seeing a group of girls in *hijab* she decides to approach and talk to them. She begins the conversation with *as-salamu alaykum*. She receives big smiles and the adjacency pair reply, *wa 'alakum-s-salam* (Robert, 2005: 18). While it was their wearing of the

hijab that marked them as Muslim and allowed for the entire interaction to be initiated, the God-phrase connected her with the new acquaintances. While Robert notes that she was interested in becoming a Muslim, at this point in her life, she still had yet to convert. Thus the community being formed rests on shared values and ideas, not necessarily religious devotion and practice. Using *as-salamu alaykum* practically indexes membership to a community with some underlying shared ideology. The bond can lead to further influence. It is due to this very conversation that Robert makes a contact in Guinea, where she had been planning a trip; although hesitant to go, meeting these girls solidifies her belief that she must make the trip as planned (2005: 18). This demonstrates how the community created can further act to influence behaviors and actions. Beginning with a God-phrase opens the reality of a shared community, also leads to the sharing of resources to a new acquaintance, who is no longer an outside stranger.

In the first season of the comedy show *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, one of the characters on the show, Sarah, who converted to Islam when she married her Lebanese husband over 25 years prior, still often faces challenges of integration. Another character in the show, Baber, the self-proclaimed conservative Muslim and the comedically fanatical Muslim on the cast, certainly considers her mostly an outsider to the Muslim community. For Baber, in addition to her physical markers of being an "outsider" – she is white (a minority amongst this particular Muslim community) and does not wear a *hijab* – she also never integrates Arabic God-phrases into her speech, even greetings. In this particular episode, a potential convert enters the community,

prompting Baber to show his feelings about Sarah as an outsider. Even though this potential new convert is new to the community and the religion, he immediately gains acceptance by Baber and is taken as an "insider" due to his supposed genuineness in Islam, also demonstrated through his quick adoption of Arabic God-phrases including the greeting *as-salamu alaykum*. Baber contrasts his behaviors with Sarah who he does not see as serious about Islam, partly demonstrated through her *lack of* Arabic God-phrases. The following conversation occurs between Baber and Sarah in the 5th episode of Season one on *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, on first sight of the convert:

> *Baber:* Sarah, who is that?
>
> *Sarah:* Oh, right, 'cause white people all know each other.
>
> *Baber:* I thought that maybe you've seen him at the bowling alley, bingo, or some other Western den of vice.

Sarah takes offense to Baber's assumptions that she is part of this 'other' of "all white people" that all know one another. But Baber not only "others" her into the "white people" category but he affiliates Sarah with what, in his opinion, is non-Muslim activities. He removes her from the group of "good-Muslims" and instead, lumps her into the category of "other" who participate in Western, non-Muslim activities. He also accomplishes the underhanded indication of his disapproval at her behavior and suggests her *unworthiness* into the category of Muslim. For Baber, there are ideological differences between the behaviors of Muslims and "white people". These result in very different practices – including visiting "Western dens of vice". Since Sarah is not "Muslim enough" for Baber, she does not exert the practices of one living

under a Muslim ideology and must rely on a non-Muslim ideology that is accepting of these "vices." While this scene is meant to be comedic, the character of Baber is constantly expressing his disapproval of other faiths for their inferiority to Islam, which in this case he extends to even a Muslim character, one too closely aligned with all that he disapproves of. One example of his general negativity to other faiths is his description of "their" God as "the evil Western God" and refers to Canada as "this Godless Western society." He also frequently calls non-Muslims as "infidels" and "heathens."

In the episode, Baber continues to marginalize Sarah's status by distancing her from even the "convert" category. In this case a "convert" would be someone who learns to adopt the Muslim ideology and put it into practice. On introduction to the potential convert, and he states his interest in converting, the othering continues:

Baber: Isn't that wonderful, a convert! I am Baber.

Sarah: Hel::lo I'm right here. I'm a convert too!

Baber: Yes, but he's serious!

….

Baber: What a blessing! Our first real convert!

(cuts to show opening credits)

Baber not only finds fault with Sarah as a Muslim, but he does not even accept her as a convert, calling Marlon, the potential new Muslim, the first *real* convert. Sarah's presence is tolerated, but Baber does not accept her into the Muslim category. One reason that Baber is quick to accept the new convert is through his language. Just

before the above excerpt, Marlon demonstrates his genuine seriousness by knowing what an Imam is and using the Arabic word *khutba* to refer to the Friday sermon. This gains prestige not just for Baber, but others in the community, many of whom do not speak Arabic. One young female observer comments, "wow, Arabic. That's impressive." While *khutba* is not a God phrase, it is an Arabic word strongly associated with Muslim rituals and practice. Marlon also begins using the greeting *as-salamu alaykum* in the next scene, something which Sarah never once uses in this first season of eight episodes. In this case of Marlon it is the demonstration of his "dedication" to Islam through his language that builds connections and insider status.

For Baber, Marlon's use of Arabic God-phrases further helps him win approval in his eyes. In the second scene in which they both appear, Marlon expresses his excitement about Islam with the God-phrase, *allahu akbar* 'God is great.' Baber's response to this is, "oh how joyous! At this rate we'll convert every white person in town to Islam!" Baber expresses happiness over not just a convert, but the recitation of the name of God, calling it "joyous." This continued use of Arabic and God-phrases resonates with Baber and allowing him to quickly gain acceptance of the convert. But, it should also be noted that language helps contribute to the alienation of Marlon by the end of the episode. Not only does he critique the behaviors of other Muslims as not "devoted" enough, he also overuses the God-phrase *allahu akbar* 'God is great', turning it into his rallying cry. After shouting *allahu akbar* seven times in a row, members of the mosque quickly begin to flee and disassociate from him. This is a quick change from their smiles and congratulations over his conversion ceremony. But

by the end of the seven cries of *allahu akbar*, their faces turn to wide-eyed shock. The overuse of God-phrases actually works to undermine his "ingroup" status, as the community sees him as a little crazy and "over-the-top."

The overall show comments on what it means to be a Muslim. While the show remains quite explicit about the behaviors that suggest a lack of piety in all the characters (from lying, vanity, anger, or lack of devotion to faith), they are all still considered *Muslims*. In this episode, Sarah tried to take Islam more "seriously" (because of Baber comments about her being an outsider). So Sarah vows to pray all five prayers for one month. After giving up on her attempts, Sarah decides she is a "bad Muslim." But she still considers herself part of the community of Muslims, and marks that in her participation in the community and attempts to strive to be better over the coming seasons of the show. I will return to the link between language and religious dedication and piety, later in the paper.

1.3 Establishing authority

A second predominant action carried out by God-phrases is to add legitimacy and authority to one's speech. This is rooted in the ideology that the name of God had tremendous power. Both the calling of the name itself can protect one in difficult situations but mentioning God recognizes the ideology that God has a role over the things that occur in life. Thus adding *alla* or *ila* to the structure of the phrase acts to

enhances the status of the entire utterance. This makes it more difficult to challenge or question the entire utterance, as that can be seen as questioning God's will.

Kapchan explains why this is the case through a study of women street vendors in Morocco. "Swearing… carries a certain moral impact. It is forbidden in the Qur'an, the equivalent of taking the lord's name in vain. In principle, an oath 'by God' is a guarantee of sincerity, a proof against lies. A believer doesn't take an oath unless telling the truth, for this has tangible consequences in the acquisition of rewards…and demerits in the afterlife" (Kapchan, 1996:59). It is the link between one's speech and the name of God that adds authority behind one's words as the Qur'an demands that God-phrases suggest truth. The "oath" of truth heightens the influence of the rest of the attached speech.

But Kapchan continues that the process of sellers lying about the prices provides a common strategy to earn better wages. "Buyers rarely believe the base price quoted, but the seller's strategy continues to be a viable one since it includes religious oaths that would make the vendor lose face (*l-wajh*) if contradicted…Their invocation of religious language and ideology serves to uphold appearances and sell goods" (Kapchan, 1996:41-42). Even with the general knowledge that the seller is lying about the price, the legitimacy added with the name of God prevents refuting it. Shoppers must take the price offered and are not able to directly question the price because to do so would shame the seller's improper use of God's name. Shoppers may get around the issue by requesting a lower price because "that's what's in my power [to pay]" but not a direct rejection, otherwise they must accept the price, and as the sellers declare,

"God has something written for you" so you shouldn't argue (Kapchan, 1996:51). This direct manipulation takes advantage of the power of the name of God to impact the behaviors and choices of others.

Similar to the example given in Kapchan's book, *walla*, an oath which literally means "by God" contextually stands in as "[I swear] by God" or when a question, "really?" or "swear?" The invocation of God adds an air of authority to the rest of the speech. As an interjection, it serves discursive purposes, as discussed earlier (Kockelman, 2003). Piamenta writes that one of the functions of *walla* is as "a dummy word in initial position; a dummy word of hesitation when having no clear answer" (1979: 8). While the role of filling in for hesitation is often the case, it certainly has more than a "dummy" function, as well be seen in the examples below. It adds confidence and authority to the speech that follows.

It is quite easy to hear *walla* or *wallahi* (a phrase similar to *walla* in meaning and use) interjected into speech across the Arabic speaking world. In the film *The Syrian Bride*, one of the brothers of the bride uses it to reassure and cheer up his sisters in a depressing situation. Although his claim is outlandish, and perhaps impossible to fulfill (he promises the bride a private plane) it helps to ease the discomfort between the siblings. Given the situation in the Golan, the siblings will never be together again, as the bride will become Syrian and can never re-enter Israeli territory. The brother says, "*Wallahi*, if my deal goes through, I'll buy you great gifts" (*The Syrian Bride*). He goes on to list those amazing gifts. Even though they know the gifts are unrealistic, using *wallahi* makes him sound confident.

An interesting case of how the legitimacy of God-phrases has come full circle, can be seen with the phrase *in sha-llah*. This phrase literally means 'if God wills it' (Piamenta, 1979) and it rooted in the ideology that all things happen through the will of God. Thus, saying *in sha-llah* reaffirms that ultimately, fate is in the hands of God, not the speakers. Even though ideologically, the phrase suggests that only God knows the future (which may actually prevent one's intentions from being fulfilled), the phrase has become commonly used for the exact opposite, that is, an excuse for when one does not want to do something. Hiding under the umbrella of the structural use of Allah, perhaps God simply did not will the action; the speaker thus avoids potential commitment. And, maintaining the authority of all other God-phrases, he or she is outside of censure or critique, because that would be ultimately questioning the will of Allah. Responding to an invitation with *in sha-llah* also serves as a discourse marker to move on with the conversation. The interlocutor accepts it as a response, not like a maybe that further pleading can persuade a person to come. This will be seen in the example below.

Resting on the margins of cultural appropriateness, foreigners often gain the opportunity to challenge this authority, which would be inappropriate for native members of the community. While living in Jordan, dealing with people using *in sha-llah* as a way out of commitments proved especially frustrating. Especially without knowing people very well, it was often difficult to distinguish those who used *in sha-llah* along the lines of ideology, putting authority in God, versus those going against its ideological justification and with absolutely no intention to follow through. In

instances when confirmation was essential, especially in the case of taxi drivers, foreigners such as myself would further prompt *in sha-llah* with "*in sha-llah akeed?"* '*in sha-llah* for sure?' While *akeed* lacks the legitimacy of a God-phrase, it at the same time avoids an excuse to hide behind. This completely inappropriate additional exchange drew chuckles from interactants, mostly because they understood the reason for my skepticism. The inappropriateness rests in the ideology behind the phrase *in sha-llah*, which is about recognizing fate is in the hands of God, and man does not hold control. It is for this reason that questioning *in sha-llah* does against this ideology, returning control to mankind. This not only goes counter to ideology, but it brings intention much closer to the speech act. *In sha-llah* distances the speaker from the promise with the intervention of an unknowable 'God.' But a non-God-phrase like *akeed* brings the promise back to human actors who must more directly confront the intention which is part of the speech act.

Another example of this skepticism comes in the film *Caramel*. As addressed earlier, one of the main characters, Nisrine, invites a policeman to spend a day in the women's salon. The policeman responds with *in sha-llah*. But, later in the film (although it is unclear how much time as passed, the film does appear to have a fairly quick timeline), to the shock of the girls at the salon, the policeman does come. His appearance prompts Nisrine to say "welcome. We thought you'd never come" (*Caramel*). Knowing the common use of *in sha-llah* as an excuse, Nisrine is not certain that his response was genuine, especially with the added gender awkwardness of a man in a ladies' salon. And this awkwardness can be seen in his entrance. Not

only does he knock over some objects in the salon but he must repeat his greeting three times, progressively louder, in order to be noticed.

In a final example of how legitimacy with God-phrases gets negotiated even outside of the Arabic language medium, here is an example from the predominantly English medium film *Brick Lane*. In the film, the husband borrows money from an older Muslim woman, Mrs. Islam, also from Bangladesh but who moved to England some time before them. Amongst the community via gossip, she is known for her practice of charging exorbitant interest. The Qur'an explicitly forbids the collection of interest. When Mrs. Islam hears the family is planning to move back to Bangladesh, she calls on the wife, Nazneen, to settle the debt. Because declaring Mrs. Islam as a usurer would be shameful, Nazneen first subtly alludes to her demands of interest "We paid it all and some more as well." She then becomes explicit (this dialogue occurs entirely in English):

Nazneen: I am not gonna pay any more interest!

Mrs. Islam: [taken aback, coughs] Do you think, **before God**, I will charge interest? Am I a moneylender?

Nazneen: No? [intonation suggest contextually 'aren't you?' Goes to get Qur'an and returns]

Nazneen: Just **swear on the Qur'an** that you're not and I'll pay you the £200.

Nazneen ends up repeating her demand for assurance in the authority of the Qur'an three times and does not receive it. The dilemma that Mrs. Islam faces is that as Islam forbids the collection of interest, she must either lie to save face and gather the money,

or she must admit to the collection of usury. She attempts to gain legitimacy by using "before God," to deny taking interest. While Nazneen answers 'no' to her being a moneylender, her intonation suggests that she in fact confirms it. This could potentially place shame on Mrs. Islam and perhaps look like blasphemy for the authority placed in God while lying. Nazneen battles the call for authority ('before God') with authority by turning around the demand with a call on a higher religious source; instead of the name of God, Nazneen raises the risk with the word of God, the Qur'an. By asking Mrs. Islam to swear on the Qur'an, Nazneen respectfully challenges the lie about charging interest. The use of the Qur'an to again authority can been seen as getting one step above in some sort of religious "hierarchy". Because Mrs. Islam lied even with the name of Allah, Nazneen needed a higher source of legitimacy to call her bluff.

At the same time, Nazneen provided a way out for Mrs. Islam. Although it would have required her to further the lie, swearing truth on the Qur'an would have allowed Mrs. Islam to save face and not admit to usury and blasphemy of using the name of God to legitimate a lie. In that case, Nazneen would have *had* to accept her word and pay. Of course, Mrs. Islam is unable to swear because of the truth behind Nazneen's accusations. After an attempt to blackmail and shame Nazneen for inappropriate behavior (which fails), Mrs. Islam leaves after saying, "anyway, you have paid too much." Mrs. Islam never honors the request for assurance in the name of the Qur'an, thus never denies the accusation of usury (*Brick Lane*). Nazneen's call on

the power of God through an even higher claim to authority (the Qur'an over the name of God) ultimately wins out.

1.4 The power to control

Not only do God-phrases give authority to the speaker's utterance, but that power can be used and manipulated for further action. In the earlier examples of *in sha-llah* 'God willing', the speaker was often able to excuse themselves from further action due to the authority of the God-phrase. In this section, God-phrases are used to gain dominance over the actions of others, often getting them to do other things, or preventing them from carrying out those actions.

One example of how God-phrases can manipulate behaviors of others can be seen in the TV series *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. One character uses the phrase *astaghfir-allah* ('I seek refuge in Allah' or I ask God's forgiveness) to express his disapproval of his daughter's behavior. The teenage daughter of a self-proclaimed conservative Muslim is trying on jogging outfits for her father's approval prior to a charity 10K run. After viewing her first outfit, the father declares "*astaghfir-allah*! I can see your belly button." Finding the outfit completely unacceptable, the father expresses the sentiment of revulsion by seeking forgiveness in the name of God. While ideologically this phrase is rooted in the idea that God is merciful and forgiving (the root gh/f/r being one of the names of Allah meaning "to forgive, grant pardon") (Wehr, 1994: 793), what he also simultaneously does is remind the daughter of Allah

and religious guidelines around modesty. The structural integration of Allah seems especially key. Adding *astaghfir-allah* also served as a method of scolding or critiquing the daughter's inappropriate choice of dress. Even without knowing the literal translation of *astaghfir-allah*, the intonation of the phrase contextually conveys disapproval and the daughter goes to change clothes. The combination of God-phrase and intonational cues controls and impacts the behaviors of the daughter.

In a second example from the film *Caramel*, two of the women use God-phrases to compete with each other over housework. In a competition to gain dominance over the other, each woman tries to win out on getting to do the dishes. In this case God-phrases enhance each one's authority. In this scene, one of the main characters has gone to have dinner with her fiancé's family. This fight over the dishes occurs amongst two of the older women of the family:

(1) Woman 1: Leave [the dishes]
(2) Woman 2: It's not a problem. No, *walla* ('by God').
(3) Woman 1: No, *walla*. You've been up since this morning
(4) Woman 2: No, no.
(5) Woman 1: No, no, no. You've done so much.
(6) Woman 2: *Alla ykhallik*. *Alla yrith aleyk* ('May God preserve you')
[women exit the scene but continue to argue in the distance]

In this interaction, the women of the household generally follow a gradually increasing level of authority to drive actions of the other person. The use of God-phrases attempt to prevent action (that is, doing dishes) by the other person. The women move from simple requests (line 1 and the first part of line 2) to swearing by God (end of line 2). The first woman adds to her oath 'by God,' reasons that Woman 2 has already done so much work (line 3 and 5). Woman 2 adds even more authority through more God-

phrases in line 6. While the women continue to fight over the dishes and it is unclear who eventually "wins" the fight, what can be seen in the attempt to persuade behaviors (here, not doing the dishes) of the other person through the ideological power held in God-phrases. The women not only "swear" to convince the others, but the second woman even resorts to God-phrases commonly seen when requesting a favor (such as in *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*, where a student uses *Alla ykhallik* to request the principle doesn't call a doctor, even through she is sick, which the principle obliges). The authority behind the God-phrase allows for attempts to affect the behaviors of others.

In this next example, it is actually the *absence* of a God-phrase that controls the interactant, as reciting the phrase *protects* from harm. In a comedic look at the relationship between religion and superstition, *Little Mosque on the Prairie* season 2, looks at the anticipation demanded of the phrase *ma sha allah* meaning 'it is God's will'; this phrase can be generally heard after something worthy of admiration or immense praise, especially with the birth of a new baby (Piamenta, 1979). In the case of anxiety, *ma sha allah* can be seen as acceptance, putting trust in God to work things out as they are meant to be. More frequently though, the phrase is heard after a very good event. It is rooted in a religious ideology that ultimately God is responsible for all things. The ideology mixes with superstitious ideas about the evil eye, thus it is used as a way to protect from jealousy. Reciting *ma sha allah* not only reflects the acceptance of God's influence and gratefulness but also God's name acts to protect against the evil eye of jealousy and any negative actions that might come. Praising without *ma sha allah* is seen as indicative of jealousy and going against the ideology

that all good things come from God. This is superstitiously thought to bring bad things on the person who is the *object* of jealousy.

Little Mosque on the Prairie plays with this expectation when the Imam of the mosque, Amaar, sarcastically bestows a load of compliments onto Baber, the judgmental and conservative voice of the mosque. Baber thinking the compliments were genuine, learns about the evil eye after he tells Fatima (another Muslim character) and Fred (an ignorant and mostly anti-Muslim radio show host) about the compliments he received:

> *Fatima:* When you pay someone a compliment, you're supposed to say *ma sha allah*
> *Baber*: It means 'thanks to Allah'
> *Fatima:* Otherwise you might give the other person the evil eye…Ba::d things will happen to them.
> *Fred:* Let me get this straight: Amaar forgets to say …uh musha-musha and he [points to Baber] gets bad luck. [chuckles] I love your religion.
> *Baber:* Only if Allah wills it. Seems far fetched.

Immediate after this exchange, Baber faces a number of unfortunate incidents beginning with the tea he is drinking having sour milk inside. Although done for comedic effect, the show elaborates on the "evils" of not following expected protocol. Fatima describes the phrase as *required*. She reflects a great awareness of the use of the phrase, when it should be said and why. This metalinguistic awareness allows her to link the usage of the phrase to some ideological and superstitious ideas that explain the logic for it. While neither of the Muslim characters link it explicitly to Islam, the third person in the scene draws the link. Power against the evil eye is placed in the ritual of adding *ma sha allah* after compliments. Although Baber dismisses it because

he sees little reason for the punishment from Allah, he soon faces enough trauma to make him value the phrase. The lack of the phrase directly results in a series of ramifications for Baber, not only in his turning to prayers to protect himself and remove the evil eye, but also results in evil things he faces from the evil eye.

Later in the episode, Baber attempts to fix the root of his trouble by complimenting Amaar and ending the jealousy that Fatima says is causing the evil eye. In the process, he also aims to *educate* Amaar on the ritual practice of saying *ma sha allah*. Baber bestows on Amaar what he thinks are compliments, adding "*Ma sha allah*. Notice I said *ma sha allah?*" (*Little Mosque on the Prairie*). Baber uses this opportunity to educate on proper practices and makes it a pretty explicit teachable moment. Baber also becomes very aware of the phrase, trying also to coach it into the Imam, which he sees as a way to prevent it from occurring in the future. In this way Baber tries to influence the actions and speech of the Imam. His coaching suggests the ideology behind *ma sha allah* without explicitly explaining the logic (or superstition for that matter).

1.5 Legitimacy through honor and respect

All God-phrases can be seen as in a dialogue, either with God or with another person or both. For those phrases that address the interlocutor, another potential action is conveying respect and honor. As an honorific register, many of these God-phrases contain a contextual meaning that is emblematic of honor (Agha, 2007:301). While

not a God-phrase, one religiously connected example is the title *hajji* or *hajjah* (depending on gender). The phrase takes its roots from Islam, where *hajji* is the title given to a person who completes the *hajj* pilgrimage. In some parts of the Middle East, when one is unfamiliar with a new set of people and obviously not knowing who has been on pilgrimage and who has not, *hajji* or *hajjah* can be used to address all elderly people as a marker of respect. For those who actually completed the *hajj,* the title shows deference to achieving this recommended action of Islam that is often the most difficult to fulfill. Even for those who have not actually completed the *hajj,* it serves as an emblem of wisdom and authority, humbling the speaker before his or her interlocutor. The title is also used by children to address parents who have already completed the pilgrimage. I observed this during my time in Jordan, and can be seen in the Syrian drama *Ma Malakat Aymanukum* where one pair of siblings both refer to their mother and father as *hajjah* and *hajji* respectively.

There are many God-phrases that provide honorific methods of giving thanks or as a means of greeting another. For example, a phrase such as *'alla ya'tik l'afye*, literally 'God give you strength,' contextually serves as a way of saying thank you. Rather than a God-phrase, one may use a version of thank you with less of a gap between the literal translation and conveyed meaning, such as *shukran* (from the root sh/k/r "to thank, be thankful, be grateful") (Wehr, 1994: 563). In contrast, *alla ya'tik l'afye* draws in the additional authority of a reference to God. The structural integration of the name of God also brings legitimacy and strength. These God-phrases of thanks are most often used by either older Arabic speakers, or by younger Arabic

speakers to their elders, due to the honor and respect they convey. In the film *The Syrian Bride*, the eldest son returns to his parents' home after 8 years. While the father refuses to greet him, the son begins addressing his father with *ya'tik l'afye* "[may God] give you strength." Honorifics often co-occur with other discursive practices (Agha, 2007:302; Haviland, 2009:36), and in this case, the son goes to lower himself, bowing before his father and reaches out for his hand. The father refuses the respectful gesture. Not only does he refuse to respond to the son, but he quickly retracts his hand from his son's grasp. This is due to the son's marriage to an 'outsider,' which was considered betrayal.

In a second example, in the film *Caramel*, one of the young salon workers goes to visit the older seamstress nearby. She responds to 'How are you?' with first a God-phrase '*katter xerak Allah'* (literally 'may God increase your welfare') before adding the non-God-phrase and non-honorific 'All is well'. She begins her greeting with a more respectful method. Literally, she begins by asking God for the betterment of her interlocutor before actually answering how she is.

Often when young Arabic speakers employ these phrases to their own young peers, it is used sarcastically. In the film *Caramel*, one of the characters receives a call from the father of her two children. While the audience can only hear her part of the conversation, one gathers that he is backing out from a visit to the children. She responds in Arabic with:

Why promise the kids and then change your mind?

'alla ya'tik l'afye (translated in the film as 'Good for you')

Okay, leave me alone.

Okay, ***yalla*** bye.

The film's translation of 'good for you' seems appropriate as it captures the contextual sarcasm and not literal meaning. In this case, the calling on God gives her a way of shaming him for neglecting his promise. The contradiction between the context of use and the ideology strengthens the sarcasm. *Alla ya'tik l'afye* is contextually used to give gratitude by asking God for their continued strength; it is often said to someone for work they have done (often something very difficult or time consuming). Given that the father had done quite the opposite by not showing up, she sarcastically uses *alla ya'tik l'afye*, through the apparent contradiction. As this is rooted in being familiar with the ideology behind such phrases, we see the translation for the film had to attempt to translate the phrase into a potentially more apparent form of sarcasm for an audience with perhaps a different ideology.

Agha also points to the metapragmatic effects of honorifics including what it says about the speaker, indexing the speaker as a person who uses polite and respectable speech (2007:302). In addition to showing respect for one's interlocutor, it also serves as a means of reflecting well on the speaker. In the Syrian program *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*, one of the characters, Taufiq, the brother of one of the leading girls, is presented as a very religious character, at least on the outside. While the show quickly reveals how hypocritical his practice of Islam truly is, Taufiq's behaviors all center around the goal of an outward appearance of a complete package of religiosity. His dress is conservative and modest; he also possesses a *zebiba*, which is a mark on

his forehead, a patch of hard skin, assumed to be due to the intense amount of prayer (Abdelhadi, 2008). His speech is also full of God-phrases. While these phrases honor and respect his interlocutors, they also serve to reflect well on him as devoted to his faith. All the cast of characters use God-phrases in their speech, but Taufiq does so to very high degree. He also uses a greater *variety* of God-phrases, especially amongst his age-range peers. In addition to frequent God-phrases, he refers to his father as *hajji*, a form of respect for the pilgrimage he has completed. In a conversation with his father, the discussion begins with the father stressing the important overlap between the intellect and religion, encouraging his son to constantly question himself about his understanding of Islam. It then transitions into worry over his sister Laila who he feels is straying from Islam. The God-phrases below all come from Taufiq during this brief conversation (translations from Piamenta, 1979):

> (1) *'alla ytawwel 'amrak* (literally "may God lengthen your life") [as a form of respect for his father and his wisdom]
> (2) *Alla a'lam* (literally "God knows [best]") [ask legitimacy for his concern about what Laila is studying, because God sees the truth of her "inappropriate" behavior]
> (3 and 4 - repeated) *'alla yustor aleha* (literally "may God protect her") [asks protection from God for his sister]

From these examples, we can see that Taufiq not only takes time to show signs of respect to his father, but also does so for his sister. Especially given that his sister is not present, his prayer for her projects him as a very caring and dedicated brother. In reality, the anger and frustration that he takes out on his sister for her behavior is not only cruel, but entirely hypocritical, seeing as he gets a girl pregnant out of wedlock.

But on the surface, his actions and speech reflect a face of respect and religious dedication behind which, the reality hides.

1.6 Connection between God-phrases and piety

The example of a character attempting to convey religiosity only on the outside bridges into an examination of how God-phrases, with the structural integration of the name of God, connect to the practice of religion. How can the use of God-phrases index something about a person's religious perspective, especially in the case of Islam? How are God-phrases used to further religious motivations? In this section of the paper, I will look at what the use of God-phrases can tell us about piety. Based on the religious teachings of Islam, the ideal of piety represents a goal one works toward, rather than a state of being; that is, a person strives to be pious, while never actually reaching piety. Man continues to make mistakes and needs to continually reflect on behaviors. Working on the path of piety challenges the believer to bring all behaviors in line with religious ideals and ideologies. Thus, in the case of God-phrases, they make up yet another behavior which should be used in line with their religiously rooted ideologies, some of which have been mentioned earlier in the paper.

In areas where Arabic is spoken, all speakers employ God-phrases, regardless of religious affiliation or lack thereof. This is due partly to the fact that *Allah* is merely the Arabic term for God, used by all Arabic speaking religious traditions. Additionally, while this paper mainly focuses on God-phrases amongst Muslims, most

Arabic speakers universally insert these same phrases into daily speech. Given the high interaction between different religious groups in parts of the Middle East, it naturally allows for a mixing and sharing of linguistic phrases, especially specific God-phrases that are linked very strongly to specific pragmatic or usage contexts. But, some phrases are also more strongly associated with a particular religious group. For example, *as-salamu alaykum* 'peace be upon you' most commonly indexes or suggests identity as a Muslim. As non-Muslims may use it to be respectful when greeting Muslims, and thus it is not a guarantee to mark the speaker as Muslim.

One of the central concepts of Islam rests in the idea of remembrance, or *dhikr*. According to the Qur'an, "Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me, and reject not Faith" (1987: 2.152). This ideological understanding helps explain the purpose behind God-phrases in everyday speech, where faith is connected to remembrance of God and especially for being grateful to Him. One Qur'anic commentary further reflects on this word *dhikr*, usually translated in English as 'remembrance.' According to Ali, this simplistic translation misses the depth of *dhikr* which conveys "to remember; to praise by frequently mentioning…to make much of; to cherish the memory of as a precious possession" (Ali, 1987:61). Filling speech with God-phrases throughout the day potentially act as *dhikr*.

Saba Mahmood, in her examination of the women's mosque movement in Egypt, explores one approach to reinserting piety into everyday life. In her book *The Politics of Piety,* she notes that the mosque movement itself is a reaction to "the perception that religious knowledge, as a means of organizing daily conduct, has

become increasingly marginalized under modern structures of secular governance" (Mahmood, 2005:4). One of the religious teachers demonstrates the signs of this erosion of religious awareness by saying that when you meet someone, you cannot distinguish Christians from Muslims. She continues " 'We are Muslims by name, but our acts are not those of Muslims. Our sight, dress, drink, and food should also be for God and out of love for Him'" (Mahmood, 2005:44). To this list, I propose to add speech, such as the use of God-phrases as an attempt to express this love. The mosque movement challenges the decline of piety through the focus on training the body (and importantly, speech) as a means to "imbue each of the various spheres of contemporary life with a regulative sensibility that takes its cue from the Islamic theological corpus rather than from modern secular ethics" (Mahmood, 2005:47).

For the women in Mahmood's study, the focus of piety is on *action* rather than inner states. She writes, "bodily behavior was therefore not so much a sign of interiority as it was a means of acquiring its potentiality" (2005: 147). While acts that index pious or religious behaviors, such as veiling or regular participation in ritual prayers, *suggest* inward acknowledgement, more important is actually that through disciplined use they create the *potential* for piety. "Action does not issue forth from natural feelings but *creates* them" (emphasis original, Mahmood, 2005:157). Thus, it is through repetition of rituals that opens the path toward piety, not feelings and desires present beforehand. This helps explain why Islam is considered a 'way of life' since it is about how every action help creates religious behavior.

Yet Mahmood acknowledges that this focus on outward behaviors is not necessarily a universal understanding of religiosity. When religion is viewed as being a reflection of "inner life," then outer behavior is not enough to measure sincerity, such as is common in other religious traditions (Mahmood, 2005:147). According to Karen Armstrong, the focus on actions over beliefs is at the heart of early Islam. The bulk of what the Prophet Muhammad taught was a way of ethical and moral living, with a strong focus on actions – honesty, generosity, purity of mind and heart, and kind actions to the less fortunate. "In the Qur'an, faith (*iman*) is something that people do: they share their wealth, perform the 'works of justice' (*salihat*), and prostrate their bodies to the ground in the kenotic, ego-deflating act of prayer (*salat*)" (Armstrong, 2009:99). In her book *The Case for God,* Armstrong traces the historical trend (through an examination of Christianity) of movements from a focus on actions, to that of beliefs. This trend indicates the shift to seeing religion as about "inner life." While Islam as been affected by this influential trend, there remains a much greater focus on actions, which can be seen in the idea of Islam as a way of life.

Looking at piety in terms of working toward the alignment of behaviors with religious ideology is a definition also rooted in theology. Passages of the Qur'an yield an ideology about piety that is greater than the devotion to ritual. The Qur'an states: "It is not piety that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this…to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, orphans, the needy…to perform the prayer, to pay the alms. And they who fulfil their contracts, and endure with fortitude, misfortune, hardship, and peril, these are they who are true in

their faith" (2.177 translation in Sajoo, 2010:ix). The reference to East and West refers to actions at the end of the ritual prayer. Just as the women in the mosque movement try to practice, piety includes a lot more than just prayer. Being "true in the faith" is a way of living that touches all aspects of life. The ideology grounds and legitimates the beliefs and practices of the women in the mosque movement, as well as other Muslims. In spite of the tendency to assume religiosity based on outward appearance, the theological definition of religiosity goes a lot deeper.

One of the most well known Muslim women who continually devoted herself to the actions of piety is the Sufi Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya born around 717 CE in modern day Iraq (Smith, 1994:22). Rabi'a was so aware of the power of invoking the name of God that she even refused to ask God to help her when she was sick. She explained this by saying, "do you not know Who it is that wills this suffering for me, is it not God Who wills it?...When you know this, why do you bid me ask for what is contrary to His will?" (Smith, 1994:44). Awareness of the power of reciting the name of Allah, of asking for his intercession, and truly believing in that power to heal, Rabi'a refused to use that power when God had instead willed her illness. Rabi'a consciously reflected both the ideology that God enacts His will in all that occurs as well as the fact that reciting the name of God acts to bring comfort and ease to the reciter. For Rabi'a, her love for God was best demonstrated through her actions and speech. She rejected worldly things like marriage because it would distract her from her goal of union with Allah. She is recorded as saying, "O my God, the best of Thy gifts within my heart is the hope of Thee and the sweetest word upon my tongue is Thy praise, and

the hours which I love best are those in which I meet with Thee" (qtd. in Smith, 1994:50). All her actions and behaviors worked to align with religious ideology showing how Rabi'a continually worked along the path of piety. She was also tremendously aware of the purpose and reason behind her prayers, which were always for the purpose of praising God and not to seek and rewards. Rabi'a is quoted as saying, "O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee from hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty" (qtd. in Smith, 1994: 30). This quote captures Rabi'a's intense awareness of her approach to prayer and doing it for the "right" reasons.

Because piety is an unreachable goal, rather than a state of being, the accumulation of behavior adds toward that effort. In her interviews with Shi'ite Muslims in Lebanon, Lara Deeb encounters this definition of piety. Deeb cites a conversation with Hajjeh Khadija, a woman who appeared outwardly to accept the actions and behaviors that set her on a path of belief, who Deeb describes as someone who volunteered, regularly prayed, and fasted during the month of Ramadan. Yet when Deeb asked Hajjeh Khadija if she thought of herself as religious, she replied, "*In sha-llah* ('God willing') I will be religious. I must never stop climbing the ladder of faith…and at the top, the last thing, there is what we call *taqwa* [absolute faith and piety], and that is something we must all walk towards" (2006: 117). Not only does Hajjeh Khadija go on to talk about the Day of Judgment but Deeb also connects *taqwa* and "absorption" and "fusion", that is something that comes with death. Even Sufis

that accept that union with God can occur during life on earth believe that full union with God only occurs after life ends. Thus, even for Hajjeh Khadija, there is continual effort, getting closer but never fully reaching a state of piety. By continuing to refine behaviors, speech, and dress, Hajjeh Khadija continues to move in the right direction. This is the meaning of piety; it is a continual desire to improve, recognizing that humans make errors, but attempting to become better.

In the Canadian series, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, one of the characters demonstrates a similar development, although perhaps with more struggles toward the 'right path.' Over the course of the five seasons, she gradually demonstrates a greater focus on her religious devotion. She continues to toil with her behaviors and doing the 'right' thing, but she does demonstrate the development of trying to do the right thing for the right reasons. In the beginning of the series, Sarah (a convert to Islam), shows little "seriousness" to the faith. She attended the mosque at least on Fridays, but was known to be irregular in her daily prayers, often commented on by other characters. While Sarah occasionally produced random tidbits of religious information, it always came as quite a shock to the rest of the characters, such as her knowledge on the *hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca. In the first season of the series, Sarah only twice uses a God-phrase, and those are only during *salah*, or ritual prayer. She recites *Allahu Akbar* 'God is the greatest' two times during the episode to mark the start of her prayer. As noted before, these instances marked an effort to prove she could take her faith seriously but she ends up exhausted and gives up.

Over the course of the series, Sarah becomes more involved in the mosque community. She spends more time with the imam or leader of the mosque, turning to him for guidance on being a better person and Muslim. She also begins to use more God-phrases, beginning with the second season when she can actually be heard using the God-phrase, *as-salamu alaykum*. Early in the second season, she goes to seek help from the Imam and the following exchange occurs as she enters the office:

Sarah: oh...um oh ah a-saalem aleykum

Imam: wa aleykum salaam. Did you just salaam me? You never salaam me.

Sarah: well, uh I need some advice. Some spiritual advice.

Imam: really?

Sarah: um-hm

Imam: ah, of course.

In this exchange, Sarah attempts to greet the imam with a God-phrase, in spite of mispronunciation. Given the timeline of the series, the imam has been in the community for over one year, and yet this is the first time she has greeted him a God-phrase (one that is common on the show), and it stands out enough for him to comment on that fact. His shock at her request for spiritual guidance (although he does it for many other members of the community) is seen through the 4th line, "really?" It seems that she never has requested guidance before and the Imam is surprised at her attention to religious guidance. With her earlier struggles with devotion to her faith, the imam may also be surprised with her attention to "spiritual" or a faith perspective on her dilemma.

In the third season she even teaches a non-Muslim how to say the greeting, *as-salamu alaykum*. When he messes it up she responds "well, that's what I would say, only I would say it a little bit better." While she is aware that she herself often mispronounces it, she clearly can say it when she tries, seen in her pronunciation as she tries to teach it. She also demonstrates a metalinguistic awareness of her own use of God-phrases, teasing herself for standing out in this way. By the 5th season, her greetings to the imam more often rely on *as-salamu alaykum*. Through her behavior and her use of God-phrases, (or at least this one particular God-phrase), Sarah demonstrates a progression and development in her behavior. This parallels the focus on actions by the Egyptian women that Mahmood studied as attempts to be better Muslims. Although Sarah continues to make mistakes and act out of pride, it is her attempts to change that matter. Also by the 5th season she continually seeks the guidance of the Imam, working to make her behavior align with the values and ethics of Islam. Just like all Muslims, she will continue to make mistakes and errors, but piety is about the attempt, not the end goal.

Being religious reflects a way of being, and it need not be simply about rituals (of prayer or of speech), although it can be. But ideas of religious devotion are pervasive in some Muslim societies in the Middle East allowing even those individuals who may not be considered "religious" to reflect a mentality of what it means to be good. In one episode of *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*, one of the characters, Alia, reflects both an understanding of Islam without expressing actions in line with religious devotion. In one scene she explicitly mentioned she did not take time to

study Islam, mostly because she was tired at the end of the day. In another scene of the same episode, she yells at her mother that money is not the goal in life. Rather there are other important things to think about, such as considerations for the less fortunate, or praying and fasting everyday. Thus even though Alia may not take time for religion in her own daily practice, she has integrated the values and beliefs of the religion as part of her ideology expressed here.

Leila Ahmed, in her memoir about growing up in Egypt reflects a similar idea about the religiosity of her mother. Although her mother did not necessarily follow all the rituals of Islam such as praying and fasting, she did consider herself religious; the teaching of Islam that "'He who kills one being kills all of humanity, and he who revives, or gives life to one being revives all of humanity'" was the root of her philosophy on life (1999: 75). God-phrases help create an environment where the entire space resonates those values of religion. Ahmed also writes in her memoir about what she learned from the women surrounding her when growing up in Egypt that:

> what was passed on [about what it was to be Muslim]…was a way of holding oneself in the world - in relation to God, to existence, to other human beings. This the women passed on to us most of all through how they were and by their being and presence, by the way they were in the world…They leave a far more important and, literally, more vital, living record. Beliefs, morals, attitudes passed on to and impressed on us through those fleeting words and gestures are written into our very lives, our bodies, our selves, even into our physical cells and into how we live out the script of our lives. (1999: 121-122)

God-phrases help to create this environment, helping to reflect these values and beliefs, these ethics about how to live. If one returns to what rituals provide, one can see that "ritual is not only something done, but also something experienced in the

doing" (Basso and Senft, 2009:3). Applying rituals provides some experience to the speaker and listener. Even if the reference to God is only implicit, they teach about being a part of community, of marking oneself as a group member, and of respects and honor. All together, these make up a way of being in the world, which is at the root of Islam. The central beliefs of Islam, of one God and in the Prophet Muhammad are at their heart, about how to live in this world.

In his study of Islam in Morocco and Indonesia, Geertz addresses the difference between 'force' and 'scope' in the case of religion. He describes a man with religious force as one for whom "his faith is what he lives for and would quite willingly die for; he is god-intoxicated, and the demands flowing into everyday life from religious belief take clear precedence over those flowing into it from any other source" (1971: 111). On the other hand, "scope" captures "the range of social contexts within which religious considerations are regarded as having more or less direct relevance" (Geertz, 1971:112). Geertz notes that the two can be related, especially for people with great dedication to their faith (1971: 112). In comparing Sarah (from *Little Mosque on the Prairie*) and Hajjeh Khadijah (from Deeb's ethnography), Hajjeh Khadijah is more successful at both 'force' and 'scope.' While Sarah reflects very little 'force' her efforts toward her religion demonstrate her growth and attention to religious 'scope.' God-phrases are helpful in the development of religious 'scope,' allowing for social contexts to be transformed into religious contexts. While religious force is difficult to assess, Taufiq (from *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*) discussed earlier for his hypocritical dedication to his faith provides an example of 'force' without

'scope.' His lack of congruity between settings makes him weak on 'scope,' but his 'devotion' to Islam including terrorist acts later in the series are clear examples of 'force.' Like what is seen in Hajjeh Khadijah, both 'scope' and 'force' create a balance that creates the Islam as a way of life explained in religious texts and reflected in religious ideology.

1.7 The line into blasphemy

In discussing the use of God-phrases as indexes of attempts to be more pious, one must also look at the line between appropriate use and blasphemy. Blasphemy rests on using God-phrases in a way that conflicts with the ideology behind them. Calling an act blasphemous relies on a metapragmatic awareness of the use and reason for use of such phrases. It rests on either the speaker or the audience recognizing an inconsistency between use and the ideology justifying its use. While blasphemy can pass without remark, it only brings about problems when the disjuncture is noticed and called upon. This can be done as a method of teaching "appropriate" use of God-phrases, especially for young children. Calling out blasphemy can also be done in order to further a personal agenda, such as suggesting another person's impiety and thus claiming moral superiority.

One of the most famous cases of blasphemy comes from the 1988 book of Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*. Shortly after its publication, *The Satanic Verses* incited anger in global Muslim populations, leading to demonstrations, protests over

publication, and the deaths of over 20 people (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1991:25-26). For some, Rushdie's book was seen as challenging the credibility of the Prophet Muhammad as well as calling into question the Qur'an's authenticity (Ahsan and Kidwai, 1991:29). The blasphemy of Rushdie's work comes from the disjuncture between the ideological belief, for many Muslims (rooted in theology), that the Qur'an represents the words of God, as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel (Gilliot, 2006:41). Thus, Rushdie's challenge to its authenticity is seen as problematic.

According to Fazlur Rahman, one of the major themes of the Qur'an is the importance of monotheism. "In discussing God, for example, the idea of monotheism – which is logically imperative – is made the foundation-stone of the entire treatment, and all other Qur'anic ideas of God are either derived from it or subsumed under it, as seemed best to establish the synthetic concept of God" (Rahman, 1980:xi). In Rahman's analysis, the concept of God (and talking about God) derives from his one-ness and supremacy, both emerging from a context of polytheism in pre-Islamic Arabic. Due to this central tenant of the text, blasphemy can be rooted in not accepting one God, or challenging His supremacy (see Qur'an 19.88-92 and 21.4).

In *The Satanic Verses*, through attribution of tremendous amounts of agency to Prophet Muhammad in the 'revelation' of the Qur'an, Rushdie challenges not only the authority of the Qur'an, but the supremacy given to Allah due to His position as the *one* God. In the book, Mahound (the character representative of the Prophet Muhammad) is conversing with Ayesha (one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives). In

response to Ayesha's anger over the number of wives the Prophet marries, Rushdie write, "he went into – what else? – one of his trances, and out he came with a message from the archangel. Gibreel had recited verses giving him full divine support [for multiple wives]" (1989: 386). Ayesha's reaction to this instantaneous legitimation of his stance was, "'Your God certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you'" (Rushdie, 1989:386). Ayesha sarcastically challenges the legitimacy of the revelation, given the Prophet's vested interested in justifying polygamy and ascribing power to the Prophet for *directing* the content of the revelation. This undermining can be seen as questioning the Qur'an itself as the word of God, while also undermining the central supremacy and authority given only to God.

The repudiation of blasphemy rests on the ideology that the name of God carries a power that should not be taken lightly. For many Muslims, calling on the name of God during times of difficulty is not seen as a bad use, or at least worthy of censure. Rather, ideologically, calling on God's name helps give one strength in difficult situations. Again, this ideology can be countered through practice out of line with ideology. In the film *Caramel*, the fiancé of one of the main characters demonstrates the barrier between appropriate calling on God, as well as the inappropriate. During a late night argument with his fiancé in their parked car, a policeman approaches Bassam questioning their public loitering. Bassam, frustrated by the police interference, begins talking back to the officer. During this conversation, he twice employs a God-phrase in frustration. His recitation of "*la ilaha illalla*" (which is part of the *shahada*, the Muslim declaration of faith, literally meaning 'there

is no God but Allah'), helps to reveal his frustration. Ideologically, it can be seen as appropriate to call on the help of God at a time of need. In this way, it receives no censure from those around him. Yet, the confrontation with the police escalates and the film cuts to a shot of Bassam, bruised and beaten, at the police station, with the police officer standing nearby, also looking bruised. The viewers only see in retrospect the circumstances that brought, what began as a minor police questioning, to this level. The escalation resides around his refusal to get out of the car and climaxes in a blasphemous use of a God-phrase. According to the police officer who is retelling the story as another officer writes the report, Bassam finally refuses to exit the car by saying what translates to, "even God won't get me out." At this utterance, the entire group of people at the police station, note their disapproval. From dirty looks (especially by the fiancé), and head shaking in disbelief from other people at the police station, there is general recognition that this statement crosses the line of inappropriate. Even the police officer transcribing the exchange, questions, "*allah*?" to insure he heard the right subject, prior to writing. Rather than leaning on an ideology in which calling on God for help legitimated the usage, the blasphemous use violated the ideology that God is in control of all things. By noting that God *lacks* the power to remove Bassam from the vehicle, he places himself in a seat of power *over* God. In this context, the violation between usage and the ideology behind God-phrases came into direct conflict, and it is this instance that opens the door for censure.

In many ways calling on ideology to censure can be used in order to further personal agendas as well. While it is common for ideologies to be ignored in practice,

pointing out inconsistencies can be done when the grievance is very extreme, as the in example above, or when the person noting the blasphemy uses it to gain moral high ground. In the Syrian drama, *Ma Malakat Aymanukum*, Taufiq outwardly displays his adherence to religious practices. He does this through his appearance as well as speech. But, given the inconsistencies in his devotion, his attempts to paint himself as pious require that he continually reinforce in public this perception, including by high usages of God-phrases and claims to higher moral superiority.

During one scene in the first episode, Taufiq catches his sister, Laila, who had been out with her friends. Taufiq sees this is inappropriate, as she was supposed to be in school and because he writes off the friends as 'bad influences', going so far as to call them whores. In the scene, Taufiq approaches Laila and accuses her of lying about what she was doing. Laila is in the company of a group of friends, including Gharam, who gets involved between the siblings. The following exchange occurs, translated into English:

Laila: *walla* ('by God') I am not lying

Taufiq: Don't mention the name of Allah in front of these whores.

Gharam: What's wrong with you? Who do you think you are talking to?

Taufiq: With *amir al mu'mineen* ('commander of the faithful') *ma sha alla*

Taufiq's sarcastic response of calling Laila or potentially all the girls *amir al mu'mineen* in the final line, alludes to the title given to three out of the four *Rashidun* caliphs (or 'rightly guided' caliphs) the first 4 after the death of the Prophet, and for Shi'ites, a title given to the first Imam, Ali. Ali was especially known for his

tremendous piety. Contrasting piety with Laila's behavior not only yields sarcasm, but works to criticize Laila's behavior. Using *ma sha alla* ('it is God's will'), which is a way of praising someone's success or beauty, allows Taufiq to further criticize the behavior of the girls as inappropriate. This is due to the disjuncture between good actions (those worthy of *ma sha allah*) and what Laila and her friends have done. Also, the contrast between 'whores' and *amir al mu'mineen* forces the girls to appear as whores, since *amir al mu'mineen* is used for only tremendously pious people. By debasing the girls, Taufiq, in this scene, appears morally superior by contrast.

Also in this interaction, Taufiq's criticizes Laila's God-phrases as blasphemous. *Walla*, swearing by God, is frequently used by Arabic speakers, even those who do not demonstrate religious inclinations. Almost all of the characters in the film, even the ones who do not carry out any behaviors specifically indexical of Islam, say *walla*, yet this is the only instance that receives criticism. For Taufiq, the condemnation occurs because of the ideology that the recitation of the name of God should occur in the context of purity (and thus 'pure' people – not "whores"). Taufiq equates the use to blasphemy due to the fact that it is used in an environment he considers *lacking* sincerity and purity. Swearing also requires one to tell the truth because of the affiliation with the name of God. As Taufiq insists that Laila is lying, he can also be scolding her for blaspheming the name of God with lies. He also expresses a strong metalinguistic awareness of the structure (that is, the name of God), usage, and intended usage for such a phrase. This awareness allows him to criticize Laila's usage, and thus make his behavior look superior and a marker of piety by

contrast. While blasphemy involves the disjuncture between religious ideology and usage, it demonstrates the greatest awareness of the intended logic behind God-phrases. The same awareness can be taken into account in the case of piety, actively using the performativity of God-phrases in ways aligned with religious ideology and practice.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that through the ideology about the power of the name of God and linguistic structural integration of Allah, people can use Arabic God-phrases to accomplish actions and behaviors during dialogic interaction. It is also compatibility or disjuncture between this ideology and use that helps build toward piety or creates blasphemy, respectively. Rooted in religious ideals that there is no clear distinction between "religious" and "secular", God-phrases help create an atmosphere where religiosity spans contexts and behaviors. In Islam, every creation of God possesses the purpose of praising Allah with its own "silent eloquence," and for this reason "the entire universe could be seen, as it were, in a religious light: that is why every human act, even a seemingly profane one, is yet judged from religious viewpoints and regulated according to the divinely revealed Law" (Schimmel, 1994:xiii). With this ideology commonly represented in the idea that Islam is a "way of life," every action can be considered religious. Even language works towards creating this holistic and cohesive environment.

Understanding the usage of God-phrases helps constitute the groundwork for the religious environment in which young children grow up. How these children learn to use such phrases and when and how much of their ideological basis they come to understand and articulate are further projects that I would like to conduct. In thinking about language socialization children are learning to contextually apply the correct phrase but the ideology behind them seem to be delayed; this is seen in the negation of the God-phrase *al-hamdu li-llah*, by a young boy deciding he was not full. Yet this

potential disjuncture between ideology and use was not determined as blasphemy and went uncorrected. On the other hand, examples of similar disjunctures between ideology and use may be singled out as inappropriate. How might those conditions differ that leaves one uncorrected yet another an object of criticism? This curious condition of structure and use that seems disjoined from ideology deserves further investigation and examination.

While rooting this paper in films is not ideal, ethnographic fieldwork will help expand the understanding of the natural usage of God-phrases and their role in dialogic communication. More importantly, greater length of fieldwork will also expand knowledge of the ideologies behind the use of God-phrases. In addition to ideologies observed while I was in Jordan, many of the ideologies noted in this paper are based on religious teachings and theology, which may not be in line with general knowledge. Further study is necessary to determine which ideologies are most in play and how their origin and roots are explained and legitimated. Misconceptions about religious theology (such as incorrectly attributing information to religious sources) are common. The version of Eve's origin that states Eve emerged from Adam's rib is often believed *by Muslims* to be the narrative depicted in the Qur'an; yet this origin story emerges from other religious traditions living in the same area as early Muslims, not the Qur'an (Hassan, 1995: 42-43). It is also interesting to further explain how these ideologies get called upon to teach their "correct" use and criticize or shame someone for their "incorrect" usage. Spending more time with Arabic speaking Muslims will reveal many of those ideologies, as well as reactions when they may be

explicitly violated. While this discrepancy between ideology and usage frequently occurs in all languages, there may be patterns at the level of community, individual, or even context for when discrepancies are noted and when they pass as unremarkable. More ethnographic data will help better understand these circumstances.

Appendix

Arabic Phrase	**Literal Translation**	**Conveyed Meaning**	**Context of Use**	**Example[1] Ideologies Behind Phrases**
Al-hamdu li-llah	"All praise is due to Allah"	"I'm done"	To mark the end of something – especially eating	As good things are the result of God, thanks are always due to Him
		"fine"	As a reply to "how are you?" or "how did it go?"	
		"thanks"	As a reply to a compliment	
Alla a'lam	"God knows (best)"	Trust in God OR "I don't know"	To recognize that God knows better OR avoiding telling what one knows OR admitting lack of knowledge	Ultimately, God knows more than man can
Allahu akbar	"God is the greatest"	Mark of frustration	Can be used in a frustrating or troubling situation	Also heard in the first line of the *adhan* or call to prayer – *akbar* is one of the names of God
Alla ya'tik l'afye	"may God give you strength"	"Thank you"	Used to give thanks for the work someone did	Strength is from God
Alla ybarik fik(i)	"God bless you"	"Thanks"	Said in response to *Mabruk* or congratulations	Anything worthy of congratulating is due to God's favor

[1] This list of ideologies is by no means exhaustive. Many more ideologies are in play, in addition to or in place of these listed.

Arabic Phrase	**Literal Translation**	**Conveyed Meaning**	**Context of Use**	**Example Ideologies**
Alla yirhamu	"God have mercy on him"	"God bless the one who has passed away"	Out of respect, said after the mention of someone who died	At the day of Judgment (after one dies), man is judged for his actions
Alla ykhallik	"May God preserve you"	To thank some one OR when asking for something	Can give thanks or also used when requesting a favor of someone	God ultimately has control over all things
Alla yrith aleyk	"May God preserve you"	To thank some one OR when asking for something	Can give thanks or also used when requesting a favor of someone	God ultimately has control over all things
Alla ysallmak	"may God keep you safe"	"Thanks" OR reply to praise or good wishes	Reply to good wishes and blessings from interlocutor	Anything worthy of praise is due to God's favor
Alla ytawwel 'amrak	"May God lengthen your life"	Compliment to someone older	Honors older interactant	God is the ultimate giver and taker of life
Alla yustor alek	"may God protect you"	Protection for someone in trouble	In difficult situations	God ultimately has control over all things
As-salamu alaykum	"Peace be with you" [name of God implied]	"hello"	As a salutation (usually to a Muslim)	*As-salam* is one of the names of Allah (Peace/ soundness)
Astaghfir-allah	"I seek refuge in God"	In the event of something needing forgiveness	Recognizing behavior of self or others that is not moral or acceptable	Man is human and makes mistakes, but God is most forgiving when man repents
Bi-smi-llah	"in the name of Allah"	"I'm starting"	To being an action, such as starting to eat, taking a test, or beginning to read the Qur'an	Saying of the Prophet: should invoke the name of God with every action

Arabic Phrase	**Literal Translation**	**Conveyed Meaning**	**Context of Use**	**Example Ideologies Behind Phrases**
In sha-llah	"If God wills it"	To accept an invitation (when intention follows) OR to express uncertainty about invitation OR to get out of an invitation (without intention)	Displaces responsibility from accepting invitations	All things are up to God, not mankind
		"I hope" To talk about a future event	To mark something that will hopefully occur in the future	
Katter xerak	"[may God] increase your welfare"	"Thank you"	Said to thank someone, sometimes for their generosity	Material wealth is due to God – who has the power to take it away
La ilaha illalla	"There is no God but Allah"	Marks anger and frustration OR the Muslim declaration of faith	(In a religious context) indexes Muslim identity, OR in a frustrating situation	Comes from the *shahada* or declaration of faith and is rooted in one of the central teachings - monotheism
Ma sha allah	"It is God's will"	At something deserving admiration OR To avoid the evil eye	In the presence of something very beautiful or good	All things occur due to the will of God
Sallem diyyatak	"[may God] keep your hands"	"Thank you"	Said when someone has handed you something or prepared food	Man's actions are through the grace of God

Arabic Phrase	**Literal Translation**	**Conveyed Meaning**	**Context of Use**	**Example Ideologies Behind Phrases**
Sm-alla	"The name of God"	Exclamation of shock at a loud noise "may it not befall you!"	Protection against harm when a loud sound occurs	Call on the name of God for support/strength
Wa 'alakum-s-salam	"and on you be peace" [name of God implied]	Reply of "hello"	Reply to *As-salamu alaykum*	Qur'anic passage to always greet someone with equal or greater greeting (4.86)
W-alla	"by God"	"I swear" "really?"	To swear something or to request proof or assurance on the part of the interactant	One should strive to always tell the truth
Ya-lla	From *Ya alla* meaning "oh God"	"let's go" or "hurry up"	To get someone to come or move faster	Derivation from the name of God

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