




La revue *Aleph. langues, médias et sociétés* est approuvée par ERIHPLUS. Elle est classée à la catégorie B.

Crossing Cultures : Unravelling Pragmatic Complexities in Translating Religious Expressions from Algerian Arabic to English

تجاوز الثقافات : كشف التعقيدات البراغماتية في ترجمة التعابير الودية الدينية من العربية الجزائرية إلى الإنجليزية

Traverser les cultures : démêler les complexités pragmatiques dans la traduction des expressions religieuses de l'arabe algérien vers l'anglais

Lynda Dali Youcef - Ecole Normale Supérieure d'Oran Ammour Ahmed

	Soumission	Publication numérique	Publication Asjp
	16-05-2024	16-06-2024	25-07-2024

Éditeur : Edile (Edition et diffusion de l'écrit scientifique)

Dépôt légal : 6109-2014

Edition numérique : <https://aleph.edinum.org>

Date de publication : 16 juin 2024

ISSN : 2437-1076

(Edition ASJP) : <https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/PresentationRevue/226>

Date de publication : 25 juillet 2024

Pagination : 377-398

ISSN : 2437-0274

### Référence papier

Lynda Dali Youcef, « Crossing Cultures : Unravelling Pragmatic Complexities in Translating Religious Expressions from Algerian Arabic to English », *Aleph*, Vol 11 (3-2) | 2024, 377-398.

### Référence électronique

Lynda Dali Youcef, « Crossing Cultures : Unravelling Pragmatic Complexities in Translating Religious Expressions from Algerian Arabic to English », *Aleph* [En ligne], Vol 11 (3-2) | 2024, mis en ligne le 16 juin 2024. URL : <https://aleph.edinum.org/12346>



## **Crossing Cultures : Unravelling Pragmatic Complexities in Translating Religious Expressions from Algerian Arabic to English**

تجاوز الثقافات : كشف التعقيدات البراغماتية في ترجمة التعبيرات الودية الدينية من العربية الجزائرية إلى الإنجليزية

**Traverser les cultures : démêler les complexités pragmatiques dans la traduction des expressions religieuses de l'arabe algérien vers l'anglais**

LYNDA DALI YOUCEF

ECOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE D'ORAN AMMOUR AHMED

### **Introduction**

An integral aspect of acquiring social appropriateness involves a profound understanding of the utilisation of politeness expressions in everyday social interactions. Politeness, especially in its correlation with speech acts, has been a longstanding focus for linguists worldwide. In contemporary times, it has become a concept extensively explored in cultural studies and pragmatics. Consequently, any research revealing the utilisation of speech act realisation strategies significantly contributes to our comprehension of the culture within the speech community. Pragmatics, concerned with language in use, has delved deeply into the concept of politeness through speech act theory. Arabic speakers, belonging to a community renowned for strong social bonds among its members, are expected to exhibit distinctions that set them apart from speakers of other communities. This study seeks to broaden the scope of pragmatics by delving into the intricacies of politeness in Algerian Arabic.

The primary objective of this article is to shed light on major challenges associated with linguistic politeness in the context of translation studies. This research investigates select Algerian Arabic politeness expressions, identified by the researcher as indicating pragma-religious challenges for translators rendering Arabic texts into English. The focus here is solely on individual expressions drawn from everyday conversational behaviour. The decision to specifically examine religious politeness expressions, rather than other formulas, is motivated by the intuition that underlying principles governing politeness phenomena in human languages (Brown and Levinson, 1987) may vary linguistically, especially when religion plays a significant role in expressing politeness. Hence, Algerian Arabic politeness formulas incorporating religious backgrounds are expected to be fertile ground for pragma-religious challenges.

In essence, this study aims to scrutinise the extent to which a lack of comprehension of the pragmatic and cultural nuances in the use of politeness expressions may lead translators to inappropriately render Arabic religious formulas into English. It is well acknowledged that some of the most significant challenges in translation stem from cultural differences (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The pivotal question then arises: How can a translator bridge the cultural gap while rendering a religious Arabic expression in English without succumbing to a pragmatic failure that might distort the intended message?

## **1. Linguistic Politeness: Theoretical Foundations and Evolution**

Politeness, a foundational aspect of pragmatics, intricately guides the way language users navigate complex social interactions. The theoretical exploration of politeness phenomena traces its roots back to the seminal contributions of Grice and Searle. Grice's observation (1989:28) encapsulates the multifaceted nature of maxims, encompassing aesthetic, social, and moral dimensions. It emphasises norms like "Be polite", which participants typically adhere to, resulting in the generation of unconventional implicatures. Complementing this, Searle (1975:60) underscores that the use of indirect forms is primarily motivated by politeness, recognising politeness as a chief driver, though not the sole one.

The significant attention accorded to linguistic politeness theory within pragmatics in recent decades has given rise to an expansive and diverse literature. This body of work has essentially elevated linguistic politeness theory to the status of an independent field of study within pragmatics, constituting a distinct social approach to understanding linguistic behaviours. In this context, the term "linguistic" functions as a modifier for "politeness", serving to underscore the intrinsic connection between politeness and verbal interaction. This distinction is crucial, highlighting that politeness, in the linguistic sense, differs from non-verbal behaviours dictated by social norms or etiquette, such as offering a seat to an elderly person on a bus.

This study aims to unravel the intricate dynamics of linguistic politeness, delving into its theoretical underpinnings and its evolution into a specialised domain within the broader field of pragmatics. Understanding the nuances of linguistic politeness is pivotal for comprehending how individuals navigate verbal interactions with tact, incorporating social, cultural, and contextual considerations. By exploring the theoretical foundations and evolution of

linguistic politeness, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive framework for analysing politeness expressions in the specific context of translating religious politeness expressions from Algerian Arabic into English.

### **1.1. Unveiling the Intersection: Islamic Culture and Politeness**

The profound influence of religion on human history and identity surpasses any other force. Religion has played a pivotal role in shaping settlements, inciting wars, and fostering some of humanity's most cherished achievements in art and architecture. Beyond these external manifestations, religion, especially in the context of Islamic culture, serves as a guiding force, providing insights into matters of morality and ethical conduct. The influence of Islamic culture extends beyond religious rituals and permeates the daily lives of Arabic speakers. Central to this cultural tapestry is the belief among Muslims that the Quran serves as the fundamental source of Islamic teachings. Addressing a comprehensive array of subjects, including wisdom, worship, and law, the Quran is regarded as a timeless guide for human conduct.

It's crucial to note that the impact of Islamic culture is not confined to explicit discussions of religion. Instead, it subtly weaves into the fabric of everyday speech, manifesting not only when explicitly discussing religious matters but also in casual conversations. In the Arab world, religion stands out as a significant force shaping the cultural repertoire of its people. Morrow and Castleton (2007 :209) aptly describe this sociolinguistic phenomenon as unique and intrinsically linked to the Arabic language. The intertwining of religious principles with language usage reflects the depth of influence that Islamic culture exerts on linguistic expressions. This phenomenon contributes to the distinctive sociolinguistic landscape of the Arabic-speaking world, where expressions of politeness and interpersonal communication are inherently intertwined with religious values.

Hence, there exists a profound and pervasive influence of Islamic culture on the linguistic practices of Arabic speakers, emphasising its unique role in shaping politeness expressions and everyday conversations. Understanding this intersection is essential for unravelling the intricate dynamics of politeness within the cultural context of Arabic-speaking societies. The subsequent sections of this study delve into specific aspects of religious politeness expressions in Algerian Arabic, aiming to dissect the nuanced challenges faced during their translation into English.

## 1.2. Pragmatic Challenges: Concepts and Competences

The term “pragmatic failure” finds its etymological roots in Thomas’s seminal work, “Cross-cultural Pragmatic Failure” (1983). Thomas provides comprehensive definitions and classifications, establishing pragmatic failure as a foundational concept in cross-cultural pragmatics. Pragmatic failure, according to Thomas (1983), is succinctly defined as “the inability to understand what is meant by what is said” (1983:82). Closely intertwined with pragmatics are two essential notions: linguistic competence and communicative competence. Linguistic competence, as articulated by Lou and Goa (2011:284), involves the knowledge of language use and users. It encompasses the ability to create and comprehend sentences, recognise ambiguous structures, and grasp the nuances of a particular language. Beyond the mastery of standard pronunciation, accurate grammatical rules, and vocabulary, pragmatic linguistic competence delves into the interlocutor’s capacity to use language communicatively (Amaya, 2008). Recognising the inadequacy of Chomsky’s notion of linguistic competence, Hymes (1971) introduces “communicative competence”, which encompasses both linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge within a given context.

In cross-cultural communication, interlocutors must possess communicative competence, which extends to sociocultural rules in both the source and target languages. This competence acts as a safeguard against native language transfer, often termed pragmatic transfer, which could lead to pragmatic failure (Hashimian, 2012). Building on Hymes’s framework, Lou and Goa (2011) offer a comprehensive definition of communicative competence. It involves not only determining the possibility of something in a language but also assessing its feasibility, appropriateness, and acceptance within a particular Speech Community.

This multifaceted concept encompasses formal competence - knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, phonology, and semantics - and sociocultural competence - understanding the intricate relationship between language and its non-linguistic context. This includes knowing how to appropriately use and respond to different types of speech acts and understanding which address forms are suitable for various individuals and situations. In essence, the exploration of pragmatic failure necessitates a deep understanding of linguistic and communicative competence, emphasising their crucial role in fostering successful cross-cultural communication.

### 1.3 Navigating Lingua-Pragmatic Failure in Translation

Lingua-pragmatics, a subset of linguistics, delves into the study of “fixed” language forms with socio-pragmatic meanings (Shammas, 2006). These forms play a crucial role in developing social relationships through culture-specific politeness in interpersonal communication. While speakers from the same cultural background can easily grasp these forms, non-native speakers often face challenges in deciphering the nuanced messages they carry. Lingua-pragmatic forms are entirely language-specific and culture-specific, defining the speaker’s attitude towards the hearer and reflecting norms governing language use in various social interactions.

One significant aspect of lingua-pragmatics is expressions of politeness in diverse situations, acting as key components of communication within specific linguistic and cultural contexts. Lingua-pragmatic failure occurs when interpreters struggle to convey the intended meaning (pragmatic knowledge) of a message due to the inappropriate use of language. Pragmatic knowledge involves understanding the relationship between the propositional content (semantic meaning) and illocutionary force (pragmatic function) of politeness expressions.

Sometimes, this relationship is evident and straightforward, as seen in the Arabic expression/*lila mabrouka*/(ليلة مبروكة), translating to “have a blessed night”. In other instances, understanding may require familiarity with the conventions and conditions of use, as with the expression/*flæ: n ʕaba bæ: sek*/(فلان عبي باسك), which literally means “so and so took your suffering”, politely implicating that the person has passed away. Difficulty may also arise when the same expression serves multiple illocutionary acts in different situations. For example, the Arabic phrase/*inshallah*/(انشاءالله), meaning “if God permits”, can be interpreted differently based on the social dynamics. Responding to a command from someone of higher status or older age, it carries the force of a commitment to execute the command quickly, akin to “definitely” or “absolutely”. In contrast, when responding to a request from someone of equal or inferior status, it may not necessarily constitute a moral obligation and might be better translated as “ok”, “alright”, “I’ll see what I can do”, or “I’ll let you know”. Navigating through these nuances is vital for interpreters to avoid lingua-pragmatic failures in translation.

## 2. Research Methodology

The present research is dedicated to a meticulous examination of pragmatic failure within the nuanced context of interpreting religious formulas. Employing a synergistic blend of quantitative and descriptive

analyses, this study delves into the intricacies of translating politeness expressions from Arabic into English. The focus on pragmatic failure serves to underscore potential challenges and shortcomings encountered in the translation process, especially when dealing with linguistic elements imbued with religious significance. This exploration goes beyond a mere linguistic analysis, embracing the broader spectrum of pragmatic aspects, with the aim of unveiling how cultural and contextual factors intricately influence the translation of expressions laden with religious meaning.

The quantitative aspect of the analysis employs systematic data measurement, enabling the identification of patterns and trends in the translation of politeness expressions. Through rigorous quantitative examination, the research aims to discern recurrent issues and patterns in the rendering of religious formulas. This data-driven approach provides a structured understanding of the frequency and nature of pragmatic failures in translating politeness expressions, offering valuable insights into the systematic challenges faced by translators.

Simultaneously, the descriptive analysis component delves into the qualitative nuances, providing a nuanced understanding of the contextual and cultural intricacies that profoundly impact the successful rendering of religious formulas in translation. By qualitatively analysing selected instances, the research seeks to uncover the subtleties and complexities that quantitative measures might overlook. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the socio-cultural and contextual factors influencing the translation process, particularly when dealing with expressions embedded in the religious discourse.

Through this multifaceted approach, the research endeavours to contribute valuable insights into the complexities of translating politeness expressions, especially those rooted in religious contexts. The findings are anticipated to shed light on the pragmatic challenges faced by translators, offering a richer understanding of the intricate interplay between language, culture, and politeness in the realm of religious expression. This holistic exploration aims not only to identify challenges but also to provide a foundation for developing strategies to enhance the efficacy of translating religious politeness expressions in cross-cultural contexts.

## **2.1 Participants**

The study enlisted a diverse sample, encompassing both male and female participants, selected through a random sampling method. This cohort comprised 30 Master of Arts (MA) students currently pursuing their degrees



in translation studies at the University of Oran. These participants bring a wealth of academic experience to the study, having dedicated approximately three years to the rigorous exploration of translation and pragmatics. Their educational background equips them with the necessary knowledge to discern and appreciate the pivotal role that pragmatics plays within the realm of translation.

The deliberate inclusion of both genders in the participant pool aims to ensure a comprehensive and representative perspective, recognising the potential nuances in linguistic and pragmatic understanding that may arise across diverse demographic groups. By selecting MA students with a focused interest in translation studies, the research ensures a level of expertise and familiarity with the subject matter, creating a robust foundation for the investigation into the pragmatic aspects of translating religious expressions. The participants' educational journey positions them as informed contributors, capable of providing valuable insights into the intersection of translation, pragmatics, and the intricate world of religious language.

## **2.2 Instruments**

The data collection process employed a carefully crafted test administered to the participants. The test aimed to evaluate the translation proficiency of MA students within the Department of Translation, specifically focusing on their handling of various religious politeness expressions associated with four distinct speech acts: requests, expressions of gratitude, condolences, and congratulatory remarks. In this test, participants were tasked with translating a range of expressions from Arabic to English, offering the researcher valuable insights into the potential pragma-religious failures that might occur during the translation process. The primary objective was to discern whether students tended towards form-based translation, characterised by literal rendering, or if they leaned towards meaning-based translation, reflecting a more pragmatic and contextually sensitive approach.

The methodological approach for evaluating and analysing the data embraced a dual perspective, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Graphs were utilised to visually represent the prevalence of form-based translation (literal meaning) and meaning-based translation (pragmatic meaning) employed by the students. This distinction, referred to as pragmatic translation deviation, goes beyond conventional grammatical or semantic errors, providing a nuanced understanding of the participants' translation strategies.

Complementing the quantitative analysis, tables were constructed to catalogue and analyse the translations. The focus of this qualitative examination was primarily cultural, specifically delving into the lingua-pragmatic aspects that emerge at the intersection of language and culture. This two-fold analytical approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the pragmatic challenges encountered by MA students in translating religious expressions, shedding light on the interplay between linguistic choices and cultural considerations.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The translations of religious politeness expressions undertaken by the participants in this research have undergone thorough analysis and discussion. The objective is two-fold: first, to scrutinise the translation of politeness, and second, to explore the primary factors contributing to inappropriate translation. A fundamental tenet of proficient translation lies in the ability to convey the same message as the source language while employing the natural grammatical and lexical choices of the target language. However, the potential for misconceptions in meaning transfer remains a challenge.

Within this section, we delve into specific pragma-religious failures observed in the translation of Arabic politeness expressions into English. The ensuing tables present a selection of lingua-pragmatic religious polite formulas in Arabic, juxtaposing form-based translations (literal translations) into English with meaning-based translations (pragmatic translations) where applicable. As we scrutinise these expressions, it becomes evident that the nuances between both languages necessitate a nuanced examination to identify corresponding forms and their realisations. This exploration encompasses approximately 23 expressions translated by 30 students, forming a comprehensive dataset. Instances where the translated utterances deviated from the intended meaning in context have been categorised as form-based translations, as delineated in the tables below.

This detailed examination of the translation data aims to shed light on the complexities and challenges inherent in rendering religious expressions from Arabic into English. By discerning patterns of form-based and meaning-based translations, we gain valuable insights into the pragmatic failures that may arise during the translation process. The ensuing discussion will expound upon these findings, offering a deeper understanding of the interplay between linguistic choices, cultural considerations, and the intricacies of religious language in translation.

### 3.1 Requests: Navigating Face-threatening Acts in Translation

Requests constitute a ubiquitous aspect of everyday human interaction, representing one of the many speech acts that punctuate our daily communication. Drawing from the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), requests fall under the category of face-threatening acts (FTAs). These acts carry an inherent potential to jeopardise the hearer's negative face, demanding a delicate balance for those initiating requests.

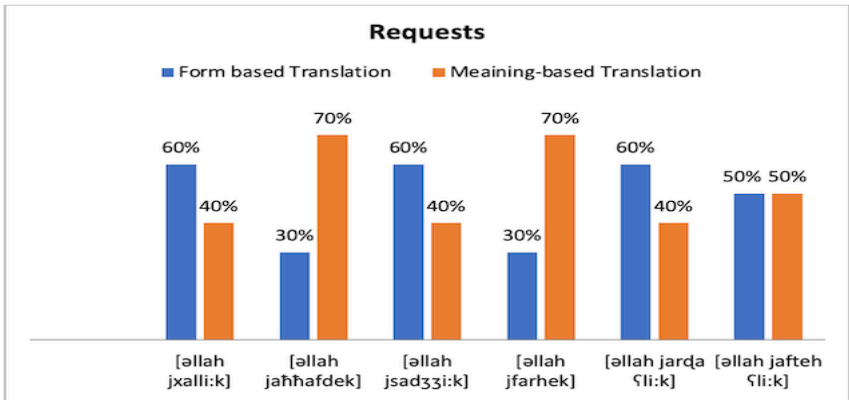
In Brown and Levinson's terminology, negative face refers to an individual's desire for autonomy and the avoidance of imposition. Therefore, the performance of a request necessitates a strategic approach to mitigate the perceived imposition on the hearer's negative face. The art of successful requesting lies in the ability to concurrently reduce the level of imposition inherent in the act being solicited while safeguarding the hearer's face. This delicate dance aims not only to secure compliance with the request but also to foster a positive and cooperative communicative environment.

Understanding the intricacies of requests is paramount in translation studies, particularly when dealing with religious expressions. The translation of polite requests involves more than a literal rendering of words; it requires an astute awareness of the cultural and pragmatic dimensions that influence how requests are formulated and interpreted. As we delve into specific examples of requests in the subsequent tables, the focus will be on discerning how pragma-religious failures manifest in the translation of these intricate speech acts. Through this exploration, we aim to uncover insights that contribute to the broader understanding of the challenges inherent in translating religiously infused requests from Arabic into English.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Form-based and meaning based translations of Arabic Requests

Requests	Arabic trans-cription	Form-based translation	Meaning-based translation
[əllah jxalli :k]	الله يخليك	May God preserve you	Could you ...?
[əllah jaħħafdek]	الله يحفظك	May God Protect you	Could you Please ...?
[əllah jsad3zi :k]	الله يسححك	May God make you succeed	Do you mind ...?

Requests	Arabic transcription	Form-based translation	Meaning-based translation
[əllah jfarhek]	الله يفرحك	May God Make you Happy	Would you kindly ...?
[əllah jarɔa ʕli :k]	الله يرضى عليك	May God be happy with you	Could you ...?
[əllah jafteh ʕli :k]	الله يفتح عليك	May God make things easy for you	Could you ...?



The examination of the translation data revealed noteworthy trends in the rendering of religiously infused requests. A significant proportion of participants (60%) opted for literal translations, utilising phrases such as “May God preserve you”, “May God make you succeed”, and “May God be happy with you” for the Arabic formulas [əllah jxallik] الله يخليك, [əllah jsad3zik] الله يسعدك, and [əllah jarɔa ʕlik] الله يرضى عليك respectively. However, this approach proves culturally and linguistically insufficient for the target readership, as it fails to convey the nuanced implicature encapsulated in the original Arabic formulas. The inadequacy stems from the omission of the illocutionary force intended in the Arabic requests. The literal translations in English inadvertently shift the focus to the praise of God independently

of the speech act of making requests. This cultural and pragmatic shortfall indicates a pragma-religious failure, where the intended meaning is lost in translation due to an exclusive reliance on semantic equivalence.

On a positive note, a substantial portion of student translators (70%) demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the illocutionary force inherent in formulas such as [əllah jaħħafdek] الله يحفظك and [əllah jfarhek] الله يفرحك. Recognising these as requests, students employed modals (e.g., “will, would, could, etc.”) and question forms to convey the intended meaning. This strategic use of language devices served to minimise the imposition and enhance the factor of optionality, aligning with the cultural nuances of the Arabic expressions.

In essence, this result underscores the importance of not only linguistic but also pragmatic competence in translating religiously laden requests. The challenges lie not merely in the lexical choices but in capturing the cultural implicatures embedded in these expressions, a crucial consideration for effective cross-cultural communication. The ensuing discussion will further unpack these findings, offering insights into the complexities of translating religious politeness expressions in a pragmatic context.

### **3.2 Thanking: Navigating Politeness in Expressions of Gratitude**

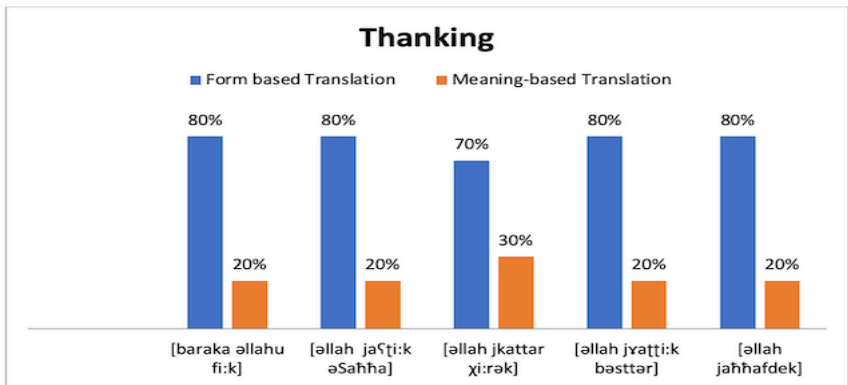
Thanking, an act of expressing gratitude, is a fundamental and convivial speech act deeply ingrained in daily communication. It serves as a universal ritual and convention observed by people worldwide. In the context of this study, the focus is on unravelling the intricacies of thanking expressions in Arabic and the challenges encountered in their translation. Arabic, as exemplified in the ensuing table, exhibits a richness in the repertoire of polite expressions for conveying gratitude. The cultural nuances and linguistic subtleties embedded in Arabic thanking expressions contribute to the complexity of translating these sentiments into English. A mere lexical translation often falls short in capturing the depth of politeness and cultural respect encapsulated in Arabic gratitude expressions.

As we delve into specific examples in the subsequent tables, the goal is to unearth instances of pragma-religious failures in the translation of thanking expressions. The analysis will shed light on how the unique cultural and religious contexts intricately woven into Arabic thanking expressions pose challenges for translators. Additionally, it will explore the extent to which these challenges impact on the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication. This section aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the complexities

inherent in translating expressions of gratitude from Arabic into English, emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of both linguistic and cultural dimensions. The ensuing discussion will delve deeper into specific examples, offering insights into the pragmatic intricacies of rendering thanking expressions within a religious and cultural framework.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of form-based and meaning-based translations of Arabic thanking

Thanking	Arabic transcription	Form-based translation	Meaning-based translation
[baraka əllahu fi : k]	بارك الله فيك	Bless you	God Bless you
[əllah jaʕti:k əSahħa]	الله يعطيك الصحة	May God give you good health	Thank you,
[əllah jkattar χi :rək]	الله يكثر خيرك	May God increase your welfare	Thank you,
[əllah jaħħafdek]	الله يحفظك	May God protect you	Thank you,



In examining the translation choices made by student translators, a prevalent pattern emerged wherein the formula “God bless you” was uniformly employed in both form-based translation (80%) and meaning-based translation (20%) of the Arabic expression [baraka əllahu fik] الله برك فيك. However, this seemingly uniform translation belies a nuanced contrast in the semantic functions these expressions serve in their respective cultural contexts.

A noteworthy observation lies in the potential divergence when two languages share semantically similar routines but diverge in the functions they fulfil. Take, for instance, the expression “God bless you !” which is utilised in both English and Arabic cultures. In English, it typically accompanies a sneeze, whereas in Arabic, it constitutes an expression of gratitude extended in response to a service or kind act. The omnipresence of Allah in various aspects of real-life situations in Arabic contrasts with English, where such ubiquity is not mirrored. An illustrative example is the routine politeness in Arabic where, post-sneeze, the individual praises Allah with the invocation/ *al ḥamdu lillah/ الحمد لله* (praise be to Allah). This distinction underscores how cultural routines and linguistic expressions are deeply intertwined and not easily translatable between languages.

Moreover, the challenge intensifies when seeking one-to-one equivalents for gratitude formulas in English. Approximately 20% of respondents opted for a generic translation, “thank you”, highlighting the difficulty in capturing the specificity and depth inherent in Arabic thanking expressions. This challenges the notion of a direct linguistic correspondence between the two languages. The intricacies of translating gratitude formulas stem from the specific religious connotations embedded in these expressions and the multifaceted pragmatic functions they fulfil. It becomes apparent that a rigid one-to-one equivalence is elusive, necessitating a nuanced approach that transcends literal translation to encapsulate the cultural and pragmatic dimensions at play. This section illuminates the complexities inherent in rendering expressions of gratitude across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

### **3.3 Condolences : Navigating Nuances in Expressing Sympathy**

Condolences represent a domain where the richness of Arabic expressions adds layers of specificity, designating the degree of loss (be it due to death, failure, or other unfortunate circumstances), capturing the formality of the situation, and encapsulating the interpersonal level of relation. In contrast, the landscape of condolence expressions in English is relatively sparse, lacking the intricate levels of formality conveyed in their Arabic counterparts. This discrepancy presents a nuanced challenge for translators grappling with the task of preserving the depth and sensitivity inherent in Arabic condolences.

Within the realm of Arabic expressions, there exists a spectrum that allows individuals to tailor their condolences based on the nature of the loss and the closeness of the relationship. This versatility is a testament to the intricate

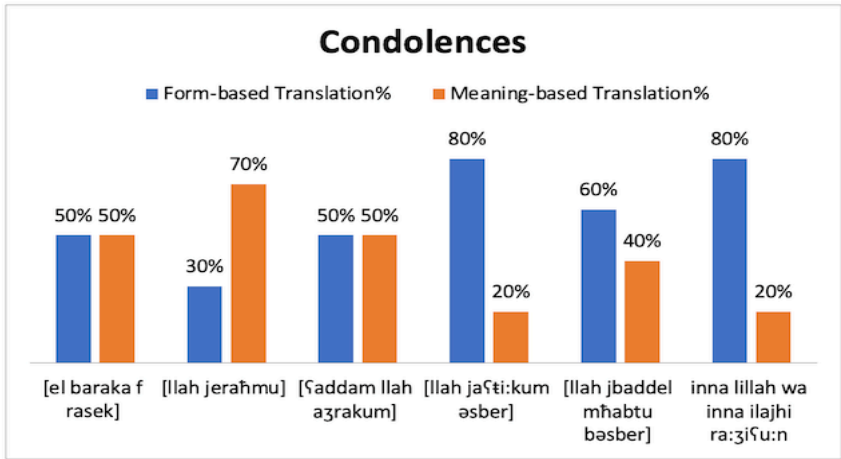
social fabric woven into the Arabic language, where linguistic expressions mirror the cultural nuances associated with expressing sympathy.

Conversely, English, while certainly capable of conveying condolences, tends to employ a more standardised set of expressions. The challenge, therefore, lies in finding a balance between linguistic equivalence and cultural resonance. The formal equivalence of Arabic condolence expressions to only one or two English counterparts underscores the intricacies involved in preserving the cultural and emotional nuances inherent in expressions of sympathy.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of form-based and meaning-based translations of Arabic condolences

Condolences	Arabic transcription	Form-based translation	Meaning-based translation
[el baraka f rasek]	البركة فراسك	Blessing on yourself	Sorry to hear about your loss
[llah jeraħmu]	لله يرحمو	May God bless him	May God have mercy on him !
[šaddam llah aʒrakum]	عظّم الله اجرکم	May God increase your reward	Sorry to hear about your loss
[llah jaʕti :kum əsber]	لله يعطیکم اصبر	May Allah comfort you	Please accept my sincere condolences
[llah jbaddeḷ mħabtu : bəšber	لله یبدّل محبتو بالصبر	May Allah replace his love with patience	Please accept my sincere condolences
Inna lillah wa inna ilayhi ra :dʒiʕu :n	إن لله وإن إليه راجعون	We belong to Allah and to him we return	Please accept my sincere condolences





In the analysis of the results, it was observed that a significant portion of the student participants (50%) opted for form-based translations that were overly direct and, in some instances, inappropriate in terms of politeness in the target culture. This tendency was manifested in their paraphrasing of the source formulas, exemplified by :

- [el baraka f rasek] البركة فراسك translated as “Blessing on yourself”
- [llah jbaddel mħabtu bəsber] لله يبذل محبتو بالصبر translated as “May Allah replace his love with patience.”

These politeness formulas could have been more appropriately rendered as “Please accept my sincere condolences”. Consequently, a majority of the students (80%) failed to uphold the polite speech act of conveying condolences in the target language. Instead, they provided their own interpretations of the implicated meaning, resulting in a meaning-based translation of the formulas. This deviation from the expected politeness norms in the target culture highlights a noteworthy aspect of pragma-religious failure in the students’ translation practices.

In essence, this section sheds light on the intricacies of translating condolences, emphasising the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural and linguistic variations. Translators must navigate the challenge of maintaining the depth and formality of Arabic expressions within the constraints of the English language, ensuring that the translated message resonates authentically with the intended cultural and emotional context.

### 3.4. Congratulations

Congratulations fall into the category of expressive speech acts, wherein the speaker conveys their emotions. These expressions are typically employed in the context of joyous events, encompassing linguistic formulas utilised during weddings, births, and religious festivals. These occasions evoke both public and private joy, reflecting the cultural richness and historical heritage of traditional Algerian society. Algerian marriage ceremonies, in particular, possess a distinctive identity that amalgamates various practices prevalent in the region.

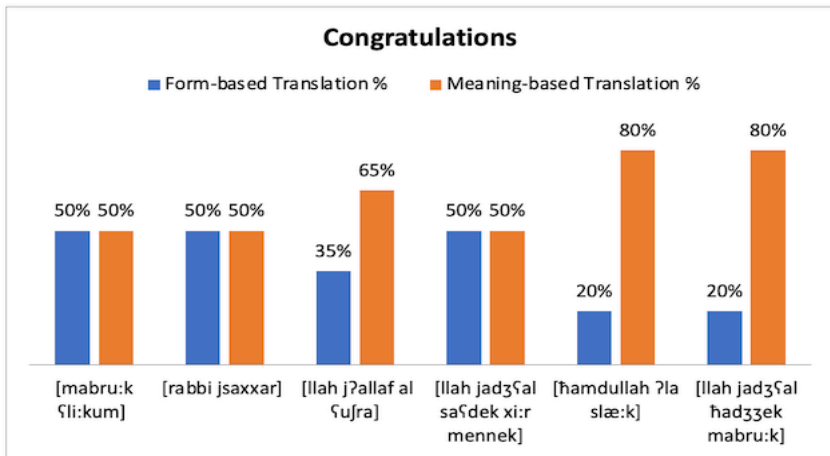
In Algerian society, congratulations are deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions. The linguistic formulas associated with congratulatory expressions carry significant weight, especially in the context of religious festivals, weddings, and other celebratory occasions. The unique identity of Algerian marriage ceremonies, shaped by diverse regional practices, further emphasises the cultural nuances intertwined with congratulatory expressions.

These linguistic expressions of congratulation play a pivotal role in expressing joy and goodwill. Understanding and translating these expressions pose challenges, particularly when navigating the pragma-religious intricacies inherent in Algerian Arabic. As observed in the previous sections, the translation of religious politeness expressions, such as those used in congratulation, demands careful consideration of both linguistic and cultural elements. In conclusion, the linguistic expressions associated with congratulations provide a lens through which we can explore the joyous occasions in traditional Algerian society. The congruence of linguistic and cultural aspects in these expressions contributes to the broader understanding of the pragmatic challenges encountered in translating religious politeness expressions. This insight reinforces the significance of a nuanced approach in translation studies, particularly when dealing with the cultural intricacies of congratulation in Algerian Arabic.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of form-based and meaning-based translations of Arabic congratulations

Congratulations	Arabis transcription	Form-based Translation	Meaning-form Translation
-----------------	-------------------------	---------------------------	-----------------------------

[mabru :k fli :kum]	مبروك عليكم	May you be blessed	Congratulations !
[rabbi jsaxxar]	رَبِّي يَسَخِّرْ	May God bless your union	May the love you share today grow stronger
[llah jʔallaf al fʊfra]	الله يَأْلَفُ العشرة	May Allah bless your union	Congratulations !
[llah jadʒʕal saʕdek xi :r mennek]	الله يجعل سعدك خير منك	May God make your luck i.e., husband better than you	Congratulations !
[hamdullah ʔla slæ :k]	الحمد لله على السلاك	Relief to you	Congratulations !
[llah jadʒʕal hadʒʒek mabru :k]	الله يجعل حجَّك مبروك	May Allah bless your hajj	Congratulations !



The examination of students’ translations of congratulatory formulas revealed that 50% of them resorted to form-based translations, indicating a significant challenge in accurately translating congratulatory expressions. This tendency resulted in serious damage to the pragmatics of the discourse, as illustrated by instances such as

- “May you be blessed?”
- “May God bless your union.”
- “May God make your luck, i.e. husband, better than you.”

These instances showcase non-equivalence, posing potential issues for language translators. When attempting to translate and directly use their first-language formulas in the target language, the outcome may range from an exaggerated or stylistically awkward contribution to one that makes little to no sense in the target language.

In contrast, a substantial majority (80%) of student translators opted for a meaning-based translation, employing the generic expression “congratulations!” for formulas like [ħamdullah ʔla slæk] الحمد لله على السلاك (said to a woman who has just had a baby) and [llah jadʒʒal ħadʒʒek mabruk] الله يجعل حجك مبروك (said to someone about to make a pilgrimage to Mecca). Only a minority (20%) utilised form-based translation. This contrast highlights a notable difference between Arabic and English routines, where many Arabic expressions involve references to religious concepts not present in their English counterparts.

The utilisation of meaning-based translations by a majority of students suggests an inclination towards conveying the general sense of congratulation rather than a literal rendering. This emphasises the challenge of retaining the religious and cultural nuances embedded in Arabic congratulatory expressions when translated into English. The prevalence of religious references in Arabic expressions underscores the importance of considering cultural and religious dimensions in the translation process to ensure accurate and culturally sensitive communication.

### **3.5 Pragma-Religious Challenges in Translating Religious Expressions**

This section delves into the significant pragma-religious challenges encountered when translating Arabic religious expressions. In the context of this study, “religion” encompasses the intricate interplay of feelings, emotions, attitudes, and moral traditions embedded in formulas, reflecting the socio-religious system of Arab culture. As noted by Piamenta (1979), Islam serves as a crucial factor preserving the Arabic language from degeneration, with Allah, frequently invoked in Arabic politeness formulas, exerting substantial influence on Arab social relations. The prevalence of religious politeness expressions in Arabic reflects a culture and language specificity, making direct

translation challenging. In most cases, the translated equivalent serves as only a rough approximation, failing to convey the intended effect. Numerous expressions, deeply rooted in Islamic influence, underscore Arabs' profound veneration for Allah, a belief consistently reinforced through worship, praise, and gratitude.

One noteworthy observation is that translators may compromise the religious background to achieve an equivalent translation. While Arabs rely on fixed linguistic expressions to convey polite attitudes, the use of models for requests in English appears more natural. Religious politeness expressions, deeply indicative of the source language culture, present a stark contrast between Arabic and English. These linguistic and cultural differences significantly impact lingua-pragmatic expressions and their translation.

The sacrifice of religious background for equivalence highlights the challenge of navigating the distinct linguistic and cultural contexts between Arabic and English. It underscores the difficulty in preserving the depth and cultural nuances of religious politeness expressions during translation. This observation emphasises the importance of a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach in the translation process to ensure effective cross-cultural communication. The study further elucidates how linguistic and cultural disparities contribute to the pragma-religious challenges faced by translators working with Arabic religious expressions.

## **Conclusion**

This study has brought to light the profound cultural and social disparities between Arabic and English, particularly in the realm of lingua-pragmatic expressions. The comparison reveals a notable richness in Arabic polite forms, attributed to the close-knit relationships prevalent in Arabic societies. The familial and communal bonds among family members, relatives and neighbours contribute to the extensive repertoire of polite expressions in Arabic, encompassing requests, thanking, congratulations, and condolences. Arabic politeness expressions exhibit complexity, consisting of diverse words with distinct semantic and linguistic characteristics. Their translation is inherently pragmatic and contextual, requiring careful consideration of the intended meaning rather than relying solely on linguistic and semantic equivalences. This pragmatic nature underscores the translator's pivotal role in navigating the intricacies of politeness expressions, especially when transitioning between Arabic and English.

The study emphasises the challenges inherent in translating such language forms studied under lingua-pragmatics, highlighting their language-specific structure and culture-specific communication. The intricacies involved in negotiating their meanings further underscore the potential for pragmatic failure. To mitigate these challenges and foster successful cross-cultural communication, the key lies in understanding the cultural code that aligns with the use of potential equivalents in the target language.

In essence, this research underscores the necessity for translators to go beyond linguistic and semantic dimensions, delving into the cultural nuances that underpin politeness expressions. Learning and applying the cultural code that aligns with the target language are crucial steps in avoiding pragmatic failure and ensuring accurate, contextually appropriate translations. As linguistic and cultural diversity continues to shape global communication, the insights from this study contribute to the broader understanding of the complexities involved in translating politeness expressions between Arabic and English.

- Amaya, L. F. (2008). Teaching culture: Is it possible to avoid pragmatic failure? *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, 2, 11-24.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Harvard University Press.
- Hashemian, M. (2012). Cross-cultural difference and pragmatic transfer in Persian refusals. *The Journal of Teaching Language Skills*, 4(3), 24-42.
- Hymes, D. (1971). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*. Penguin, 46-63.
- Kasper, G. (1997). Can pragmatic competence be taught? *University of Hawaii, Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Centre*, 2-22.
- Luo, X. & Goa, J. (2011). On pragmatic failures in second language learning. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 1(3), 284-300.
- Morrow, J. A. & Castleton, B. (2007). The impact of globalization on the Arabic language. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 16(2).
- Piamenta, M. (1979). *Islam in Everyday Arabic Speech*. Brill.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics, vol. 3 Speech Acts*. Academic Press, 59-82.
- Shammas, N. (2006). Lingua-pragmatic politeness and translatability. *Damascus University Journal*, 21(34), 23-56.
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4, 92-115.

---

## Abstract

---

Effective communication between societies relies on translation as a crucial tool. Translation facilitates communication among individuals who speak different languages, serving as a conduit for transferring meaning. It is more than a simple transference of information from the source language to the target language; it is a nuanced process that demands the conveyance of all semantic elements present in the source language. The resulting target text must be not only linguistically accurate but also equivalent in meaning to the source text. This study seeks to explore pragmatic failures in translating religious politeness expressions from Algerian Arabic into English. Speech acts have been extracted from various everyday communication contexts, reflecting diverse speech events. The participants consist of 30 randomly selected Master's students pursuing degrees in translation studies at the University of Oran. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were employed in the evaluation and analysis of the collected data. The findings reveal that insufficient pragmatic-religious competence often leads to alterations in the intended meaning of the source message. While a subset of Arabic religious formulations successfully translates into corresponding English expressions, numerous Arabic expressions encounter pragmatic challenges, hindering their ability to convey comparable religious meanings in English. The study underscores the necessity of learning the cultural code that aligns with the use of potential equivalents in the target language to mitigate pragmatic failures. In conclusion, this research sheds light on the complexities of translating religious politeness expressions and emphasises the significance of cultural awareness to avoid pragmatic failures when working across languages.

---

## Keywords

---

Pragmatic-religious failure, Islamic expressions, translation, culture

---

### مستخلص

الترجمة ضرورية للتواصل بين المجتمعات. إنها طريقة للتواصل بين الأشخاص الذين لديهم لغات مختلفة. لا يقتصر الأمر على نقل المعنى من اللغة المصدر إلى اللغة الهدف، ولكنه أيضاً عملية تتضمن نقل جميع ميزات المعنى في اللغة المصدر، ويجب أن يكون النص الهدف مكافئاً للنص المصدر. تشمل البحوث الحالية الفشل التداولي للترجمة الإنجليزية لبعض العبارات الدينية وصيغ التحية باللغة العربية. تمت ترجمة الصيغ، التي تم اختيارها في التواصل اليومي خلال خطب مختلفة، من طرف 30 طالب ماجستير في قسم الترجمة بجامعة وهران. حيث تبين من خلال هذه الدراسة أن عدم كفاية الكفاءة العملية الدينية غالباً ما يؤدي إلى تغيير المعنى الموجود في النص المصدر. كما أظهرت أنه على الرغم من إمكانية ترجمة

بعض الصيغ الدينية العربية إلى صيغ دينية إنجليزية مقابلة، تبقى ترجمة العديد من الصيغ العربية غير مطابقة عملياً في إعطاء معنى ديني مقابل باللغة الإنجليزية

كلمات مفتاحية

فشل براغما ديني، عبارات إسلامية، معادلة الترجمة، الثقافة

## Résumé

La traduction est essentielle pour communiquer entre les sociétés. C'est un moyen de communication entre des personnes ayant des langues différentes. Il ne s'agit pas seulement de transférer le sens de la langue source vers la langue cible, mais c'est aussi un processus qui implique de transmettre toutes les caractéristiques de sens dans la langue source, et le texte cible doit être équivalent au texte source. Cette étude porte sur l'échec pragmatique de la traduction en anglais de certaines formules de politesse religieuse en arabe. Les formules, qui ont été sélectionnées dans la communication quotidienne lors de différents discours, ont été traduites par 30 étudiants en maîtrise au département de traduction de l'Université d'Oran. Nous illustrerons ces discussions théoriques par une approche mixte, quantitative et qualitative. L'étude a montré qu'une compétence pragmatique religieuse inadéquate conduit souvent à une altération du message source. Elle a révélé que, si quelques formules religieuses arabes peuvent être traduites en formules religieuses anglaises correspondantes, de nombreuses formules arabes échouent de manière pragmatique à donner un sens religieux correspondant en anglais. Par conséquent, la seule façon d'éviter un échec pragmatique dans leur utilisation dans une langue étrangère est d'apprendre le code culturel qui correspond à l'utilisation d'une expression équivalente dans la langue cible.

## Mots-clés

Échec pragma-religieux, expressions islamiques, équivalence de traduction, culture