



Assessing Speech Acts of Curses and Prayers in Turkish

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Received: 01.02.2015; Accepted: 05.05.2015

Abstract. Prayer and curse utterances are a significant linguistic form that the addressee expresses his/her inner feelings and attitudes towards the hearer. The semantics of prayer and curses are based on mutually shared background information between hearer and speaker. While some languages have few prayer and curse utterances, other languages, such as Turkish, have abundant prayer and curse expressions that are commonly used in everyday language. The present article delivers a special classification of prayers and curses and analyzes the kind, characteristics and functions of prayer and curse utterances in Turkish by examining specific examples with respect to age, gender and place. Individual interviews were used to collect data from 120 males and females that participated in the study. It was revealed that the females use prayer and curse utterances more frequently than males. Rural people used prayer and curse utterances more often than urban ones.

Keywords: prayer and curse utterances, speech act, expressive acts

1. INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are not a new topic for researchers. On the contrary, they have been very popular since their emergence in the late 1960s. Recently there has been a remarkable growth of research on speech acts as a kind of verbal communication. This term first brought forth by philosopher Austin in her book "How to Do Things with Words" in 1962. According to Crystal (2003) speech acts "refers to a theory which analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of the speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication" (p.427). (As cited in Sharifi & Karimipour, 2012, p. 54). Ordering, promising, thanking are some acts that are recognizable with each other according to speaker's intention. These are acts for communication. Action which is performed in every utterance that is meaningful just in context and situation, have three acts. According to Yule (2000) these acts are locutionary act, illocutionary act, and prelocutionary act. The most important acts of an utterance that is producing an actually meaningful utterance are elocutionary act. The aim of locutionary act is to inform the reader and considered as linguistic meaning. Communication aspect of an utterance is illocutionary act that is analyzed based on context. According to Lech (1983) Context is the background knowledge assumed to be shared between speaker and hearer to interpret the real meaning of the utterance. Effects of an utterance intended by speaker are perlocutionary act.

Searl (1976) continued Austin's theory about illocutionary acts and classified sentences to five groups: declarative, commissive, assertive, expressive, and directive. Declaratives are communication acts that show speaker's feelings and attitudes to change the world by his/ her words. As stated by Yule (2000) "commissives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future actions. They are promises, threats, refusals, pledges, etc" (pp.53-54). Assertives are representing, conveying, and committing speaker's belief about truth of proposition, such as assertion, claims and reports. Expressive are expressing speaker's feelings and attitudes such as apologizing, complaints, thanks, congratulations. Directives are

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speech acts that make the hearer perform a particular action, such as requesting, ordering, inviting or suggesting. Austin (1962) stated that cursing utterances are uttered to relieve the speakers' anger, in other words, the perlocutionary act is not for the person to whom the curse is directed but for the speaker. So in prayers and curses, unlike other speech acts the consequence of the utterance is directed towards the speaker not the hearer or the addressee. In prayers and curses the speaker expresses his or her inner feelings and attitudes towards the hearer. The sender maybe alone, or with receiver, but his/her role is limited to one participant. Maybe the receiver be present in the setting, but are not expected necessarily to respond or talk. Ervin-Tripp (1968) stated that blessing and curses are like “expressive monologues” that senders' attentions to the listener's comments are not necessary.

Almost in all languages the two terms cursing and blessing are common and recognized as speech acts. These terms have been studied by researchers from different perspectives such as religion. By using curses individuals show their anger to others and by using blessing shows their satisfaction. Hymes (1974) suggested that a speech act should be analyzed regarding to “setting, participants, goals, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genre”(p.53-62), however, the acts of blessing and cursing does not necessarily constrained to specific time or place. It is not essential that interlocutors present in the setting or speaker expect response from the addressee.

Curse and prayer are defined by different dictionaries variously. Webster (1913) defines curse as “an invocation of, or prayer for, harm or injury; malediction; Evil pronounced or invoked upon another, solemnly, or in passion; the cause of great harm, evil, or misfortune; that which brings evil or severe affliction; torment”. Also it defines Prayer as “an address (as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought; an earnest request or wish; the act or practice of praying to God or a god”. Curse as a prayer “asking that God brings misfortune to someone; an imprecation; an execration; the opposite of a blessing; a denunciation; a remonstrance to imprecate; to execrate; to stone somebody”. It defines Prayer as asking God for your needs to be fulfilled; a reverent petition made to God; imploring God; making a request of God to help us or others”.

Many researchers have Studied about speech acts , such as apologizing, complaint, refusing and thanking (Bayat, 2013); requestive speech act (Tabatabaei & Samiee, 2012); use of expressions of gratitude (Özdemir & Rezvani); requests, refusals and complaints (Delen & Tavit, 2010), but little studies have been done about prayers and curses. Sharifi & Ebrahimi (2012) investigated to assess speech acts of curses and prayers in Persian and they classified them into two category. Those which have association with countries' culture, traditions, customs and religion and those which have progressed and produced gradually and no specific cultural root can be traced for them. They concluded that human beings utter some negative or positive statements at the time of happiness or sadness when they are unable to do anything else. In other study Sharifi & Karimpour (2012) studied thematic roles and grammatical features of cursing and blessing speech acts in Kurdish (Ilami Dialect) and found that their structures have some common features syntactically and semantically. Also they found that these sentences are idiomatic and are used metaphorically. Payam & Sepahi (2013) in their articles studied to find the role of prayers and curses in Baloochi's language and found that they show their ideology, desires , difficulties and experiences via praying and curses and social context has great role in delivering of meaning.

Prayer and curses in different societies can reveal some aspects of their social, economical and cultural living. This research discusses the content and performance of curses and prayers in various contexts among Turks in Maraghe city from the province of eastern Azerbaijan in North West of Iran. Generally Turks in Maraghe speaks Turkish, and particularly the older generation speak mostly or exclusively Turkish with each other. Although new generation as a result of

impacts of new technologies such as media and formal language education in schools and changes in society tend to speak Persian with their children . So in this setting old generation use some special curses and prayers in contrast to new generation such as children who have grown up in new Persian context. In gathering of this study the researcher spoke and interviewed with people from different age and social groups in Maraghe and villages around it. Then the obtained information analyzed by reasoning. So, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. Which classifications of prayers and curses can be presented?
2. Is there any specific root associated with the existing prayers and curses in the society?
3. Is there any age restriction on the mentioned speech acts?
- 4- Is there any gender restriction on the mentioned speech acts?

- 5-Is there any significant differences in degree of prayer and curse use between rural and urban participants?

2. THE INVESTIGATION OF PRAYERS AND CURSES IN

2.1. Turkish Language

In praying someone , individuals appeal God to bring fortune to someone but in curse , the speaker appeal God to bring misfortune and evil upon addressee, since he/she are in anger and cannot revenge from addressee so wants God power to revenge from individuals who have caused them offended. In general, prayers and curses can be classified into the following groups:

A) Prayers and curses which are among friends and youth and seem appropriate just among themselves. This kind of curses and blessing are so simple, restricted and uttered without real intention. Also, using intensifier is not common in this kind of curse and blessing.

B) Prayers and curses that is not real. They may uttered and produced among members of families in response to trivial things such as disobeying of children repeatedly or prayers to others such as strangers or to a person in higher position that the speaker doesn't like the addressee but pretending he/she praying the addressee. They are uttered by speakers when they are in anger or threatened by hearer. Although they produce curse, but their goals is not the misfortune of the addressee. Just they want to relief and threaten their addressee to do in favored of the speaker and uttered by both natives and non-natives who are aware enough of the country's culture and customs. In this kind of blessing the speaker may use intensifiers more but in cursing using intensifiers are restricted. One kind of curses is very common in this kind of curses is that generally they use and refer to familiar person that has passed or injured or is in misery as a clear example to curse to new addressee.

C) Prayers and curses which are simple and intelligible and are frequently used by children in different contexts. In this kind of blessing and curses , generally children curses their friends without knowing actually about it, and pray for themselves sometimes unusually and in a strange manner.

D) Prayers and curses that are really uttered by speaker. This kind of curses and prayers are uttered in different situation, different people, different places, in different mood and gestures. In curses and prayers that are produced intentionally different form are used. Some of them are understood just in this culture and some are universal and common between other cultures. In using curses and blessing, generally the speaker use religious names and Quran the holy book, with raised hands and loudly and sometimes with crying. The speaker sometimes repeats the sentences. Most of the curses are categorized in this group.

E) Curses that are uttered in the form of pray but express malicious wishes, or in the form of curse generally in negative manner but convey compassionate meaning. This kind of utterances can be understood from the intonation of addressor and the context.

Also, investigation in this area revealed that praying speech acts, can be classified to some sub-category. Prayers may refer to success, reputation, health, longevity, wealthy, happiness and descendants. In contrast in curses the speaker aims to target addressee's plight, frustration, defamation, disease, needy, death, and shortness of food, infertility or losing his / her children.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 59(47.6) males and 61 (49.2) females. From among the participants 40(33.33) were illiterate, 20(16.0) were under guidance school, 30(24.2) held a high school Diploma or less, 30(24.2) held Academic degree (MA/MS and Ph.D.), and 20 held a high school Diploma or less. The participants ranged in age from 7 to 76. They were all Turkish native speakers, however, some did not have literary knowledge to read and write (n = 20).

3.2. Instrumentations

3.2.1. Demographic questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire was used to gather the participants' personal information. The questionnaires were anonymous and were numbered in accordance with interview questions. The items included the participants' age, gender, mother tongue, educational degree, and living place. The population distribution is presented in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Demographic profile of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Female	61	49.2
Male	59	47.6
Urban	66	55
Rural	54	45
Illiterate	40	33.33
Under guidance school	20	16.0
High school	30	24.2
Academic	30	24.2
Under15	38	31.66
16-30	20	16.0
31-45	19	15.3
Over 46	53	44.16
Women in urban	29	47.54
Men in urban	37	62.71
Women in rural	32	52.46
Men in rural	22	37.29

3.2.2. Interview questions

An interview was run to help investigate the participants' production of blessing and cursing utterances in conversations. Following Tables (3.2- 3.8) illustrate participants choices of item options for questions 7 and 8 regarding gender in rural and urban areas of implementing praying and cursing speech acts.

Table 3.2. Participants choices of item options in rural areas.

Variable	Choices	Frequency	Percent
Women and men in rural	Never	5	9,26
	Rarely	6	11,11
	Sometimes	19	35,19
Total 54	Most of the time	31	57,41

As it is obvious in table above both women and male use praying and curses speech acts most of the time (N=31, 57.41%).

Table 3.3. Participant's choices of item options in urban areas

Variable	Choices	Frequency	Percent
Women and men in urban	Never	10	15,15
	Rarely	12	18,18
	Sometimes	8	12,12
Total 66	Most of the time	22	33,33

Table 3.3 shows that both gender (N=22, 33.33%) implement praying and curses speech acts most of the time. Results obtained from Table 3.2 and Table 3.3 demonstrate that participants in rural areas produce praying and cursing speech acts (N=31, 57.41%) more frequently than participants in urban areas (22, 33.33).

Table 3.4. Female's choices of item options in rural areas.

Variable	Option	Frequency	Percent
Women in rural	Never	0	0
	Rarely	0	0
	Sometimes	10	31,25
Total 32	Most of the time	20	62,5

Table 3.5. Male choices of item options in rural areas.

Variable	Option	Frequency	Percent
Men in rural	Never	5	22,73
	Rarely	6	40,90
	Sometimes	9	40,90
Total 22	Most of the time	11	50

Table 3.6. Female choices of item options in urban areas

Variable	Choices	Frequency	Percent
Women in urban	Never	2	6,90
	Rarely	2	6,90
	Sometimes	4	13,79
Total 29	Most of the time	16	55,17

Table 3.7. Male choices of item options in urban areas

Variable	Choices	Frequency	Percent
Men in urban	Never	8	21,62
	Rarely	10	27,02
	Sometimes	4	10,81
Total 37	Most of the time	6	16,22

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Tables from (3.4 to 3.7) demonstrate that females in rural areas (N=20, 62.5%) implement praying and curses speech acts more than male (N=11, 50%) most of the time. Also obtained results revealed that female (N=16, 55.17) use praying and curses speech acts more frequently than their male (N=6, 16.22) counterpart.

Table 3.8 Female choices of item options in urban areas

Teachers' variables	N=59		N=61	
	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	22.03	2	3.28
Rarely	16	27.11	9	14.75
Sometimes	13	22.03	14	22.95
Most of the time	17	28.81	36	59.01

As it is obvious in Table above female (N=36, 59.01%) were used more frequently praying and curses speech act than male (N=17, 28.81%).

Following Tables (3.9- 3.24) illustrate participants answers for questions 5 and 6 regarding the kind and the way of implementing praying and cursing speech acts. The answers have been categorized according to the groups that have been introduced in introduction section.

Some examples of the first group (A) will be presented below.

Table 3.9

Blessing illocutionary act: <i>allah t̄ömæn olsün.</i> God help you.
English translation: <i>God help you!</i> Function: joking Patient: a friend Agent: a friend Cause: the friend are always free and pretend are always busy Goal: irony and sarcasm

Table 3.10

Cursing illocutionary act: <i>halvavü yim</i> your Halva eat
English translation: <i>I hope I eat your Halva.</i> Function: joking Patient: a friend Agent: a friend Cause: that friend has made him/her angry by not doing something in favor of the other friend Goal: have fun and speak

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Table 3.16

Blessing illocutionary act: <i>allah nüm rælæmi agham jöymæsin</i> God my scores my father not see
English translation: <i>May god don't show my low scores to my father</i> Function: wishing/ affective Patient: his father Agent: a little boy Cause: the boy has got low scores at his exam Goal: solving his problem and protecting him from his father's anger make him happy

Some examples of the first group (D) will be presented below

Table 3.17

Blessing illocutionary act: <i>allah gapüzü hæmæfæ atfæx goysün</i> God your homes 'door always open do
English translation: <i>May god let your home's door be open. (literal translation)</i> Function: wishing, farewell Patient: her neighbor woman Agent: a neighbor woman Cause: the woman has done favor for her neighbor woman that needs that Goal: health and happiness of her neighbor

Table 3.18

Cursing illocutionary act: <i>Itjivizi bir taxta goyüm</i> both of you one coffin put
English translation: <i>May I put both of you in one coffin. (literal translation)</i> Function: affective Patient: mother-in-law and father-in-law Agent: an angry bride Cause: the bride and mother -in law and father-in -law have problems with each other. Goal: the death of both of them in a bad condition

Table 3.19

Blessing locutionary act: <i>allah üzüvü agh elæsin</i> God your face white do
English translation: <i>May Allah make you honorable and happy person.</i> Function: wishing and encouraging Patient: her daughter Agent: a mother Cause: the girl has got good grade in her exam and has listened her mother advice Goal: the happiness , success , and honor of her daughter

Table 3.20

Cursing illocutionary act: <i>gan tüfsün evivæ</i> blood fall your home
English translation: <i>May blood fall into your home. (literal translation)</i> Function: affective Patient: her neighbor woman Agent: an angry woman Cause: the neighbor woman has annoyed and disturbed her by her words and behaviors, such as lying and making her family have problems Goal: the death of one of her neighbor family

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Goal: affectionate

It is clear in all examples that using religious words such as Quran the holy book and Allah are evidence. Some example from second category that are discussed in introduction section are presented in following Tables:

Table 3.25. Prayers

Turkish sentences	English translation	category
1-Allah sæni çætin jünæ göymasæn.	May God doesn't let you be in difficult situation.	success
2-Allþh hæynæ istæsun bilevæ versin.	May God let you get what you desire.	success
3-Allþh allævæ tþætinnih jövsætmæsin.	May your hands never see trouble.	success
4-Allþh jözlævoon ifighæn sökhlösin.	May God not give blind eyes.	health
5-Allþh gæzö gædæidæn bilevo sökhlösin.	May God save you accident and trouble.	health
6-Allþh bilövi pis bælböydön geitæysin.	May God save you from bad things.	health
7-Khöf joonlær jöræsæn.	May God give you a harmonious living together.	happiness
8-Khöf lonön yþfiypsüz.	May God give you a harmonious living together.	happiness
9-Allþh sænæ ömiy veysin.	May God give you a long life.	longevity
10-Allþh sizin bohlovizdæn özötmösin.	May you be great man.	reputation
11-Allþh böfo öjb elæsin.	May your head be upright.	reputation
12-Allþh bijözü o jöza möhtöj elæmæsæn.	May Allah don't need one eye to other eye.	wealthy
13-Allþh bileva tþökh versin.	May God give extra for you.	wealthy
14-Allþh bilevo möhtaj elæmæsin May God not let you in need of others help.	May God not let you in need of others help.	wealthy
15-Allþh öfbghu dædæ nænæsiz göimösin.	May God let your child be brought up with mother and father.	Descendant
16-Allþh öghlunön göohum elæsin, gizoonön hæmsöyö.	hæmsöyö May you be family with your son, neighbour with your daughter.	Descendant

Curses are integral part of our daily life, very important subject of folklore. Angers, hatreds, rages, irremediable resistances from adults to minors, from minors to adults, or between furious people have been reflected through these cursing phrases. They are simple, sincere, and clear. Such words are a compound of hopes and hopelessness, fears and joys, angers and repentances. Following Table demonstrate some examples of curses utterances with different categories in Turkish language obtained from interview.

Table 3.26. Curses.

Turkish sentences	English translation	category
1-allah bilevü yeyæ salsæn.	May you fall down.	defamation
2-Bædbaakht olasan.	May you be unlucky.	frustration
3- Sütümdæn kheyi jörrmiyæsæn.	Sütümdæn kheyi jörrmiyæsæn.	frustration
4-arzüva yetifmiyæsæn.	May you not attain your desire.	frustration
5-övin daghilsin.	May your family become destroyed.	loosing of children
6-allah balalavü öldürsün.	May your children die out.	loosing of children
7- Balalavun matæmindæ ötüyasan.	May you sit in your children's sorrow.	Loosing of children
8-Üfakh aizæsönda galasön.	You may not attain to have any child.	infertility
9-Allah üyzüvü tþæssin.	May Allah cut your aliment.	Shortness of food
10-Biy titþæ tþöræyæ möhtaj olasan.	May God put you in need of a slice of bread.	needy

11-a llah gæflvø sændærsæn.	God may your ankles broken.	disease
12-Pistih tütasan.	I wish your chin be broken.	disease
13-allah bilevæ min jüy dæt versin.	May God give you thousands of trouble.	disease
14-allah patdadssin.	May you burst out.	death
15-allah patdadssin.	May your face see the soil of grave.	death
16-Titfæ titfæ olasan.	May you be broken to pieces.	death
17-Jedæsæn geyitmiyæsæn.	May you go but not return.	death
18- Jæhænnæm ötunda yanasan.	May you burn in fire of hell.	death
19-Jözlærün tfor ölsün.	May your eye become blind.	plight
20-övimi yækhdün allah övivi yæxhsæn.	You have spoiled my life, may your life be spoiled.	plight
21-Gan tüfsün övæ.	May blood drop on your home.	plight
22-ælvn gætfhün sænsæn.	May your hand and arm be broken off.	plight
23-ælavjün olmasæn.	May you not find remedy for your trouble.	plight
24-Dilün tfonmæsin.	May your tongue be held and not speak.	plight
25-Daf bafüva tüfsün.	May rock fall on your head.	plight
26-Mænnæn dæ pis jünæ galasan.	May you be worst than me.	plight
27-Hæynæ elisæn allah onü bafüva jætisín.	Whatever you have done, may you deserve the same.	Plight
28-allah janøvæ alsæn.	May God take your soul.	death

By careful analyzing of utterances, it was revealed that in curses, the speaker express his/her attitude and wishes for punishment of the addressee in four ways: Death of addressee directly (16,18,28)or indirectly (15,14,17,25), harms of parts of the body of the addressee (11,12,13, 19), suffering great pain physically and mentally instead of dying(1,2,3,4,27,26, 24, 23,9,10), punishment of addressees' family and property not himself/herself directly (13,21,20, 5,6, 7,8).

Table 3.27. Frequency distribution of prayers and curses of second category

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Pray	Health	102	85
	Success	99	82,5
	Happiness	82	68,33
	Longevity	77	64
	Descendents	71	59,16
	Wealthy	63	52,5
	Reputation	54	45
Curse	Disease	105	87,5
	Death	93	77,5
	Plight	85	70,83
	Needy	77	64
	Loosing children	61	48,4
	Infertility	54	45
	Shortness of food	45	37,5
	Defamation	31	25,83

As it is obvious in table above the most important category in praying speech act was Health (N=102, 85%), followed by success (N=99, 82.5), happiness (N=82, 68.33), longevity (N=77, 64%), descendents (N= 71, 59.16), wealthy (N=63, 52.5) and the last one was reputation (N=54, 45%). Regarding curses categories disease (105, 87.5) was the first one, followed by death (N=93, 77.5), plight (N=85, 70.83), needy (N=77, 64%), loosing children (N=61, 48.4%),

infertility (N=54, 45%), shortness of food (N=45, 37.5%) and the last one was defamation (N=31, 25.83).

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As it was adverted in this article, speech acts are classified into various categories. One of these classifications has been set up by Searl (1976). He has introduced five categories of speech acts which one of them is expressive speech act. Since in cursing and blessing the speaker's express his/her feelings and attitudes, so it can be classified as expressive speech acts. Prayers and curses can be found in all languages, although it can have some differences. Many use some negative or positive statements at the time of happiness or sadness when they are angry or unable to do anything else.

Many Turkish children in Eastern Azerbaijan province grow up around elders who use a lot of Prayers and curses, and so they use these two speech acts in their speech like elders. However, children prayers or curses are not real, since they don't have clear conception about it. They are full of religious connotations and elders use more frequently holy book Quran and Imams names in their speech acts in addressing others. Prayers and curses are a part of women's' discourse, since their lack of power and inability to use physical force. Women use prayers and curses as a single weapon to show their emotions such as anger, grief, and complaint of unfair treatment, or express their happiness. Also, older women use more prayer and curse speech acts in contrast to their male counterparts. It may be because of their beliefs, emotional feelings, some disabilities and sensitivity to others. Women in rural areas use more prayers and curses than urban areas. It may because of this fact that traditions, superstitions and older customs are more prevalent in rural areas, but technology and media have changed some of them in urban areas.

It was revealed that most of the prayers and curses speech acts in Turkish have religious root and can be classified into five groups. Prayers and curses which are among friends and youth, curses which are uttered and produced among members of families, Prayers and curses which are simple and intelligible and are frequently used by children, prayers and curses that are really uttered by speaker, curses that are uttered reversely in a positive manner and addressee understand it. Also, results demonstrated that prayer are used around issues such as property, success, reputation, health, longevity, and livelihood and curses are used around issues such as plight, frustration, defamation, disease, childless, shortness of food that environment, situation and time and place play important role in conveying the exact meaning. Furthermore, detail analyzing showed that in curses utterances four ways of conveying the meaning including death of addressee directly or indirectly, harms of addresses' parts of body, suffering great pain, punishment of addressee's family and property are used more frequently.

Both men and women may perform prayers and curses speech acts and it is more common among the older rural Turkish population. Using gestures, raised voice and special mood along with material objects are common among elders in their daily life. However, it seems that the use of the more dramatic prayers and curses of the new generation is in decline due to their close association with superstition. Regarding syntactic, many cursing and blessing are usually used in the present time and in either second or third person or less commonly the past time. In a social viewpoint, they serve different functions like affective, thanking, wishing, objective and so forth. Achieving specific goal, such as death, misery and health are the most important goals followed in Turkish cursing and blessing speech acts. Prayers and curses will exist as long as the concepts of "goodness" and "badness" exist in human relationship. Finding of this study can reveal some points about values, beliefs, customs, and feelings of Turkish people.

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