

Sarcasm: An Illocutionary Force of Gratitude Expressions in Algerian Arabic**Khedidja HAMMOUDI**

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Received: 10/03/2023**Revised:** 02/07/2023**Accepted:** 16/11/2023**Abstract**

Thanking does not all the time involve the sense of being grateful to someone for something; rather, it has other functions and purposes among which sarcasm is one. This paper attempts at revealing the sarcastic function of thanking by taking Algerian Arabic as a data source. Analysis of the illocutionary force of this speech act shows that this pragmatic phenomenon can be explained with reference to violation of felicity conditions, floating of Grice's maxims of the cooperative principle, and activating conversational implicature.

Keywords: Algerian arabic, Grice's Maxims, thanking, sarcasm.

التهمك قوة الخطاب الموجودة في عبارات الشكر في الدارجة العربية الجزائرية

ملخص

لا ينطوي تقديم الشكر طوال الوقت على الشعور بالامتنان لشخص ما على شيء ما؛ بل له وظائف وأغراض أخرى من بينها السخرية. تحاول هذا البحث الكشف عن الوظيفة الساخرة للشكر من خلال أخذ اللغة العربية الجزائرية كمصدر للبيانات. يُظهر تحليل القوة الإرشادية لفعل الكلام هذا أنه يمكن تفسير هذه الظاهرة البراغماتية بالإشارة إلى انتهاك شروط السعادة المعبرة للشكر، وكذا تعويم مبادئ جريس للمبدأ التعاوني، بالإضافة إلى تفعيل تأثير المحادثة. الكلمات المفتاحية: لغة عربية جزائرية، مبادئ جريس، شكر، تهكم.

Le sarcasme : une force illocutoire d'expressions de gratitude en arabe algérien

Résumé

Remercier n'implique pas toujours le sentiment d'être reconnaissant envers quelqu'un pour quelque chose ; au contraire, il a d'autres fonctions et objectifs parmi lesquels le sarcasme en fait partie. Cet article tente de révéler la fonction sarcastique du remerciement en prenant l'arabe algérien comme source de données. L'analyse de la force illocutoire de cet acte de langage montre que ce phénomène pragmatique peut être expliqué en référence à la violation des conditions de félicité, au flottement des maximes de Grice sur le principe coopératif et à l'activation de l'implicature conversationnelle.

Mots-clés : L'arabe algérien, la maxime de Grice, le remerciement, le sarcasme.

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Introduction:

Thanking is an expressive speech act whereby a speaker reveals a psychological state towards a state of affairs or person⁽¹⁾. That is why it has some features as: 1) factivity which refers to the state of affairs presupposed by the speaker to be true, 2) a psychological state which is expressed, and 3) the propositional content that shows some property ascribed to the speaker or the hearer⁽²⁾.

Thanking, as analysed by Searle⁽³⁾, brings the idea that the illocutionary force of thanking verbs is to express an attitude that they are factive. Accordingly, thanking (for) is an act whereby a speaker expresses gratitude to a previously done action by the addressee and which benefited the speaker who, in turn, has a feeling of gratefulness, and therefore utters the thanking⁽⁴⁾. However, this is not necessarily true all the time since the speaker need not be grateful as we will show later in the present work that the thanking may serve other functions than expressing gratitude. Interestingly, there are significantly different ways to describe thanking functions. Searle's rules are sometimes broken, such as when "thank you" is used ironically⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾ or has the function of closing a conversation, or accepting/ rejecting an offer, and so forth.

When investigating the pragmatics of thanking, it has been suggested that the use of pragmatic frames for pragmatic phenomena in the sense that this speech act event description originates in Olshtain and Cohen⁽⁷⁾, and Hoppe-Graff et. al⁽⁸⁾, the frames are, simply categorized, distinct variables for the context where a particular utterance can take place. These frames should be known by the speaker for a successful communicative situation. In this vein, it is proposed⁽⁹⁾ that certain situational parameters for thanking should be taken into account.

The distinction between simple and intensified expressions of gratitude, as well as the formal and situational aspects of thanking, can be elucidated further. Simple expressions encompass various functions such as phatic communication, serving as a closing signal, and expressing acceptance or sincere gratitude. The intonation also plays a role, with a rising tone typically associated with simple thanking expressions, while a falling tone is linked to intensified ones. Continuation patterns, like saying "that's okay," are common for both simple and intensified thanking. Additionally, discourse-specific features, including the context of the dialogue and the manner in which thanking expressions are employed, contribute to the simple thanking dynamic. On the other hand, situational features delve into the context in which thanking occurs. This involves considering the settings, such as whether it takes place at work or in a domestic or a more intimate environment. The participants in the conversation, including their social roles and personal relations (such as family members versus strangers), also influence the formality and the tone of thanking. Furthermore, the type of thanking is contingent upon the nature of the favor performed, whether it is a major or minor gesture.

According to many scholars, the speech act of thanking is actually viewed as a universal illocution across different languages and worldwide cultures⁽¹⁰⁾⁽¹¹⁾. In this vein, Jautz⁽¹²⁾ claims that expressions of gratitude are employed to communicate the speaker's appreciation to the addressee for something they have said or done. Likewise, he highlights that expressing gratitude, characterized by phrases like "thank you" and "thanks," tends to be a customary speech act where speakers consistently use these phrases whenever they wish to convey appreciation. For Eisenstein and Bodman⁽¹³⁾, expressing gratitude has the potential to foster a sense of warmth and unity between those engaged in conversation. Within the same interest, Jung⁽¹⁴⁾ states that expressions of gratitude, through their formulaic nature, contribute to strengthening the connection between conversational partners. Moreover, certain gratitude expressions serve various purposes, including initiating conversations, signaling closure, bidding farewell, and providing positive reinforcement.

In response to that, the present study focuses on other functions of thanking expressions in Algerian Arabic since the latter is not widely investigated particularly in the field of pragmatics. It tries to highlight sarcasm as one of the prominent facets of thanking depending

on the context; a reason for which many concrete examples are dropped from daily life conversations held in dialectal Arabic.

1-How to express thanking in Algerian Arabic:

There is no precise thanking formulaic expression in Algerian Arabic. Instead of having a standard form like other worldwide languages, gratitude, in Algerian Arabic, is expressed by different strategies which mainly include blessings, good wishes and prayers to the *thankee*. The choice of these formulae depends highly on the socio-pragma-linguistic competence of the *thanker*. Other factors which may influence the use of these thanking expressions involve social variables such as age, gender, social distance, the level of formality, the educational background, etc. Here are some instances of thanking phrases in Algerian Arabic:

e.g. 1.1[j-aʃtʰi:-k ʻsaħħa] meaning may god give you health.

Give.3rd.sing.masc.fut-you.acc health

e.g. 1.2 [ba:raka ʎa:hu fi:k] meaning god bless you.

Bless.3rd.sing.masc.pres god.nom in-you

e.g. 1.3[saħi:t] meaning may god give you health.

health.2nd.sing.masc.pres

e.g. 1.4 [tʃi:] meaning may god let you live .

Live.2nd.sing.masc.futur

e.g. 1.5[j-erħam wa:lɔi:-k] meaning bless your parents.

Bless.3rd.sing.masc.futur parent.plur-your.poss

e.g. 1.6[rabb-i jɔza:zi:-k] meaning god reward you.

God.me.poss reward.3rd.sing.masc.futur-you.acc

e.g. 1.7[rabbi jfarħek] meaning may god make you happy.

God-me.poss happy.3rd.sing.masc.futur-you.acc

e.g. 1.8[rabbi jxeli:k] meaning may god let you alive.

God-me.poss live.3rd.sing.masc.futur-you.acc

e.g. 1.9[ala:h jnawrek] meaning may god give you shine.

God shine.3rd.sing.masc.futur-you.acc

All of these phrases mean "thank you".

2- Behind Thanking:

In Algerian Arabic, a thanking expression such as [jaʃtik safia or ba:raka'lahu:fi:k] can convey a different function whilst uttered in additional supra-segmental phonological features. These sound-features include: sharp voice quality, different intonation, noticeable stress on a given word of the thanking phrase, and elongating some vowels. It, conspicuously, sounds to the addressee's ear that this thanking locution is seriously a perfectly different message than gratitude. It generally notifies the hearer about a negative emotional state towards an unpleasant thing or an annoying unexpected action (previously done by the addressee and which really anger, offend, and sometimes even hurt the thanker, i. e., the speaker). Let us consider some examples.

e.g. 2.1 jaʃtʰi:k safifia ʃla lʃafsa lli derthali w fiaʃamtni guda:m na:s

jaʃtik

Give. 3rd.sing.masc. fut

saha ʃla
healt for

L-ʃafsa
The-

lli
that

		h			behavior	
Dert-ha-li						
		w	hafamt-ni		godem	nas
Do.3 rd .sing.	masc.past-it.fem-	and	Shy.3 rd .sing.	masc.past-	In front	people
me.acc			me.acc			
May god give you health for what you did! You embarrassed me in front of people...						
e.g. 2.2 Barak'allahu fi:k a ssi fla:n kabbart bija jkabar mi:zek...						
baraka	lahu		Fi-k	Aa		ssi
Bless.3 rd .sing.	God.nom		In- you	oh		sir
masc.pres						
flane	kabbart		bija	jkabar		mize-k
x	Make.2 nd .sing.		For-me	Make.3 rd .sing.	masc.	Honor-
	masc.past-			Fut-		your.poss
	grow- me.acc			grow.		
God bless you sir! You highered me, may god higher you too						

e.g. 2.3Merci infiniment pour le geste ana nestahel... Thanks a lot for the thing you did, I deserve...

mersi	infinimo	Pu:y	Le-dzest	ana	nestahel
thanks	infinite ly	for	The-gesture	I	Deserve.1st.sing.pres

e.g. 2.4Sahiiit wah hadi hija lkelma... Thanks! Yes, that's the promise

safiit	wah	hadi	hja	L-kelm-a
thanks	yes	this	It.fem	The- word.fem

3- The Explanation of This Kind of Speech Act:

Each speech act has three dimensions: locution, illocution, and perlocution. The first one refers to the act of producing an understandable meaningful string of speech. All of the above examples are locutions. In other words, a locution refers to the fact of saying a linguistic expression known as an utterance.

The second facet is the illocutionary act/ force. It generally refers to the action intended to be performed by the speaker in uttering the locution. In the mentioned examples, there is a kind of confusion of what the illocution of the "formulaic expressions of gratitude" is. One cannot determine whether these sentences are meant to express thanking and gratitude or to intend something else. This is why interpretations can only be made by virtue of the conventional force associated with a given linguistic expression either in an explicit, direct way or an implicit one. Accordingly, thanking expressions used in those examples do not have the illocution of thanking and expressing gratitude. Instead, the purpose that the speaker has in mind is completely divergent. There is an indirect relationship between the gratitude formulae such as [jaʃtik saħa] with another feeling and therefore it has a function of blaming or talking sarcastically rather than showing a positive attitude of gratefulness and indebtedness. This is why illocutions can only be explained within the system of cultural and social conventions: in Algerian Arabic, it is a conventional notion that once a thanking expression is uttered in a different way/ intonation, it surely has a distinct intention by the speaker. In the case of the cited examples, gratitude formulae are to be faultlessly understood as blaming or at least a translation of a negative attitude such as dissatisfaction, discomfort or anger, etc.

The last facet of speech act realization is perlocution. It refers mainly to the effects on the hearer. The consequences of the utterance are context-dependent, i.e., the locution-sequel is

related to the circumstances where it occurs. As a matter of fact, the circumstances involve the interlocutors, the settings, and the type of conversation. Let us consider and analyze the following examples:

Context 1: the girl is cleaning the floor; her brother comes and steps with his dirty shoes. The girl considers this action as very annoying. She says, "jaʃtik saħa, ħammaldik". Her brother just smiles, omits his shoes and continues walking.

As a speech act, the expression "jaʃtik saħa" is the locution. Once uttered by the girl, the formulaic expression (that is supposed to express thanking) has the illocutionary force of a positive sarcasm (positive because it is perceived as fun for the response of the brother was a laughter). The perlocutionary intention of the phrase can be grasped not as a thanking but rather an opposite meaning that the speaker is not happy with what the hearer has done. Therefore, this form of thanking can express a completely divergent message which is sarcasm.

Context 2: After being betrayed from her boyfriend, the girl states in a very sad voice: [jaʃtik saħa hadi hija lkelma]. The man didn't respond.

As a speech act, the phrase "jaʃtik saħa" is the locution. Whilst being spoken by the girlfriend, the formula seems to have a distinct function (rather than thanking). The purpose that is in the speaker's mind and that she intends to fulfill is blaming the addressee for a previously done action (betrayal) that she considers as hurt. As far as the perlocutionary force of the linguistic expression used in this context is obviously not a gratitude expression whereas it strictly has the intention of causing the hearer (the boyfriend) to understand the girl's negative sarcastic locution, i.e., blaming.

3-1- Juxtaposition:

As noticed in the contexts above, thanking expressions used to indicate sarcasm either in a somehow positive intention (as in context 1) and a negative one (as in context 2). Equal to what has been cited in the literature, there is a kind of juxtaposition. Correspondingly, this indicates that the same speech act (for which the locutionary act is "jaʃtik saħa") can both be negative and funny at the same time. Interestingly, listeners may feel that sarcasm is employed to show a negative emotion such as blaming someone for something that really hurt them, or used humorously as to make fun of the action that has been done by the addressee, noting that the degree of being hurt or the negativity of the action done is not that serious.

3-2- Problem of Felicity Conditions:

Thanking is an inherently polite speech act. Searle ⁽¹⁵⁾ specified a set of rules for defining the speech act of thanking (to express gratitude and appreciation). In his Eighteenth- Century English, Raymond ⁽¹⁶⁾ cited that these rules are:

1. Propositional Content Rule: past act (A) done by the hearer (H)
2. Preparatory Rule: the act (A) benefits the speaker (S) as they (S) believe that (A) benefits them (S).
3. Sincerity Rule: (S) feels grateful or appreciative for (A).
4. Essential Rule: Counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation.

These are said to be the felicity conditions for the speech act of thanking to be successful. Whereas once said sarcastically, as shown in the previous list of examples, the same locution may violate these felicity conditions, i. e., it may not help for all of them to occur so as for the locution to be understood as an expression of gratitude and indebtedness. In a sarcastic intention expressed by a gratitude structure, the felicity conditions which are absent include the preparatory rules as well as the sincerity conditions of the locution of thanking.

Once said sarcastically, a thanking locution may have a completely different preparatory rule. The act (A) does not benefit the speaker (S) and they (S) believe that this action does not benefit them. This preparatory condition is distinct from the one of expressing gratitude. For this reason, those thanking formulae have another function which is the sarcastic illocutionary force of the utterance.

On the other hand, sincerity condition is also completely different (if not, let say, violated). There is no feeling of gratefulness or being thankful to (A) or even to the addressee/ hearer (H). In analyzing the previously mentioned instances, one may deduce that there is a kind of incongruity. In more precise words, there is an opposition between the terms used and the function they intend to. This can only be explained by means of violation of sincerity condition (of the thanking).

In fact, violation of one or more felicity rules or conditions of a given locution does not prevent or stop the intended act from being achieved. This violation may just deviate the normal course of the habitual realization or understanding of a given linguistic structure. This deviation gives rise to a new illocutionary function which is intended by the speaker. The intention is grasped by the hearer if, and only if, they share the same socio-cultural-pragma-linguistic background. This is to say, in order to achieve the wanted message appropriately, through an extremely divergent structure (which has no relation with what is wanted), interlocutors ought to partake similar background of societal norms and pragma-linguistic expectations, i.e., expect the use of certain linguistic forms in different contexts and understand their meanings; this opens the door to discussing both the literal meaning and the intended meaning by the speaker, which requires contextual pragmatic interpretation..

3-3- Literal vs. Intended Meanings:

We mean by the literal meaning the basic understanding of a given word, i.e., its first definition. In the previous examples, phrases like "jaʕtik saħa w jerħam wa:ldik, etc." are taken for granted as being gratitude formulae to express indebtedness and thanking. Whereas when they are put in context, their interpretation becomes circumstance-dependent—as shown in contexts 1 and 2. For this reason, the speaker's way of saying the locution gives the listener the ability to recognize that the utterance is not all the time literally true. Additionally, the addressee must infer the speaker's true intention which could be to express disdain for the action just done or the lecture just heard. In other words, the difference between the literal meaning of the speaker's utterance and its figurative intention must be recognized to understand that the meaning was neither gratitude nor indebtedness; it was rather a sarcastic one.

Sarcasm occurs when a person says the opposite of the truth, or the opposite of their true feelings in order to be funny or to make a point. Truthfulness is one of the pillars of Grice's Cooperative Principle of Conversation⁽¹⁷⁾. When one says that in sarcasm the speaker utters the opposite of their true feelings, this means that there is a violation of one of the maxims.

4- Violation of Grice's Maxims

Grice's Cooperative Principle outlines how people typically communicate in conversations by following certain implicit rules to ensure understanding and efficiency. These rules are known as maxims, which include guidelines like being truthful, providing enough information, avoiding ambiguity, and being relevant. When someone intentionally breaks or ignores these rules in a conversation, they might do so to convey a hidden or implied meaning to the listener. This intentional deviation from the usual conversational norms is referred to as "flouting a maxim." The aim behind flouting a maxim is often to imply something beyond the literal meaning of the words spoken, leading the listener to infer or deduce this implied meaning, known as implicature. Essentially, it involves using indirect or implied communication by intentionally not following the standard conversational rules.

4-1- Maxim of Quality:

Grice's maxim of quality suggests that the speaker should make a truthful contribution to the discussion. If we try to apply this idea on the contexts 1 and 2, we may come to the remark that the speaker's contribution to the conversation with a thanking expression is not truthful for there is no place for expressing gratitude in both contexts. This discrepancy arises from how the speech act of expressing gratitude and the corresponding responses appear to contradict Grice's (1975) conversational maxim of "being truthful."

It has been claimed that the essential motif of a sarcastic utterance is its violation of Grice's maxim of quality for the sake of showing the reverse of what has been said. In fact, the verbatim meaning is undoubtedly not true (especially when used to intend a different illocutionary function like sarcasm in our study). Assuming that the hearer is always following the cooperative principle, the hearer will discount the literal meaning as a possible interpretation of the utterance and search for a different but related attitude that the speaker wants actually to intend. Therefore, the hearer will attempt to infer that what the speaker really means is something else rather than thanking or being grateful. Consequently, the interpretation must be something like "I am not thanking you at all; oppositely, I am really mad of what you have done/ said".

Flouting maxims occur when individuals purposefully disregard these rules to prompt their listeners to deduce the implied meaning behind their words, known as implicature.⁽¹⁸⁾ When individuals deliberately flout cooperative maxims, they aim for the utmost comprehension from their audience, assuming that the listener can uncover the implied message within their words. People might breach the quality maxim to indirectly convey a sarcastic tone in their statements. As in:

A: jaʃti:k saħa, zed̥t zeweqtli dar, farraħtnii (thanks, you helped me)

B: Désolé wallah manʃawed (sorry, won't repeat it).

It is obvious from what the girl says that she is teasing her brother and her purpose is, by no means, praising him. She exploits the maxim of quality (being truthful) to be sarcastic. Likewise, the brother seems to notice the purpose behind the girl's compliment and offers an apology in return.

[barakallahu fi:k, hakka lli jestafifed ʃla lʔasrar wella makaŋʃ] (thanks for keeping secrets.)

The speaker is certainly not thanking the hearer, nor does he praise him. Rather, an obvious intention is that the speaker is blaming the addressee using a thanking formulaic expression to extremely mean the opposite. This shows how sarcasm can violate the maxim of quality.

4-2- Maxim of Manner:

Grice (1975) states that the maxim of manner relates not to what is said, but rather, to how it is supposed to be said. The maxim of manner advocates that the speaker should say something unobscured, unambiguous, brief, and ordered. Yet, when someone says a thanking expression with a hidden message is an instance of manner violation because, most of the time, the hearer cannot deduce whether what is said is the real meaning or not. This is why blaming sarcastically with the use of a gratitude formulaic expression is not as overt as other speech acts; rather it is internally, covertly expressed.

An elaboration of the *Gricean* maxim of manner was proposed by Leech⁽¹⁹⁾, who distinguishes two kinds of clarity. "One kind consists in making unambiguous use of syntax and phonology of the language in order to construct a clear text". In our consideration, if the syntax of [jaʃtik saħa] for example is correctly structured to the ear of the addressee, a given phonological feature including changing stress placement and intonation may be ambiguous to them, in the sense that what is said is not an expression of gratitude as it is supposed to be, but rather a completely different emotional state of dissatisfaction of the behavior of the hearer. This results in a sarcastic phrase that can only be understood as blame or a negative emotional state towards the addressee.

Another category involves crafting a distinct message, one that is lucid or understandable, effectively conveying the intended illocutionary aim to the recipient. In fact, blaming through this kind of expression is an indirect act, and therefore; not as perspicuous as required. Yet, it takes little time for the hearer to grasp the intention of the speaker; sometimes unless taking into account the context where this utterance is said, the hearer cannot grasp what is really intended. If taken in isolation, the thanking expression (that was supposed to be sarcastically used to blame the hearer) remains an expression of gratitude. Therefore, there is a violation of the maxim of manner.

4-3- The Maxim of Quantity

Flouting maxims happens when the speaker deliberately disregards these rules to compliment the listener, leading to an implied meaning called implicature ⁽²⁰⁾. In certain specific conversational situations, people may deviate from cooperative principles for reasons such as humor or to enhance politeness. Flouts of the maxims happen in cases where the speaker deliberately does not explicitly show what he or she means so the four maxims cannot operate normally. For example: [*jaʕtʕik safia, hakka di:r ja:k?*] *ih, makanʃ muʃkil*.

In the above example, the conversational text violates the quantity maxim by failing to provide the necessary information clearly in the response while saying “*ih, bla mzija makanʃ muʃkil*”. The normal answer should be an apology like “*smahili maʃi belʕani*” or a laughter if it is understood as a joke or has a sense of humorous once uttered by the speaker.

4-4- Maxim of Relation

Thanking, though being used to mean the opposite in this case, is completely irrelevant. There is nothing that deserves the feeling of indebtedness or gratitude. Therefore, violation of Gricean maxim of relation occurs when the speaker says irrelevant comments or ideas. More to the point, the maxim of relation is violated to signal the speaker's intention to express a negative attitude in a different way. The speaker's linguistic contribution is not directly connected to the topic in the conversation. Besides, the violation of the maxim of relation is done to make relax conversation and humor ⁽²¹⁾.

5- Implicature is Highly Activated:

Since, as shown in many examples, the maxims of the cooperative principle can be violated in sarcastic expressions, the hearer should have a solution so as to grasp the speaker's intended meaning. Grice's conversational implicature is one of the pragmatic theories which has the idea that utterances can make meanings based on what is implicated referring to some assumptions to the particular utterance. Meaning is actually realized from the situation of some utterances while “Grice's theory of implicature is concerned with the ways in which meaning can be communicated not only by what is said, but also by how it is said” ⁽²²⁾.

6- Other Aspects to Get the Right Intention:

The hearer is able to look around at the setting of the conversation in order to assess the truth of the speaker's claim (when following Grice). Therefore, the hearer can see that their environment is not, indeed, as described. Moreover, the circumstances where such an utterance has been said do not denote any kind of appreciation, nor does the situation necessitate gratitude and indebtedness by the speaker. Other aspects that the hearer may rely on for a successful interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning include: the intonation, body language, the broader context of a conversation and knowledge of the speaker's sarcastic tendencies. In the same vein, Bach (2005) ⁽²³⁾ makes explicit an assumption of Grice's theory: that an implicature is not carried by the sentence itself, but by the utterance of that sentence within its context.

Conclusion

By and large, thanking is a universal phenomenon that is conventionally used differently among cultures and societies. As shown along the paper, gratitude formulaic expressions are not all the time used positively as an indication of indebtedness and thankfulness. Rather, they can be used to indicate the opposite meaning, i.e., sarcasm. Pragmatically, this can be explained by virtue of violation of felicity conditions and floating of the conversational maxims. In any conversation, context –in addition to other factors- plays a very important role as it helps for the hearer to understand the right implicature intended by the speaker.

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