

Teaching English Language Journal

ISSN: 2538-5488 – E-ISSN: 2538-547X – <http://tel.journal.org>

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Please cite this paper as follows:

Saidian, S. (2022). "There is nothing better than the name of God." the generic analysis of religiously motivated speech introductions in Persian-speaking media. *Teaching English Language, 16*(2), 229-253. <https://doi.org/10.22132/TEL.2022.159254>

Research Paper

"There is nothing better than the name of God." The Generic Analysis of Religiously Motivated Speech Introductions in Persian-Speaking Media

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Abstract

Acknowledging that there is a dearth of the systemic investigation of religiously motivated language, this endeavor attempts a qualitative examination of the religiously motivated discourse applied to the opening segments of broadcasts aired on Farsi-speaking media outlets. Based on a corpus of 450 randomly gathered programs from multiple Iranian state-run radio and television channels and according to the theoretical foundation considered for this endeavor, I first illustrate the procedure through which the data was collected, followed by the generic analysis of the opening religious speech segments employed at the beginning of the material under investigation. I also aim to show how religious-thought-evoking introductory insertions thematize the discourse and how they influence the mind of society. The findings are reported concerning the Persian or Arabic expressions applied religiously in the preludes, how these expressions are positioned with regards to the discourse that follows, their functions and the goals they are to fulfil.

Keywords: Religious Language, Introductory Speeches, Media, Persian

Received: August 2, 2022

Accepted: October 19, 2022



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1. Introduction

Since the Islamic revolution in 1979, Iran's sociopolitical context has experienced great changes. Formerly striving for secularism through vast social and political changes during the reign of Reza-Shah Pahlavi, and arguably Israel and the West's closest Middle Eastern ally, Iran suddenly found itself positioned opposite to those attempts and former political partners. Also, numerous social and political changes were prompted through the discourse the revolutionists used. This discourse was marked with religious features, the most prominent being that all acts and activities should begin with the name of Allah (God). Consequently, regardless of the topic of the matter, one is suggested to always begin with the name of Allah. This has been recommended in Islamic teachings, and some often follow with the recitation of a verse from the Quran for further grace.

This typical practice of initiating a topic with recourse to religious expressions is not, of course, solely a product of the Islamic Revolution, though ostensibly reinforced by the pro-Islamists. Inscriptions from Old Persia allude to the fact that Ancient Kings of Persia, who regarded themselves as the shadow of the God on Earth, even before Islam, also started by referring to a divine providence. Even the princes and princesses were educated to follow this typical manner (Kent, 1953). Note the following example from Darius (522-486 BC) inscriptions:

1. "A great god is Ahura Mazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many" (Kent, 1953, p. 138).

After the outbreak of Islam, which was coincident with the downfall of the Sassanid Dynasty, the use of religious rhetoric was still a common tradition in literary (e.g., Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*), scientific, and political (Nazam-al-Mulk's *political letter*) texts (Bahar, 2006; Khaleghi-Mutlagh, 2014; Shoar,

1996) Thus, contrary to the general decline of religion in the pluralistic Western society (Hall, 2001), the use of initiating religious rhetoric seems to historically mark the Iranian religious-oriented context.

The use of religious rhetoric is not restricted to Muslim Iranian politicians. In the analysis of Bin Laden's rhetoric, Chilton (2004) also showed how he similarly treated political and religious contexts, while Western leaders, being aware of the constitutional separation of a religion and the administration, avoided confusing rhetorical norms. This, of course, is not always the case. American political rhetoric also makes use of religious speech acts, but, as Chilton (2004) argues, these structures crop up only in the speeches that address the grassroots, as shown in the following examples.

2. May God continue to bless America.

3. May God's peace, mercy, and blessings be upon you. (Chilton, 2004, p. 174)

What marks the Persian rhetoric is that the incorporation of initiating religious expressions has turned into an integral part of the current speech to the extent that, in almost all formal and even informal gatherings, absence of this rhetoric indicates failure of the speaker in performing an act. As a result, in all job interviews, TV interviews, lectures, administrative gatherings, the news, and other formal or informal events, everybody is assumed to observe the above principle. Particularly, political bodies are expected to begin their speech by appealing to God by reading a Quranic verse. Reading a verse from the Quran assumes knowledge of the Quran, respecting religious concepts, believing in good deeds, indicating piety, and thus being a reliable person in word and deed. On the other hand, breaching this convention is interpreted as non-observing or flouting religious responsibilities which confront the Irano-Islamic context. For instance, one extreme perlocutionary effect of this ignorance can be that the violator might be subject to extreme

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reproach. It is, therefore, highly likely that religion and religiosity interact intricately with one's social status which is at least partly manifested in one's language. Note should be made that the purpose of these introductory expressions differs from that of an introduction (e.g., of an article) which describes a problem and seeks or suggests alternative answers to that problem (Lindsay, 2011).

Under these circumstances, disregarding the type of genre involved, the mixing of religious expressions with the genre in focus creates a potpourri that is typical of the Irano-Islamic society, highlighting "an important area of genre development, that is, the role and function of interdiscursivity in genre construction, appropriation, and interpretation" (Bhatia, 2008, p. 175). Put another way, on many occasions, the intruding religious genre, without even having the least connection, is bent into the main genre, marking it religiously. This persuasive religious verbosity is used as a means to cajole the audience into accepting the argument raised by the speaker because s/he speaks in the name of God, and it thus leaves no room for the audience to question the speaker's reasoning. The private intention behind this generic concoction, at the abstract level, is a bizarre dissemination and hegemony of the religious discourse, "through the analysis of appropriation of generic resources" (Bhatia, 2008, p. 175) on the ordinary and extraordinary affairs of the society.

A theoretical analysis by Aldasheva and Platteau (2014, p. 592) acknowledges a host of studies measuring "the effect of religious beliefs and participation in religious activities" on social lives of individuals (Botticini & Eckstein, 2007; Chen, 2010; Clingingsmith et al., 2009; Gerber et al., 2010; Jalilifar et al., 2014). Acknowledging that, until this point in time, a systematic investigation of religiously motivated discourse as the point of departure has hardly been attempted, irrespective of its relevance to a purpose

of the speech, this research seeks to qualitatively investigate such language as applied in the beginning segments of programs broadcasted in Farsi-speaking media outlets, though this language is not necessarily restricted to media discourse. To analyze the data, based on the theoretical framework considered for this research, I first explain the procedure through which the data was collected, followed by a description regarding the generic analysis of the religious discourse used as an opener. Evocation of religious concepts by lexical and grammatical expressions can also occur in other parts of a discourse in addition to the introductory part. However, the goal here is to reveal how such religious-thought-evoking opening insertions thematize the language used and how they influence the thoughts of the audience, and thus the society. The findings are reported based on the languages the expressions are used in, namely Farsi or Arabic, how such expressions are positioned regarding the entire discourse, their functions and their goals.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study is the cultural studies approach to genre, which "seeks to examine the dynamic relationship between genres, literary texts and socio-culture" (Bawarshi & Reif, 2010, p.23) as shapers of text types. That is, viewing genres from this perspective determines the interconnection between texts, social practices and structures. As Bawarsh and Reif (2010) maintain, the constitutive features of the society highlight the genres to which they belong. A society chooses the speech acts that correspond closely to its ideology for interpretation. Ideologies are cognitive or mental infrastructures, fixed social values or attitudes of social groups (van Dijk, 2000). This justifies the presence or absence of the same genre in various social contexts.

A dynamic view of genre embodies a community's ways of knowing, being and acting (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p.477). This dynamic genre

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view requires identifying formal/linguistic features associating/linking a genre to social actions and social relations. Therefore, knowledge of linguistic features as well as awareness of writer expectations is constructed by genre knowledge—writer/speaker intentions and how they are revealed concerning social expectations and why, when and where we use genres, and which roles are assigned to the participants of genres. Stated directly, I aim to see what triggering devices are used by speakers/writers, whether these devices with a religious air can be classified and whether there are any connections between their structures and discourse structures.

3. Data

It is a truism that we live in the era of relations and media, and, in this fast-track world, people attempt to expand their control of others to increase their hegemony and shape their character and behavior. In this regard, media, as an excellent resource in changing people's language and thought, can help change the mind of the society. To conduct this study, I randomly accumulated the data from multiple Iranian state-run radio and television channels at various time points from March 25 until May 26 in 2017. The content of the programs covered as diverse topics as religious, cultural, social, educational and political themes. As the goal of this study was to analyze the generic structure of the initial sections of speech that immediately precede the greetings section in the Persian context, only the preliminary sections or the religiously rhetorical expressions that trigger a discourse were recorded, and the rest of the language was discarded. That is, I recorded only the part that evoked a religious response before the greetings section. Altogether, 450 programs constituted the data for the study. It was decided that a qualitative analysis would usefully enable the researcher to scrutinize the language features of the preliminary sections of speech.

4. Major findings

Most existing studies in genre analysis have eschewed investigating the introductory parts of speech (except for Schegloff's (1986) study of canonical openings of American private telephone conversations, or Arminen and Leinonen's (2006) study of mobile phone call openings), and this neglect seems to be more considerable in relation to the preliminary sections of discourse that bear a religious meaning in a particular setting. Assuming the difficulty of analyzing a large corpus, I initially started with a small sample of around 150 instances to make the analysis manageable. This stage helped refine the data and eliminate the texts with similar forms. To increase the dependability of the analyses, I conducted a search for language patterns twice before the rest of the texts were subjected to analysis. Given that the ultimate function of all these utterances was to leave a religious and spiritual impression on the audience, I decided to scrutinize the rhetorical form of these texts. In what follows, I present the major findings obtained.

As indicated by the data, the expression *bismillah-e rahman-e rahim* (in the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful) or its corresponding Persian equivalent appears as an initiating phrase in almost all the settings which I analyzed, though sometimes it occurs elsewhere in the introduction. Interestingly, the Arabic expression together with a Persian phrase that approximates in meaning to the Arabic phrase occasionally follow one another, as illustrated by the following examples:

(4)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ + بِه نام خدا

[*bismelâh-e rahmân-e rahim + be name xodâ.*]

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful + in the name of God

(5)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ. بِا نام تو آغاز میکنیم یا غیاس المستغیسین. با نام تو آغاز میکنیم یا ستار العیوب.

[*bismelâh-e rahmân-e rahim + be name xodâ. Bâ nâm-e to âqâz mikonam ey gâs-ol-mostaz'âfin. bâ nâm-e to âqâz mikonam ey satâr-ol-oyub.*]

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In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. I begin with your name, oh rescuer of the poor. I begin with your name, oh concealer of flaws.

(6)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + و بنام خداوندی که غفور و رحیم است

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim + va be name xodâvandi ke ġafur o rahim ast.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate + and in the name of God who is forgiving and merciful.

The second finding suggests that the language of greetings does not necessarily transpire at the outset of a speech. They sometimes appear on the boundary of the introductory and the main parts of a talk. Note the following examples:

(7)

با اجازه خدا و با اجازه خدایی که همیشه کنار ماست برنامه امروز رو شروع میکنیم. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم مردم خوب

ایران سلام بر شما سومین روز از مهمونی خدا بر شما مبارک باشه.

[*bâ ejaže xodâ va bâ ejaže xodâ-i ke hamîše kenârê mast šoru mikonim. besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim.*

Iran, salâm bar šomâ. sevomîn ruž az mehmâni xodâ bar šoma mobâarak bâše.]

With the consent of God and with the consent of the God who is always beside us, we shall begin today's program. In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. Iran, hello. May the third day of God's feast (Ramadban) be blessed upon you.

(8)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. ما را رها کنید در این رنج بیحساب با قلب پاره پاره و سینه کباب. بنام خداوند رحمان و رحیم.

سلام میکنم به همه شما دوستان عزیز. هموطنان بزرگوار شما خانواده های دوست داشتنی که از سراسر کشور در این

برنامه همراه ما هستید. طاعات و عباداتون قبول باشه.

[*besmelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. Mâ râ rabâ konid dar in ranj-e bibesâb bâ qalb-e pâre pâre o*

sine-ye kabâb. Benâm-e xodâvand-e rahmân o rahim. Salâm mikonam be hame-ye šomâ

dustân-e azîz. Hamvatanân-e božorgvâr, šomâ xânevâdehâye dust-dâštani kea az sarâsar-e

kešvar dar in barnâme hamrâb-e mâ bastid. Tâ'ât o ebâdâtetun qabul bâše.]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. Leave us (let us be) in this immense pain with a torn heart and scorched chest. In the name of the merciful and compassionate God. I salute all you dear friends, honorable compatriots; you endearing families who have joined us in this program from all over the country. May your prayers and devoutness be sanctioned.

Sometimes, religious introductory expressions- following reciting God's name- plead God to accept worshippers' prayers, or include congratulatory remarks on the birth anniversary of the prophet or one of the subsequent Imams. These expressions seem to function as greetings, hence justifying the omission of greetings expressions as shown below:

(9)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + عبادات شما بینندگان عزیز در پیشگاه حضرت حق انشاء الله مورد قبول واقع بشه و امیدواریم خداوند توفیق بده به همه ما بتوانیم تا آخر ماه مبارک رمضان بهترین تمرینها رو برای بندگی حضرت حق داشته باشیم.
[besmelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. + ebâdât-e šomâ binandegân-e azîz dar pişgâh-e haq enšâlá mored-e qabul vâqe beše va omidvârim xodâvand tofiq bede be hameye mâ betavânîm tâ âxar-e mâh-e mobâarak-e ramezân betarin tamrin-hâ ro barâye bandegîye hazrat-e haq dâšte bâšîm.]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. + We hope your prayers dear viewers are sanctioned by the Almighty, God willing, and we hope God gives us all the fortune to practice being the holy one's worshippers in the best possible way till the end of the holy month of Ramadhan.

(10)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + تبریک عرض میکنم ولادت با سعادت منجی عالم بشریت خدمت همه هموطنان عزیز. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + الهی به امید تو
[besmelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. + tabrik arz mikonam velâdat-e bâ saâdat-e monji-e âlam-e bašariat xedmat-e hameye hamvatanân-e azîz. besmelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. Elâhi be omid-e to]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. + I would like to congratulate all you dear compatriots on the blissful birthday of the Savior of Humanity's birthday.

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. + In you I trust, God.

The third finding of the study attests to the fluidity of the religious expressions and the absence of a fixed order of occurrence. The data showed that religious categories of language are in fact smoothly changing and so it is likely that the same expressions appear under different arrangements in different contexts. Note the following examples. In example 8, reference to God is made at the outset followed by a verse from the Quran; in 9, it follows the initiating greetings phrase, while in 10, reference to God terminates the introductory part following a mystic poem.

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(11)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. يا ايها العزيز مصنا و اهل النظر و جعنا ببضاعت مزجاه فعرف نل كيل و تصدق علينا انالله يجزل متصدقين. صدق الله العلي العظيم.

[*bismelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. Yâ ayohal azizo massanâ wa ahlana zorro wa je'nâ bebezâaten mozzâten fa'aofo lanalkayla wa tasaddaq alaynâ enallâha yajziyal motasaddeqin. saddaqollâh olali ol azim*]

Then, when they came (back) into (Joseph's) presence they said: "O exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family: we have (now) brought but scanty capital: so, pay us full measure, (we pray thee), and treat it as charity to us: for Allah doth reward the charitable." (Yusef Ali)

(12)

. سلام عليكم. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. لا حول ولا قوة الا بالله هو على العظيم. حسينا الله و نعم الوكيل نعم مولا و

نعم النصير

[*Salâm aleykom. bismelâh-e rahmân-e rahim. va lâ hola qovvat elâ belâ hova aliyyelazim. Hasbonalâho va nemalvakil. nemal molâ va nemal nasir*]
Hello. In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. There is no power over Great God's power. God protects us as He is a reliable protector.

(13)

گفته بودی که چرا محو تماشای منی وان چنان مات که یک دم مزه بر هم نزنم، مزه بر هم نزنم تا که ز دستم نرود ناز چشم تو بقدر مزه برهم زدنی. بنام خدا

[*gofte budi ke chera mahv-e tama:shay-e mani va anchenan ma: ke yek dam moje bar ham nazi, moje bar ham nazanam ta ke ze dastam naravad na:z-e chashm-e to be qadr-e moje bar ham zadani.*]

You (God) asked why I am staring at you and why I am so infatuated that I don't bat an eyelid. I don't bat an eyelid lest I might lose the love in your eyes. In the name of God.

The fourth finding illustrates that speakers opt for both direct and indirect speech acts to make an appeal to God, represented in three patterns- to be introduced later- to rest the souls of the prophet and his family in peace, to damn the souls of enemies of the State, and thus, as they interpret it, Islam, to

accept their worships/prayers, to give them hope, to facilitate the resurrection of the savior, to bestow health and/or wealth upon us, to increase love between people, or to bestow happiness on the audience, as illustrated by the examples below. In example 11, the speaker calls God as the one who needs nothing, or that who conceals the sins/wrongdoings of others, implying that everybody begs something from Him or people ask for forgiving their sins. In 12, on the other hand, the speaker calls God compassionate and merciful, tacitly besieging God to be compassionate and merciful to us, whereas in 14 the speaker explicitly wants God to not only expedite the reviving of the savior, but to bestow health and victory on us and to place us in the category of righteous people.

(14)

با نام تو آغاز میکنیم یا ستار العیوب. بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم. با نام تو آغاز میکنیم یا غیاس المستغیبین.

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim + be name xodâ. bâ nâm-e to âqâz mikonam ey gâs-ol-mostaz'afin. bâ nâm-e to âqâz mikonam ey satâr-ol-oyub*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. I begin with your name, oh rescuer of the poor. I begin with your name, oh concealer of flaws.

(15)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم + و بنام خداوندی که غفور و رحیم است.

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim + va be name xodâvandi ke ġafur o rahim ast.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate + and in the name of God who is forgiving and merciful.

(16)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحیم + عبادات شما بینندگان عزیز در پیشگاه حضرت حق انشاءالله مورد قبول واقع بشه و امیدواریم خداوند توفیق بده به همه ما بتوانیم تا آخر ماه مبارک رمضان بهترین تمرینها رو برای بندگی حضرت حق داشته باشیم.

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. + ebâdât-e šomâ binandegân-e azîz dar pišgâb-e haq enšâlâ mored-e qabul vâqe beše va omidvârim xodâvand tofiq bede be hameye mâ betavânim tâ âxar-e mâh-e mobârak-e ramezân betarin tamrin-hâ ro barâye bandegiye hazrat-e haq dâšte bâšim.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. + We hope the prayers of you dear viewers are sanctioned by the Almighty, God willing, and we hope god gives us all the fortune

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to practice being the holy one's worshipers in the best possible way till the end of the holy month of Ramadhan.

(17)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + اللهم عجل لوليک الفرج والعافیة والنصر و اجعلنا من خیر انصاره و اعوانه
والمستشہدین بین یدیه

[*besselâh-e rahmân-e rahim. + allahoma ajjel levali-ek-alfaraj val afiat-e valmasr va ajalna men xair-e ansara va a'avanabo val mostashbadin-e bain-a yadai.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. May God precipitate the reviving of the savior, bestow health and victory on us, and put us in the category of right people...

(18)

امیدوارم کہ طاعات و عبادات یکایک شما خوبان مورد قبول درگاه حق تعالی قرار گرفته باشد.

[*Omidvâram ke tâ'ât o ebâdât-e yekâyek-e šomâ xubân mored-e qabul-e haq taâlâ qarâr gerefte baše.*]

May the prayers and devoutness of every one of you good people have been sanctioned by God.

A delicate point concerning petitioning, revealed in the analysis, is that where reference is made to a Shiite Imam, petition to God is not directly made by the speaker. This tacitly justifies the view among the Shiite Muslims that an Imam, as a spiritual and guilt-free leader and mediator, can make a more effective appeal to God (Al-razi, 2017), thus freeing the speaker from making a direct petition, as noted by the following example:

(19)

با استعانت از محضر امام عصر، برنامه این هفته رو آغاز میکنیم.

[*bâ esteânât az mahzar-e imam-e-asr, barâmeje in hafteh ro âghaz mikonam*]

We begin this week's program by seeking help from the living Imam.

The fifth finding holds that where remembering God is stated in Persian, a more diverse set of attributive adjectives is used:

(20)

به نام خداوند+ (دادار پاک)

[*be nâme xodâvand+ dâdâr-e pâk.*]

In the name of God. + the righteous creator.

(21)

به نام خداوند+ کریم

[*Be nâme xodâvand+ karim.*]

In the name of God. + the beneficent.

(22)

به نام خداوند+ احسان و جان خداوند بخشنده مهربان

[*Be nâme xodâvand+ ehsân o jân-e xodâvand-e baxšande o mebrbân.*]

In the name of God. + the generosity and essence of the forgiving and kind god.

(23)

بنام خالق زیبایی خداوند بخشنده و مهربان.

[*be nâme xâleq-e zibâi, xodâvand-e baxšande o mebrbân.*]

In the name of the creator of beauty, the merciful and kind god.

(24)

بنام خداوند بزرگ و مهربون سلام

[*be nâme xodâvand-e bozorg o mehrabun, salâm.*]

In the name of the great and kind god. Hello.

(25)

بنام خالق بی همتا و درود

[*be nâme xâleq-e bi hamtâ o dorud.*]

In the name of the peerless creator, and bello.

The sixth finding of this study shows that greetings, on occasions reflecting a religious overtone, irrespective of the talk, address various people, living and/or dead, TV viewers, the nation, God, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, those lost during the Iran-Iraq war, and those killed in Syria under the guise of defending Islamic shrines. Note the following examples:

Note the following examples:

(26)

سلام و صلوات خداوند بر حضرت محمد و خاندان مطهر ایشان

[*salâm o salavat-e xodâvand bar hazrat-e mobamad va xândân-e motabar-e iškân.*]

Greetings and peace be upon (his sacredness) Mohammad and his holy family.

(27)

مردم خوب ایران سلام بر شما

[*mardom-e xub-e Iran, salâm bar šomâ.*]

Good people of Iran, bello.

There is nothing ...

(28)

سلام و درود خدمت شما شهروندان شهریاران

[*salâm o dorud xedmat-e šomâ šabr-vandân-e šabr-e bârân.*]

Hello and greetings to you citizens of the city of rain.

(29)

سلام عرض میکنم خدمت شما خانواده های محترم

[*salâm arz mikonam xedmat-e šoma xânevâdehâ-y-e mohtaram.*]

Greetings to you dear families.

(30)

سلام و صلوات و تحیت برخواستہ از جان ما تقدیم به همه مصادیق هدایت انسانها، همه انبیا و سلام به همه شما

شیفتگان اهل بیت اجمعین.

[*salâm o salavat o tabiat-e bar xâste arz jân mâ taqdîm be hame masadiq bedâyat-e ensânâ, hame-ye anbiâ o salâm be hame-ye šomâ šiftégân-e ahl-e beyt ajma'in.*]

Greetings and praise and blessings from the soul to all the role models involved in guiding people, all the prophets and bello to all you admirers of the prophet's family.

(31)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. الحمد لله الرب العالمين. و صلاه والسلام على سيدنا ابوالقاسم مصطفى محمد و على آل طيبين.

سلام و درود و صلوات الهی بر فرزند شایسته نبی اکرم و احیا گر دین نبوی امام بزرگوار

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. Alhamd-o lelab-e al-rabbel alamin. Va salato va alsalam ala saiedana va nabiana abalqasem mostafa Mobamad va ala al-e taibin. Salam va dorud va salavat-e elabi bar farzand-e shayeste va ehyagar-e din-e nabavi emam-e bozorgvar*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

(32)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. الحمد لله الرب العالمين وصل الله على سيدنا و نبينا محمد و آله طاهرين و سهو المنتخبين

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. Alhamd-o lelab-e al-rabbel alamin va alsalam ala saiedana va nabiana Mobamad va aleh-e taberin va sabv-ol montakhabin*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

The seventh finding makes clear that where a Quranic verse is read, the content of the verse sometimes endorses the theme of the speech as shown by the following example where the subject of the speech was Ramadan (the Islamic fasting month). Reading a Quranic verse to trigger off the talk can reinforce the belief that the speaker's argument enjoys a Quranic basis, and

thus their argument is justified. Any counter argument is interpreted as against the Quran hence irreligious and superficial.

(33)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، شهر رمضان

الذی انزل الیه فیہ القرآن هدی للناس و بینات من اللهدی والفرقان. عرض سلام و درود خدمت شما شهر و ندان شهر باران.

به خودمون میبالم که این برنامه رو انتخاب کردید.

[*besselâb-e rahmân-e rabim. šabro ramezâna lazî onzela fibel qorân hodâ lelnâse va bayyenâten menal hodâ va forqân. arz-e salâm o dorud xedmat-e šomâ šabrvandân-e šabr-e âftâb. be xodemun mibâlim ke in barnâme ro entexâb kardid.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. (Sabih). Hello and greetings to you citizens of the city of rain. You're choosing this program has made us proud of ourselves.

Persian spoken discourse is generally abundant with loquacious language and circumlocutions. This being so, native speakers of Persian sometimes begin with a poem or part of a poem, as a point of departure, often capitalizing on God's immense abilities as shown by the examples below:

(34)

ز بسم الله چیزی نیست بهتر، نهادم تاج بسم الله بر سر.

[*zê besmelâb čizi nist bhtar, nahâdam jâj-e besmelâb bar sar.*]

There is nothing better than the name of God; I have put the name of God [like a] crown on my head.

(35)

با نام تو میشود به صحراها زد، با نام تو میشود به دریاها زد، ما اهل گذشته ایم و امروز ولی با نام تو میشود به فردها زد

+ به نام خدا

[*bâ nâm-e to mišavad be sabrahâ zâd, bâ nâm-e to mišavad be daryâbâ zâd, mâ abl-e gozašte-im va emruz valî bâ nâm-e to be fardâhâ zâd+ be nâm-e xodâ.*]

With your name, one can travel the deserts; with your name, one can travel the seas; we are a part of the past and today though we can travel to the future with your name + in the name of God.

(36)

خدایا شروع سخن نام توست، وجودم به هر لحظه آرام توست دل از نام و یادت بگیرد قرار، خوشم چون که باشی مرا در کنار

[*xodâyâ šoru soxan nâm-e tost, vojudam be har lahze ârâm-e tost*]

[*del az nâm o yâdat begirad qarâr, xošam čon ke bâši marâ dar kenâr*]

God, I begin my words with your name, every moment my soul is calm because of you

My heart becomes serene thinking of you, I am happy because you are at my side

(37)

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دلا نود کسی بنشین که او از دل خیر دارد، به زیر آن درختی رو که او گل های تر دارد در این بازار مکاران نرو هرسو
چو بیکاران، به دکان کسی بنشین که در دکان شکر دارد.

[*delâ nazîd-e kasi benešin ke u az del xabar dârad, be zîr-e ân deraxti ro ke u golhâye tar dârad
dar in bâzâr-e makârân naro har su čo bikârân, be dokn-e kasi benšin ke dar dokân šekar dârad*]
*Oh, love. Sit with one who knows what is in your heart, under the tree which has wet flowers. Don't
wander in this market full of cheaters like a loafer, sit at one's store who has sugar in it*

The use of Persian poems reverberates the deep-seated religious beliefs that have been the source of inspiration among some, if not all, the poets of the past.

The last finding, though not necessarily the least, is pleading the audience to remember the speaker in their prayers is a sign of the commonly-held belief among the Shiite Muslims that if more people remember a person in their prayers, chances are that God would assist them.

(38)

سلام. نماز و روزها تون قبول باشه. خیلی خیلی زیاد مارودعا کنید سر سفره های افطار تون. ما خیلی محتاج دعای شما
عزیزان هستیم.

[*salâm. namâz o ruzehâton qabul baše. xeyli xeyli ziyâd mâ ro doâ konid sar-e sofrêhâye eftâretun. mâ
xeyli mohtâj-e doâye šomâ az zîzân hastim.*]
*Hi. I hope your daily prayers (namâz) and fasting are accepted [by God]. We are very much in need of
you dear people's prayers.*

1. Patterns of introductory speeches

Analysis of the generic configuration of the introductory language led to the development of six patterns illustrated and exemplified below:

I.(Reference to God) + (a Quranic verse) + (greetings in Persian or Arabic) + (expressing happiness, congratulations, or condolences) + (appeal to God)

(39)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + انا اعطيتك الكوثر فصل لربك ونهر ان شانعك هو الابتر
[*besselâh-e rahmân-e rahim. enâ a'ataynâkal kawsar. fasalle lerabbeka wanhar. enna šâneaka
hoal abtar.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate.

*To thee have We granted the Fount (of Abundance). Therefore, to thy Lord turn in Prayer and Sacrifice.
For he who hateth thee, he will be cut off (from Future Hope).*

(40)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + الحمد لله حمد هو و نستعينو و نعمنو بهي و نتوكل عليه و نصلي و نصلم على البشير
النظير السراج المنير العبد المعير الرسول المسدد ابوالقاسم محمد...

Saidian

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. Alhamd-o lelah-e nahmad hova va nastai: no va ne-mato behi va natavakkal alajh-e va nasal va naslom ala bashir-O nazîr al-seruj-ol monir al-abd-ol moi:r al-rasu:l masdad abelqasem Mohamad...*]

(41)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. شهر رمضان الذي انزل اليه فيه القرآن هدى للناس و بينات من الهدى والفرقان. عرض سلام و درود خدمت شما شهروندان شهرياران. به خودمون ميپايم كه اين برنامه رو انتخاب كرديد.

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. Shahr-o ramezân allazî onzel elaihe fi qoran hod-a lenas va baiyenat men-al boda va alforqan*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. The month of Ramadhan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion.

(42)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. يا ايهالعزيز مصنا و اهل النظر و جعنا بضاغت مزجاه فعرف لنل كيل و تصدق علينا اناالله يجزل متصدقين. صدق الله العلي العظيم.

[*besmelâb-e rahmân-e rahim. Ya aiy-o-al azîz mosna va ahl-o nazâr va ja-ana bebezû-at maz ja-o fa-arafa lenal kîl va tasaddaq*]

Then, when they came (back) into (Joseph's) presence they said: "O exalted one! Distress has seized us and our family: we have (now) brought but scanty capital: so, pay us full measure, (we pray thee), and treat it as charity to us: for Allah doth reward the charitable." (Yusef Ali)

II.(A Persian poem addressing God) + (reference to God in Arabic or Persian) + (greetings)+ (appeal to God) + (expressing happiness, congratulations, or condolences)

(43)

در محضر دوست جان بربر بفرست، از چشمه چشم اب و گوهر بفرست، آن سان كه خدا فرشتگان را فرمود، عطر صلوات بر محمد بفرست. بنام هستي هستي بخش خداوند بخشنده مهربان. عرض سلام و ادب و احترام دارم خدمت يكايك شما سروران عزيز شما حضار محترم و همينطور شما بينندگان با محبت و دوست داشتني. اميدوارم كه طاعات و عبادات يكايك شما خوبان مورد قبول درگاه حق تعالى قرار گرفته باشه. انشاءالله كه ما روهم از دعاي پر خيرو بركتتون بي نصيب نكرده باشين. جا داره كه رحلت جانسوز بنيانگذار جمهوري اسلامي ايران پدر فرزانه حضرت امام خميني رو خدمت يكايك شما عزيزان تسليت و تعضيت عرض كنم.

III.(Reference to God in Arabic) + (Reference to God in Persian) + (greetings)+ (petition to God to accept our prayers)

(44)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. بنام خدای بخشنده مهربان. صبح شما بخیر نماز و روزه هاتون قبول.

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[*besmelâh-e ruhman-e rahim. be nâm-e xodây-e baxšandeye mebrabân. sobb-e šomâ bexeyr o namâz o ružebâtun qabul.*]

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. In the name of the forgiving and kind God. Good morning. I hope your daily prayers (namâz) and fasting are sanctioned [by God].

IV.(A Persian poem addressing God's abilities) + (A Quranic verse) + (petition to God)
+ (reference to God in Persian) + (greetings)

(45)

بنام خداوند جان و خرد، کزین برتر اندیشه بر نگذرد. اللهم رب الشهر رمضان الذي انزلت فيه القرآن. الہی بہ امید تو آغاز میکنیم سفره ای دیگر از سری سفره های سر سفره خدا را با نام و یاد خداوند مهربان دانا و توانا. بنام خداوندی که بخشنده است و بخشندگی را دوست دارد. سلام عرض میکنم.

In the name of Ramadhan's God who sent the Quran in the same month. In God we hope. I begin another dinner of the series of God's dinners, in His name, the beneficent, the Omniscient, and the Omnipotent. In the name of God who is generous and loves generosity. Hello everybody.

V.(Reference to God in Arabic) + (a quote from a Shiite Imam)

(46)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + الحمد لله الرب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا ونبينا ابوالقاسم المصطفى محمد و على آل طيبين و الطاهرين والمعصومين

In the name of God, the beneficent, the merciful+ we thank God, the God of the universe, and we send greetings to our leader and our prophet, Mohammad, and his offspring.

(47)

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم + اللهم عجل لوليک الفرج والعافیة والنصر واجعلنا من خیر انصاره و اعوانه والمستشهدين بین یدیه

In the name of God+ Oh God, speed up sending our leader and keep him well and help him win, and put us in the category of his supporters and bless us martyrdom in his way.

VI.(Reference to God) + (greetings) + (asking the audience to remember the speaker/others in their prayers)

(48)

بنام خدا سلام. امیدوارم که تو این روزهای پربرکت ماه مبارک رمضان، توی لحظات زیبای افطار، لحظه های پربرکت سحر قدر سلامتیمونو بدویم و برای کسانی که این سلامتیرو ازش محرومن و مشکل دارند دعا کنیم و به فکر و یادشون باشیم.

[be nám-e xodâ. salâm omidvaram ke tu in ruzhâye por barekat-e mâb-e mobâarak-e ramezân, tuy-e labezât-e zibaye eftâr, lahzebâye por barekat-e sabar, qadr-e salâmatimun o bedunim va barâye kesâni ke in salâmati ro azeš mabruman o moškel dârand doâ konim o be feker o yâdešun bâšim.]

In the name of God. I hope that in these blessed days of the holy month of Ramadhan, in the beautiful moments of iftar (the time when the fast is broken), the blessed time of dawn, we appreciate our health and prey, keep in mind and remember those who are deprived of being healthy and have problems.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The study of the religious-oriented opening of speech in a specific context has hardly been in the limelight of research. The analysis of these typically cultural and religious openings using the cultural studies approaches to genre demonstrates that in the Irano-Islamic society, the employment of these expressions abounds in the media, pointing to the dominance of a particular ideology that shapes the discourses inflicted on this society, features that have always been a part of Iranian culture, but have taken a more prominent form and at times have gone through a metamorphosis in the decades following the Islamic Revolution. For instance, Pishghadam and Kermanshahi (2016), in their functional analysis of 300 instances of Persian address terms *Haji* and *Hajieh*, indicated that these terms, contrary to their past religious value and the social status they granted an individual, have lost their religious character and, on occasions, they act as anti-value. Thus, the media, as a powerful resource in the hands of those in power, play a crucial role in establishing an ideology, hence imposing content and language on the genre. It is worth mentioning that in ancient times, such religious discourse was limited to specific classes of the society and written texts, thus restricting the amount of exposure to this discourse, while today, the media imposes a completely different level of influence on its audience. Therefore, such language application can be utilized by those in power to gradually ingress into the mindset of the society, guiding masses toward specific interpretations

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among those existing. In this section, the findings of the study are discussed in light of approaches to genre in cultural studies.

As indicated by the data, Arabic, as the language of the Quran, and Persian, as a language that has been massively influenced by Arabic, are in many respects replete with attributive adjectives that describe God's absolute abilities. The use of Arabic and Persian religious references together (statements and poems) emphasizes God's abilities. These expressions might ostensibly be regarded as redundant, though reinforcing and diverse in their perlocutionary effects. Shared with the Quranic language, the Arabic expressions might be interpreted as more devotional, Godly, and spiritual, while the Persian expressions, decorated with flattery and persuasion, might sound more natural and authentic to the Persian-speaking audience (examples 30-33). The use of grandiloquent and obsequious language is also directly suggested in the prayers of the Shiite leaders of Islam. For instance, in a long prayer from Imam Ali (the first recognized leader after the Prophet's death from the viewpoint of the Shiite followers), 1000 attributes are enumerated for God, and every year Shiite Muslims recite all this long prayer on the night that Imam Ali is believed to have been martyred (Al-razi, 2017).

This language of ingratiation, used for asking God to bestow health or wealth, defeat enemies, recuperate the ill people, and so forth in a humble way or implore a Shiite Imam to mediate between God and the supplicant, performs widespread speech acts that occur in the daily speech of Persian Muslims. For instance, the Quran says:

(49)

سوره مائده آیه ۳۵ (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 35)

يا ايها الذين امنوا و اتقوا الله و ابتغوا اليه الوسيله و جاهدوا في سبيله لعلكم تفلحون

[*jā ajob-a laẓina āmanu: va taq-o lah va vabtaghu elajb-elvasilah va djābadu: fi: sabileh le-alakom toflehu:n.*]

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O you who have believed, fear Allah and seek the means [of nearness] to Him and strive in His cause that you may succeed. (Al-Bokhari, 1990)

The Shiite interpreters of the Quran attribute the word *means* to entreaty and supplication by mediating the Imams as divine leaders who can make a more effective appeal to God. This view has also been numerous documented in Shiite inscriptions (e.g., Majlesi, 1990)

Concerning the deceased sometimes mentioned in the introductory language of Persian speakers as a strategy of indirectly imploring God, in Shiite Islamic instructions, it is believed that the dead understand a living person's greetings and they respond, but further comprehension of the living world for the dead depends on the divine and holy path they have taken and the spiritual stage they have attained in their lives (Al-Bokhari, 1990; Shirazi, 2000). The ostentatious greetings to the dead and the living whom they believe to be ethereal, like the present Iranian spiritual leader, imply that the speaker follows the same *right* path.

A further strategy of imploring God is based on the belief that nothing happens without God's will, but God's will can be directed by the mediation of venerable people like Shiite leaders, those martyred, or the living who are religious in deed, hence adding to the effectiveness of their petition. This is in line with the belief that all those who were martyred in the way of implementing this interpretation of Islam should always be remembered as the commemoration of those people is evidence that we are continuing their sacred path.

Another strategy suggests that beginning a discourse with a Quranic verse indicates one's knowledge of the Quran. It also implies that the Quran is a window onto every activity one indulges in and that if people begin their talk with the Quran, they will be protected from the possible evils that lurk around them. It is considered as further proof to what one says because the Quran is believed to be the words of God, and hence flawless. Thus, one's reading of a

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verse indicates that the speaker does not trespass the limits imposed by the Quran, and therefore whatever is said is Quranic and irrefutable (Al-jaziri, 2003; Mohamad Naser-al-din, 2001).

Therefore, there are two prominent implications. First, the language used in the opening discourse by the Iranian media is conspicuously religious, which suggests that the religious use of language is deeply rooted in the society of Iran, attempting to influence people in all aspects. This dominant discourse reflects the underlying structure of the Iranian society. In fact, two strong discourses have existed in this society for centuries—long before the Islamic revolution: discourse that echoes theological beliefs and discourse that expresses Iranian culture, traditions and values. The pendulum has always vacillated between the two. After the Islamic revolution, however, there has been an extreme shift toward the spiritual end, overshadowing Persian traditions despite voices disputing the change. Religious discourse has used all available means to take the upper hand. The ramification of this discourse has been a change in the ideological structure of the society that has arguably led to a change in social, and consequently, individual identities. This can be witnessed in interviews, meetings, social gatherings and other such settings, where one may witness eyebrow-raising exaggerations in speech as the speaker attempts, sometimes hopelessly, to convey their adherence to Islamic teachings, usually striving to please a specific audience.

Second, Iranian culture receives little or even no reference regardless of the topic. References made to Iranian culture which are not marked religiously are thought to reinforce thoughts and traditions that are pre-Islamic and may not conform with Islamic thoughts and teachings, and thus should be disregarded. In other words, any connection to centuries-old traditions are considered as non-Islamic and abominable and therefore must be abandoned. This may give rise to confused, and mostly, dual identities.

This changing discourse, which is the result of a change in ideology, is assumed to lead to changing identities and the eventual adoption of new identities.

As this study evinces, there are many areas about religion which have grabbed the attention of researchers interested in this topic. Furthermore, there are several questions about religion and religiosity that are yet to be answered. There is also the concern that the sensitivity of the topic might deter scholars from conducting further studies on religious issues. If such studies are not fraught with problems and complications for researchers and if these studies are privileged, further research can be warranted and more valid results can be accrued. The topic is therefore welcoming since it heralds an inherently cross-disciplinary study. Although the sample size in the study appeared to be adequate for conducting research, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to contexts other than the media language. Furthermore, our knowledge of social processes involving religion in language, rather than the opposite, remains inchoate. The possible reasons for this are arguably (1) the intricate connections between religion and language and (2) the variegated methods of research. The comprehension of religion in the Iranian media context may significantly contribute to the understanding of the role religion plays in the social setting of Iran.

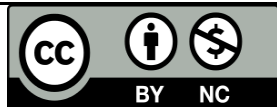
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