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العدد الثالث

والعشرون

## دراسة تداولية لترجمة القسم من اللغة السريانية إلى اللغة الإنكليزية

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### المستخلص:

تبحثُ الدراسةُ في براغماتيقا ( تداولية ) القسم في اللغة السريانية على وفق نظرية أفعال الكلام (سيرل ١٩٧٥)، وثوابت حسن اختيار التعابير (أوستن ١٩٨٢)، وتهدفُ إلى بيان السلوك الوظيفي للقسم في سياقات مختلفة؛ أي: قوته التعبيرية، وتأثيره على المُتلقّي، وتبحثُ الدراسةُ في كيفية ترجمة تعابير القسم من السريانية إلى اللغة الإنكليزية؛ إذ أُعطي مترجمان يحملان شهادة الدكتوراه في علم اللغة والترجمة ثلاثين تعبيراً في القسم مع سياقاتها؛ لترجمتها إلى الإنكليزية، وأظهرت الدراسة أنَّ القسم وظيفة أساسية في التواصل يلجأ إليها السريان؛ لتحقيق جملة من الوظائف البراغماتية في مختلف السياقات التواصلية، وبرهنت الدراسة أنَّ القسم بمعنى: الحلف، وهو فعل كلام يُقوِّض المُتكلم نفسه بالالتزام بما يقوله، وخُصِّصَت الدراسةُ إلى أنَّ الترجمة الحرفية هي أكثر استيعاماً من استراتيجيات الترجمة الأخرى؛ إذ يلجأ إليها المترجمون؛ لتفادي الفشل في التواصل، أمّا في الحالات الأخرى فيستعمل المترجمون المكافئ اللغوي الأقرب معنى للغة السريانية، وتُعدُّ هذه الدراسةُ إسهاماً بسيطاً في حقل الدراسات السريانية؛ إذ من المؤمل أن تشجّع الباحثين للقيام بإعداد دراساتٍ مماثلة أو دراساتٍ متقاطعة تتناول جوانب لغوية أخرى من هذه اللغة المهددة بالاندثار والزوال.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الأبعاد الثقافية والحضارية، أفعال الكلام التعبيرية والتفويضية بالإلزام، استراتيجيات الترجمة، اللغات المهددة بالزوال، أدوات القسم.

### The Translation of Syriac Swearing into English: A Pragmatic Study

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**Abstract:**

The current study is intended to investigate and analyze the pragmatics of swearing in Syriac (in the sense of taking an oath) in accordance to Searle (1975) *Speech act theory*, and the *felicity condition* as stated by Austin (1962). The purpose of this pragmatic analysis is to show the functional behavior of swearing in different contexts, i.e. its force as an utterance (locution) and its effect on the receptor. In order to explore how swearing in the Syriac dialect of Baghdede (a Nineveh district) is translated into English, 30 swearing expressions with associated situations and contexts were given to two translators with PhD degree in Linguistics and translation at the Catholic University in Erbil to translate into English. The study reveals that swearing functions as a means of communication that Syriac people use to satisfy different pragmatic functions in different communicative situations; it is a commissive speech act by which the speaker is committed to keep and/or affirm what he is saying. The study also revealed that literal translation is the most frequently employed strategy for rendering swearing expressions from Syriac into English. The translators resort to this strategy to avoid communication failure. In most of other cases, the translators used the closest *natural equivalent* of the Syriac language in terms of meaning. This study is a modest contribution to Syriac linguistic studies that most probably would encourage similar or cross-linguistic studies that tackle other aspects of this endangered language.

**Keywords:** Culture, specific aspects, Expressive and commissive speech acts, Translation strategies, Endangered languages, Swearing devices.

**1. Introduction**

In general, swearing is a universal linguistic phenomenon with two basic components, the object sworn by and the issue or case that the language user wants it to be confirmed or emphasized on swearing. Building on the universality of this linguistic phenomenon (Finn (2017), the current study tackles 'swearing' in Syriac as a speech act influenced (and being influential) by context and other pragmatic variables such as attitude, experience, ideology background knowledge, etc.



The main problem with the Syriac system of swearing is similar to other Syriac linguistic phenomena, viz. rarity of relevant modern linguistic studies; this state of affairs promotes the fact that Syriac is still an endangered language. The aim of this study is to explore how swearing (in the sense of taking an oath) is expressed explicitly (or implicitly) in different contexts and situations. Moreover, it highlights the cultural aspects of this linguistic phenomenon and its impact on the objects that Syriac language users frequently swear by, and identifies what functions or meanings (and probably shades of meaning) can be detected from the act of swearing in different communicative situations. The study also analyzes the data gathered in a one-year- field study to see what usually motivates the participants to swear and what they frequently swear by. In addition to the focus of the study on the most frequently occurring swearing expressions in Syriac, it also explores their realization in English through contextualizing them by reference to translation.

In this study only the type of swearing used in the sense of taking oaths is investigated. Moreover, the study is concerned with the conversational swearing as used by native speakers of Syriac of Baghdade in their daily dialogues, conversations and different interactions. The sense of swearing that includes cursing, vulgar terms, and profanity (together with official forms of swearing) is beyond the scope of this study.

Therefore, this study could be considered a modest contribution to Syriac linguistic studies, that most probably would encourage other researchers to conduct similar studies or cross-linguistic studies that tackle different other instances of speech acts.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Definitions

Swearing is a socio-culturally rooted linguistic phenomenon almost in all human communities. Stapleton (2020: 381) points out that swearing is “a highly complex socio-pragmatic activity, which produces different effects depending on features of the context, speaker and hearer categories, speaker-hearer relationships, and cultural and social expectations/ideologies”. The main purpose of swearing, as Jay and Janschewitz (2008) point out is to



express emotions; and the emotional impact of swearing is determined by experience with a culture and its language conventions. Swearing is used by language users of different gender, occupation, education, faith, etc. in different contexts, situations, and interactions (formal/informal) to satisfy an unlimited number of pragmatic functions. (cf. Abd el-Jawad, 2000; Holmes, 2013; Finn, 2017).

Swearing is frequently practiced by males and females, young and old people to make their words more convincing, reliable and hence "legitimate" (cf. Hudson, 2000: 24).

Swearing is a universal linguistic phenomenon practiced by all language users; it represents their daily life style and reflects, among many other things, how they view the world; and how their daily interactions and commitments are determined by this linguistic behavior

Most of the definitions of the notion 'swearing' are based on the fact that the speaker solemnly appeals to something held sacred or dear in order to affirm or deny his commitment to a certain behavior, act, or any aspect of life. No doubt that religion and religious beliefs and symbols had and still have their impact on language users' behavior, whether linguistic or non-linguistic. This is evident, for instance, including the name of God in many definitions for the term 'swearing' by many scholars of different cultural backgrounds. "Calling on the name of God to ensure that one is saying the truth, or that one will keep one's word" (Thomas, 1998: 1). Therefore, swearing in this study is confined to that area of language used to express strong or intense emotions and attitudes (cf. Andersson & Trudgill, 1992; Finn, 2017). Moreover, swearing is conceptualized as a speech act that serves a pragmatic function in daily interactions. This pragmatic/communicative function satisfies the speaker's intention behind swearing, viz. to make the addressee believe in what has been said and what sworn by (the force of the speech act) and react accordingly (the effect of the speech act on the addressee).

## 2.2 Swearing, Culture and Language

Sapir (1970) was the first scholars who highlighted the interrelationship between language and culture. Culture plays a significant role in determining the social behavior of people in their society which may be



quite different from that of other societies. The most influential system that reflects socio-cultural behavior of people is their language. Therefore, language can be considered the ambassador of culture to other cultures<sup>\*</sup>; it reflects whatever linguistic and non-linguistic behavior of its users.

Culture, as a system of social, ideological, and moral beliefs is the most influential factor that determines the linguistic behavior of language users. Therefore, each community has its own cultural peculiarities and shares a lot with other communities as well. Consider the following swearing items used by different communities in the Nineveh Plain:

- *Bmaaran 'iishu< mshiiHa* 'by our Lord Jesus Christ'<sup>1</sup>
- *Wôrrasul MuHammad* 'by the Messenger Muhammed'
- *W <ali 'amiirul-mu'môniin* 'by Ali, the prince of believers'
- *Bshekh <aadi* 'by Shekh <adi'
- *Bsaiyyid hayaas* 'by Saiyyôd Hayaas'

The above examples are Christian, Sunni Muslim, Shiite Muslim, Yezidi, and Kakai culture-specific swearing terms, respectively.

### 2.3 The pragmatics of Swearing

No doubt, when someone swears by something, he or she does not mean to convey the literal meaning of what has been stated; rather performing an act with force and impact on the addressee. In terms of Searl's (1975) Speech Act theory, we can say that the act of swearing goes under the category of **Expressives** in general, and the **Commissives** in particular. Swearing is an Expressive speech act since it refers to the emotive state of the performer of the act of swearing. On the other hand, it is a Commissive speech act since the performer commits himself to do an action.

The essence of any interaction that requires using language is communication; and in any communicative act there is possibility of communication failure or breakdown. This failure could be attributed to lack of probing the context of the utterance as well as failure to consider it as a performative action. This is absolutely the essence of the speech act theory and other pragmatic notions (cf. Austin, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> All translations are word-to-word literal translations by the researcher.



All types of swearing are treated here as being true utterances regarding their content and the situations in which they are uttered. In this sense, they satisfy the *felicity condition* as stated by Austin (1962).

### 3. Previous Studies

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there are no studies on Syriac swearing. However, Studies on this sociolinguistic phenomenon has been investigated in Arabic by Iraqi researchers from different perspectives: sociolinguistic (Majeed 2020; pragmatic (Shihab, 2018); contrastive (Haijal, 2009)

Ahmed's study entitled "Nature of swearing in Iraqi Arabic Society: A Sociolinguistic Study" (2020) sheds light on swearing as a universal phenomenon in general and as a cultural aspect in the Iraqi community in particular. It argues that the Iraqi society has its own way in talking the oath to achieve a common purpose. The study concludes that Iraqi people are among communities that frequently use swearing due to several moral values that they admire.

Haijal's (2009) study entitled "Swearing in English and Arabic" presents swearing devices and objects sworn by in Arabic poetry. It explains and discusses cultural differences between Arabic and English and the role of culture in determining the social behavior of people of which language is an important part. The study concludes that Arabs pay more attention to swearing than English ones due to cultural differences; it also concludes that English has few jurative devices to swear, however, in English they use emphatic statements to assume that their saying is true.

Shihab's 2018 study entitled "Pragmatic Study of Swearing in Arabic with Reference to English" tests the behavior of oath in both Arabic and English. The analysis of swearing aligns with the speech act theory; that is, giving oath is about giving a promise or a commitment by which the speaker obliges to a future action. The study concludes that the only difference between English and Arabic in swearing is the syntactic structure of the Arabic language.

A few studies on swearing explored in the field of translation have been conducted. Abu-Rayyash et al (2023) study entitled "Strategies of translating



swear words into Arabic: a case study of a parallel corpus of Netflix English-Arabic movie subtitles” adopts a corpus-assisted approach to explore the translation strategies that Netflix subtitlers opted for in rendering English swear words into Arabic. The study reveals that three translation strategies were observed in the corpus, namely, omission, softening, and swear-to-non-swear. The study recommends more corpus-assisted studies on different audio-visual translation modes, including dubbing, voiceover, and free commentaries.

In their study entitled "Untranslatability of Yemeni Arabic Oath Expressions into English", Qarabesh et al. (2023) try to answer, by a large corpus of oath expressions created through an online questionnaire, whether Yemeni Arabic oath expressions are (un)translatable into English by examining the syntactic formula of oaths from linguistic and cultural angles. The study showed that linguistically, there is a very close equivalence between English and Arabic, with respect to oath-making, in both particles and expressions. At the cultural level, there is also some equivalence, which is evident in the original effect that Yemeni Arabic oaths retain in their English translation.

The pragmatics of swearing in Syriac, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been investigated so far. Therefore, the current study is intended to investigate and analyze swearing (in the sense of taking an oath) in accordance to Searle (1975) *Speech act theory*, and the *felicity condition* as stated by Austin (1962). The study is also intended to show the functional behavior of swearing in different contexts, i.e. its force as an utterance (locution) and its effect on the receptor with reference to translation.

#### 4. Swearing in Syriac

Christianity does not allow swearing of whatever type, and for whatever end. This is evident in dozens of biblical verses, whether in the Old or New Testaments. Here are some verses illustrated here for convenience:

- “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain”. (Exodus 20:7)
- "You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord." (Leviticus 19:1)
- "Do not swear oaths" (Matthew 5:34)



- "But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil". (Mathew 5:33-37)

However, still most of the people swear in a way or another violating the teachings of their faith!

People differ from each other in their faith and religious commitments. For example, the majority of Syriac language users embrace Christianity. Therefore, it is not strange to find their swearing system based heavily on this creed: its values and symbols. This is evident in the Nicene Creed, the symbol of Christian Faith. The Nicene Creed is collectively taken by the believers and professed at Sunday Mass, services of baptism and confirmation, etc. where they profess their faith and devotion to the Trinity. Here is a sample of certain parts of this creed:

*Kômhemnakh bikhkha 'allaha 'aaba dhabaaTôd kol... wbôkha rabbi 'iisho< mshiiha waHiid bôrd 'alaaha... bruuHa qadiisha makhiyanô kol... wbgthha 'iita qadôshtha wômshabhaniTHa dôshliihô... wkômhemnakh bôghtha ma<mudiiTHa dghufraan dôkhTiyyatha..., wôknaTrakh qyamtôd miithô wkhayyô khathô l<aalam <olmiin.*

*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty ... And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God... And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life ...In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sin. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come<sup>2</sup>*

Swearing, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, is part and parcel of the Aramaic heritage. St. Ephrem's writings, for instance, include dozens of swearing terms and expression, most of which are religiously grounded: By God, the most beloved; By the blood of those who sacrificed for the sake of Jesus; By the name of all saints; By the name of our Lord; By my saint mother Mary, etc.

<sup>3</sup>. <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe>



Similar to other people of different nations and languages, the Syriac people regardless of age, gender, class, and education swear by sacred (divine or secular) entities or moral values (e.g. honor) that they and the rest of the community admire. However, there is no doubt that each community (within the broad culture) has its own swearing expressions.

### 5. Methodology

To investigate our hypotheses, the researcher has adopted the following procedure in collecting and analyzing data, and as follows:

1. The researcher recruited four male university student volunteers to collect as much data as possible from male language users of Syriac dialect of Baghdede. The informants are of the same age, education, and social class. Data collection has been carried out through observing conversations, discussions, disputes, etc. in real life situations (e.g. cafes, cafeterias, playgrounds, markets, parties, games, social events and religious anniversaries). In addition to observing and documenting how native speakers of Syriac swear in the above-mentioned situations, the recruited volunteers ask the people, whenever suitable and accessible, two questions:

- What makes you swearing in your daily interactions?
- What do you usually swear by in your daily interactions?

The reason behind this first step is to identify: ***the purpose of swearing, swearing devices, situations, sworn by objects, and swearing values.***

The student-volunteers are also asked to be truthful, informative, relevant, and brief in their documentation of the situations, i.e. responses that satisfy ***cooperative principles*** that should determine any conversation. Moreover, all felicity conditions are expected to be taken into account in observing the situations or in the interviews. Therefore, all the examples (whether collected by the volunteers or taken from the interviews) are ***felicitous*** since the speaker-hearer relationship is known, and the context of the utterance is well specified.

2. In order to explore how swearing in the Syriac dialect of Baghdede is translated into English, 30 swearing expressions with associated situations and contexts as reported by the four volunteers (See the Appendix) were given to two translators with PhD degree in Linguistics and translation at the



Catholic University in Erbil to translate into English. The reason behind supporting the data with the context and situation is to lessen translation problems related to the purpose behind uttering swearing expressions, and to make it easy for them to find suitable strategies to overcome translation problems when necessary.

The translators were asked to provide translations that satisfy felicity conditions and provide happy performative acts of swearing in English (Austin, 1962). Moreover, the truthfulness of the swearing act, its informativity, its relevance to the context of situation and the manner in which it is uttered were also recommended in the translations.

The two versions of the translators were given to an English native speaker<sup>3</sup> at the same university to check the reliability, adequacy, and understandability of the swearing expressions in the TL as rendered by the two translators. This evaluation is done from the perspective of a contemporary English native speaker, whose background is generally from England, as opposed to another English-speaking country such as Ireland.

## 6. Field Study Data Analysis

The data has been sorted out and categorized according to the basic pragmatic themes of swearing (i.e. speech acts), the formality/informality of the situations, swearing devices, objects sworn by, and swearing values.

### 6.1 Purposes of Swearing

Our data and answers to the question '*What makes you swearing in your daily interactions?*' show that the most common purpose of swearing in Syriac is to emphasize the truthfulness of one's words through making the sworn by entity (whether someone or something) a witness to what has been said

The answers to the question '*What makes you swearing in your daily interactions?*' were centered on satisfying mainly the following purposes:

- Convincing the addressee and making him/her believe that what the swearer is trying to convey is true. This is the super pragmatic strategy for managing many life situations.

<sup>3</sup> . Mr. Michael Phillips, Catholic University in Erbil.



- Giving extra force to what the swearer is saying or stating; consequently, adding more effect on the addressee.
- Expressing one's attitude towards a certain debatable or controversial issue.
- Connoting meanings that cannot be expressed by only denoting to an entity that one swears by.
- Routinely swearing as they interact with others.
- Serving different pragmatic functions like promising, apologizing, complaining, etc.; as such, swearing is taken as a pragmatic strategy to reinforce the message intended and its emotive function.

The data show a good number of swearing instances functioning as speech acts of different types. Here are the most used ones sequenced according to their frequency. Table (1) shows the 125 swearing items responses, significantly centered on the categories illustrated in the table below:

Table (1). Frequency distribution of swearing responses in Syriac

| <i>Swearing categories</i>                               | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Confirming or assuring; emphasizing</i>               | 38               | 47.5              |
| <i>Convincing</i>                                        | 21               | 26.25             |
| <i>Warning; Threatening</i>                              | 17               | 21.25             |
| <i>Blaming; Reproaching</i>                              | 13               | 16.25             |
| <i>Encouraging; Proving success, failure, guilt etc.</i> | 11               | 13.75             |
| <i>Promising</i>                                         | 8                | 10                |
| <i>Begging; Showing obedience</i>                        | 7                | 8.75              |
| <i>Apologizing and Regretting; Taking responsibility</i> | 5                | 6.25              |
| <i>Advising</i>                                          | 5                | 6.25              |
| <i>Inviting</i>                                          | 4                | 5                 |
| <i>Total</i>                                             | 125              | 100%              |

The confirming or assuring or emphasizing category constitutes 47.5 % of the total number of the data, it appeared 38 times; while the inviting category constitutes only 5%; it appeared only four times.

## 6.2 Swearing Situations

The most common situations that make the language users of Syriac resort to swearing are, in a way or another, related to emphasizing and/or expressing:



- **Attitudes** whether negative or positive towards the other (e.g. trust, support, solidarity, threatening, reproaching etc.)

- **Feelings** (love, hatred, intimacy, etc.)

Sometimes swearing is used by some people as a habit, but void of meaning such as **b'allaha** 'by God', **briishi** (by my head), etc.

Sometimes swearing is used to add humor to the speech in an intimate situation as in:

- **briishôd 'aatha bôSla** 'by the head of this onion'

- **bqorôd 'aawa nhiira** 'by the grave of that burned one, i.e. burned in the fire of the hell.

Even in heated debates between quarreling people, some of swearing items might be considered impolite, especially when they include unmentionable things like some parts of the human body. This always happen when the speaker wants to disgrace the addressee and attracts the attention of people who are witnessing the dispute, no matter whether the speaker is telling the truth.

### 6.3 Swearing Devices

The main swearing devices in Syriac that are associated with swearing and used in different contexts are the following:

- The lexical items **gyaamôn** 'I swear'; **hemôn** and **hemônni** 'believe' and 'believe me' are the main swearing items that start a swearing utterance.

- The only particle that is used with all the nouns sworn by is /b/ 'By'. For example: **b'allah, bômshiiha, briishi** 'By God, by Christ; by my head'.

- Indirect if clauses as in:

*Lahaawôn pliiTa mkhaaSôd baabi 'ôn la qaawôrnukh qahuula.*

*Lit. 'I am not from my father's back, if I won't burry you soon'.*

### 6.4 Sworn by objects

Our data and answers to the question '**What do you usually swear by in your daily interactions?**' show that swearing in Syriac stems from an emotive force of different values. Some of the spiritual, moral and material values that Syriac native speakers swear by can be, for convenience, illustrated as follows:



**a. Spiritual or religion-specific values** such as the word '*alaaha* 'God' alone or with attributes and some other Christian divine powers are the most powerful source that Syriac language users swear by. Trinity '*allaaha 'aaba, mshiiHa 'd̄bra, ruHad qudsha* 'God the father, Christ the son, Holy Spirit', and '*d̄nj̄l* 'the Gospel', *maryam* or *qad̄shta Maryam* 'Mary or St Mary', *Sliiwa* 'the Cross', *sahth̄d qadiish̄d* 'Martyr Saints' and '*īita* 'the Church' are also sworn by either with the expression *gyaamin b...* 'I swear by...', or the particle /b/, or implicitly referring to what indicate them. The speakers of Syriac may also add (explicitly or implicitly) some attributes or explanations to the Almighty God and to their faith icons whenever they want to appear true and more convincing as in:

- *Bsh̄m̄d̄d 'alaaha* 'by the name of God'.
- *Bqurbana qadiisha d̄dkshaaq̄l̄d kul suraaya* 'by the Holy Communion that every Christian take'.
- *Bkuleh̄n sahth̄d maaran* 'by all the saint martyrs.
- *Bsliiw̄d Haayi* 'by the living Cross'
- '*Baabo 'alaaha* 'by God the father'.
- '*baab̄d 'īishu*< 'by the father of Jesus'.
- '*bqor̄d maaran* 'by the tomb of our Lord'.
- *B̄mshiiha, b̄mshiihayȳn kyaam̄n* 'by Christ, by Christ I'm swearing'.
- *B'īita khlaapaH; b'īita qad̄shta* 'by the lovely church; by the sacred church'.
- *B̄Sliiw̄d maran; b̄Sliiw̄d Haayi* 'by the cross of our Lord.
- *b'aawa d̄dk̄m khaal̄qlukh* 'by the one who created you'.

Closely related to the spiritual values by which the respondents swear are the sacred places and shrines, and the holy times throughout the year:

- *b'aathi sh̄d'THa qad̄shta* 'by this sacred hour'.
- *b'aatha yoma briikha* 'by this blessed day'.
- *b'aatha Soma brikha* 'by this blessed fasting'.
- *b'aathi qyamta* 'by this Easter'
- *b'īisho< T̄d̄fla* 'by Jesus the child'.
- *b'aatha b̄yalda briikha* 'by this blessed Christmas'.



**b.Moral or honor-based swearing values:** The Christian community of Baghdade is to a great extent conservative; and the relations among people whether at the level of the family or the community as a whole are still very strong. They are even ready to sacrifice for each other. Therefore, it is not unnatural to find the people swearing by their life and the life or honor of each other, such as *briishôd baabi*, *bsharaafi* 'by my father's head, by my honor'. People swear by their honor, life or even the life or honor of those whom they hold dear, members of the family in particular like parents, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters (whether dead or alive). *Brokhôd saawi* 'by the soul of my grandfather', *qaaSôf <umri* 'Let my age be ruined if...' *mkarôskha qawwômti* 'May my body collapse if...'. Here are some instances of moral or honor-based swearing values:

- *Bôhrôd eni* 'by the light of my eyes'.
- *Mkarôskhôn* 'Let I fall down'.
- *meTHôn daha qaamukh* 'May I die now and in front of you'.
- *qoriili* 'May you burry me'.
- *Maayôth baabôH emôd diilô kômdaagôl* 'Let one's father die if one is telling lies'.
- *Ta'niili lmuqurtaaya kaaniyyôn kômdaglôn* 'May they carry me to Muqurtaya cemetery if I'm telling lies'.
- *Mparôtkhi kaaki/garmaami*; *shal'i kaaki* 'May my teeth/bones be broken; Let my teeth be pulled out'.
- *Mfaalôsh kummi* 'let my mouth be collapsed if...'
- *Bjaahôd kul man dô'ôtlô jaah* 'by whoever has the prestige/power'.

**c. Tradition-based material swearing values:**

Similar to other communities some tradition-based material swearing values are held sacred to an extent that the respondents swear by frequently such as food in general, and 'bread', 'salt', and 'milk' in particular as in:

- *b'aathi nô<mô* 'By this grace'.
- *b'aatha pôrzôd lakhma* 'By this piece of bread'.
- *Bkhôlya dômôSli* 'By the milk I sucked'.
- *blakhma wmôlkha dô'iiTHô benaaTHan* 'By the bread and salt we have shared'.



- *b'aatha bōhra* 'by this light'.

Culture توضف في البيانات عن

Parts of the human body are also frequently used in swearing to serve certain functions, head and eyes in particular as in:

- '*ōbriishi* 'By my head'.

- '*ōbōhrōd eni* 'By the light of my eyes'.

- '*ōbthōmmōtti* 'By my word of honor'.

## 7. Translation Data Analysis

In order to explore the most commonly adopted translation strategies in rendering Syriac swearing expressions into English, only thirty out of 125 swearing expressions were selected from the data collected from male language users of Syriac dialect of Baghdade through observing their conversations, discussions, disputes, etc. in real life situations. The thirty swearing expressions together with their contexts are supposed to satisfy felicity conditions and truthfulness of the swearing acts, their informativity, relevance to the context of situation and the manner in which they are uttered. The renderings of the two translators are analyzed according to the translation strategies they employed.

### 7.1 Results

This study indicates that the translators employed in their translation of Syriac swearing expressions a number of strategies: literal translation, **Explicitation**, **Substitution by Cultural Equivalence**, **Deletion and Compensation**, and **a Combination of Strategies**. Table (2) shows the frequency of strategies the translators resorted to.

Table (2). Frequency distribution of Translation Strategies

|  | Translation Strategies                                           | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
|  | <i>Literal translation</i>                                       | 29        | 48.3       |
|  | <i>Explicitation</i>                                             | 5         | 8.3        |
|  | <i>Substitution by Cultural Equivalence/ Adaptation strategy</i> | 7         | 11.6       |
|  | <i>Deletion and Compensation</i>                                 | 14        | 23.3       |
|  | <i>Combination of Strategies</i>                                 | 5         | 8.3        |
|  | <i>Total</i>                                                     | 60        | 100%       |



The table shows that the translators resorted to many strategies, including literal translation 48.3%, Explicitation 8.3%, Substitution by cultural equivalence adaptation 11.6%, Deletion and compensation 23.3%, and a combination of strategies 8.3%. The frequency of the translation strategies used by each translator concerning the thirty swearing expressions is as stated in the table below:

Table (3). Frequency of Translation Strategies used by the Translators

| <i>Translation Strategies</i> |                                                                  | <i>Translator A</i> |          | <i>Translator B</i> |          |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
|                               |                                                                  | <i>f.</i>           | <i>%</i> | <i>f.</i>           | <i>%</i> |
| 1.                            | <i>Literal translation</i>                                       | 16                  | 53.3     | 13                  | 43.3     |
| 2.                            | <i>Explicitation</i>                                             | 2                   | 6.6      | 3                   | 10       |
| 3.                            | <i>Substitution by Cultural Equivalence/ Adaptation strategy</i> | 5                   | 16.6     | 2                   | 6.6      |
| 4.                            | <i>Deletion and Compensation</i>                                 | 5                   | 16.6     | 9                   | 30       |
| 5.                            | <i>Combination of Strategies</i>                                 | 2                   | 6.6      | 3                   | 10       |
| <i>Total</i>                  |                                                                  | 30                  | 100%     | 30                  | 100%     |

## 7.2 General Discussion

All the data samples (7.1) are felicitous since the speaker-hearer relationship is known, either relatives and/or friends; and the context of the utterance is well specified, mostly students at the university campus, at home, or in real life situations. The reason behind supporting the data with the context and situation (See the Appendix) is to lessen translation problems related to the purpose behind uttering swearing expressions. Building on these procedural facts, it is not expected to have serious translation problems. However, still the translators were sometimes unable to invest the context and situation of the data in their rendering the Syriac swearing expressions into English successfully. Here are some general comments and discussions centered on realizing the purpose of swearing expressions in the TL, their cultural peculiarity, and strategies used by the translators to overcome translation problems.

### 7.2.1 Purpose of Swearing Expressions in the TL



Syriac language users use *direct speech acts* to prove the truthfulness of their swearing act. They either use the swearing expression explicitly *hemōn* 'believe me' or *gyaamōn* 'I swear' or 'I take an oath by....' in both cases the illocutionary force (i.e. *promising, threatening, etc.*) with its impact on the addressee is conveyed. They also show the speaker's commitment to his utterance of swearing.

This is evident in the translation of *bkhorawuuTHan 'ōyyōn gyaamiinukh, wōbjaah dkul man dō'ōtlō jaah* (5) and *hemōni, briishi wōb shōmmōd 'alaaha* (9) literally by Translator A (henceforth Tr. A) into:

*'By our friendship and by whoever has the prestige I swear'.*

*'I take an oath by my head' and 'I call God as my witness'.*

The former has the illocutionary force of convincing; whereas the latter has the illocutionary force of confirming. In both cases the swearing expressions *gyaamiinukh* and *hemōnni* are followed by another supportive swearing expression in (5) *wōbjaah dkul man dō'ōtlō jaah*, and two swearing expressions in (9) *briishi wōb shōmmōd 'alaaha*.

Similarly, Translator B (henceforth Tr. B) rendered (5) and (9) into stating the act of convincing and the act of confirming by two simple questions based on the two performative verbs 'believe' and 'trust':

*On what would you like me to swear to make you believe me, pal?*

*But why on earth don't you trust me? Believe me!*

However, (Tr. B) supported these two questions by the explicit English swearing expression 'I swear': *'I'm swearing on our own friendship'* and *'I swear on the name of God'*.

Again, the translators tried to preserve the explicitness and directness of the SL swearing expression without retaining their illocutionary force and the expected effect on the TL reader/addressee. For instance, the swearing expressions in (10 and 17) *tunethōd guurō shqol mōnni* and *Haram...* have been translated into:

*'A word of honor...' and 'for sure you won't ...' (Tr. A)*

*'I promise you solemnly ...' and 'I shall in no way ...' (Tr. B)*

As such, the act of promising in (10) and warning in (17) lost too much of their force as acts and as effect on the TL readers/addressee. However, (Tr.



A), to a certain extent, managed to avoid directness and explicitness in rendering *tunethôd guurô* into 'A word of honor' which is usually associated with strict social commitment to promising by men; and *Haram...* into 'God forbid if ...' which carries a close meaning to swearing; that is, 'shame on me if I won't ...'.

Similarly, the act of warning in (16) *b'aathi qadamta wôb'aathi iita brôkhta 'ôn lam'udôlukh...* has been substituted by a simple sentence:

*'This wrong behavior will humiliate you in front of all the people'. (Tr. A)*

In this cases, the force of the utterance as a speech acts of warning is reduced; and consequently its effect on the TL readers would not be as that experienced by the SL readers.

Moreover, one can easily detect the implicitness of confirming or abiding to a commitment speech act as in (8) or encouraging in (26 and 27) or apologizing in (24); presupposing that the speaker abides himself to keep his words as a promise in (11 and 12); a commissive speech act through which the speaker's utterance is intended to warn or threaten the addressee not to... as in (16 and 18) or blaming the addressee in (20 and 21). Here the performative acts are all indirect through the conditional structure '*ôn la...* 'If not/unless'. This has been well preserved by the translators in most of the instances and translated them into English explicitly. For instance, in (8) '*aana leyyôn mkhasôd baabi 'ôn la...*, which confirms or assures the speaker' attitude towards the addressee has been translated as:

*'I'm not from my father's loins if ...' (Tr. A)*

*'I shall not be the true son of my father if ...' (Tr. B)*

The conditional structure '*ôn la...* 'If not/unless', which is part and parcel of the speech act of blaming '*ôbôhrôd eni 'ôn lahaawôdwa ...* in (21) and of promising in *b'aatha bôyalda briikha, wbkkelôd maaran... 'ôn 'iyyôn kômdaglôn* (12), have been substituted by two complex statements by (Tr. A):

*God witnesses my words I'm telling the truth. (12)*

*Only because you are dear to me, I cannot but to forgive you for what you have done to me. (21)*



The former '*ʾon 'iyyōn kōmdaglōn* has not been rendered literally into 'if I'm lying' but into its opposite form 'I'm telling the truth' in order to keep the promising force of the swearing expression. Similarly, instead of translating the conditional clause as '*if you were not ..., what have you done cannot be forgiven*', the translator rendered it into a different syntactic structure that, as to him, might have more effect on the TL reader:

*Only because you are dear to me, I cannot but to forgive you*

The purpose of the swearing expressions has mostly been preserved by the two translators except for two instances of encouraging speech acts (26 and 27) rendered by (Tr. B) into convincing and advising speech acts, respectively:

*I swear to God and on my father's head that had you known what has befallen me you would all shut up and utter nothing'. (26)*

*Be a true son of your father, if you so wish you will be a man in the true sense of the word. (27)*

However, this does not mean there should be always clear-cut boundaries between one type of speech act and another that should be preserved in the TL; this depends on the translator's reading of the context of the swearing expression and its situation for there always exists overlap. Consider how (Tr. B) substituted in his rendering of (25) the implied speech act of encouraging:

*Believe me and have trust in me that such a chance doesn't knock twice at your door.*

This rendering does not imply the act of encouraging; rather, it denotes convincing and/or confirming. Therefore, such translation distorts the message conveyed to the TL reader.

Similarly, the act of inviting implied in the context and situation of the SL text (29) has been rendered by (Tr. B) as:

*Don't worry please. You will be with us next time if you so wish. What do you think?*

This might most probably be understood as an act of promising by the TL reader.

### 7.2.2 Preserving Culture-specific Aspects of SL and TL



As far as the aspects of culture are concerned, our data show that the translators are sometimes not aware of the culture-specific aspects of either language. Consequently, the translators were not successful in transferring the effect the swearing expression has in Syriac into English. For instance, *b'aatha p̄r̄zōd lakhma* (19), *mkar̄skhōn wdaha qoriili bmuqurtaaya* (24) have been rendered literally into 'by this piece of bread' and 'May I collapse and being soon buried in Muqurtaya Graveyard', respectively by (Tr. A). However, *qoriili bmuqurtaaya* (24) has been explicated by identifying that *muqurtaaya* is the name of a cemetery in Baghdade. In other words, the translator resorted to semantic translation and reproduced the Syriac swearing expression in English, while maintaining context and culture. On the other hand, (Tr. B) showed a moderate understanding of the culture in his rendering of the swearing expressions in (19 and 24); he resorted to adaptation strategy (i.e. making a shift to the TL culture) and translated (19) just into 'I swear' and 'May I perish and be buried in Muqurtaya (a cemetery)'.

The two translators maintain the link with the religious domain in their translation of religion-specific swearing expressions so that they better yield a similar response in the TL audience. Of the thirty SL data samples, eleven of them are religion –specific: swearing by '*alaaha* 'God' (2, 4, 9, 20), *maaran* 'our Lord' (1, 6, 12, 26) *maryam* 'St Mary' (28), *qurbana qadisha* 'Holy Communion' (14), '*iita* 'church' (16). These occur in many configurations. For example '*alaaha* appears as '*alaaha khlaapiH* (2), '*alaaha mbadaalukh* (4), and *shōmmōd 'alaaha* (9), *hemōn diilō 'alaaha* (20). No doubt many emotional and cultural reasons stand behind this diversity.

The translators made use of *literal translation* as it is more accurate and straightforward, and maintains the denotative meaning of swearing expressions and structure. Following this strategy, the translators did not face any serious translational problem. However, problems arise with the connotative meaning which is culturally dependent, i.e. non-literal meaning. For instance, the two swearing expressions: *mkar̄skhōn wdaha qoriili bmuqurtaaya* (24) and *b'aatha p̄r̄zōd lakhma* (19) have lost a lot of their



meaning being translated by (Tr. B) into '*May I perish and be buried in Muqurtaya (a cemetery)*' and 'I swear', respectively.

The translators should have resorted to cultural **equivalence strategy**; that is, using words and expressions in the TL that better embody culture and emotions.

### 7.2.3 Strategies Used in Translating Swearing Expressions

The results of the study, as illustrated in Tables (2 and 3), show that a good number of Syriac swearing expressions have been translated directly by their most common meanings; that is, *literal translation* has been adopted by the translators since the swearing expressions are expected by the translators to be similar in both the SL and TL. For instance, all the swearing expressions that carry the name of '**alaaha**' have been translated into '*God*'. Similar religious symbols, which are usually charged with emotional associations aroused by the swearing expression, cannot be left behind by the two translators, Tr. A in particular.. Consider, for instance, the swearing expression in (6) **bSalabuut dmaaran**. This has been rendered by (Tr. A) into '*By the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ*', using a combination of strategies, namely literal and explication explicating; i.e. crucifixion and adding '*of our Lord Jesus Christ*'. Similarly, translating **b'aatha p̄r̄zōd lakhma** (19) by (Tr. A) into '*By this piece of bread*' since 'bread' is thought by the translator to have a common cultural value in both cultures. However, it has been rendered by (Tr. B) simply as '*I swear*' which does not convey to the TL that meaning of the SL charged with emotions, but a neutral one. In other words, the translator should have not neglected the **connotative meaning** of the expression **p̄r̄zōt lakhma** which is basically related to emotive side of language and culture. He should have resorted to a cultural equivalent, if any. If not, he would have resorted to imply this meaning in a statement that starts with 'I swear' such as: '*I swear you haven't asked about me at all. Have you ever thought of its impact on me?*'

**Deletion and Compensation** strategy comes next in frequency; it has been manipulated 14 times: five times by (Tr. A) and nine by (Tr. B). For instance, both translators in (29) resorted to this strategy; they deleted the SL swearing expression and compensated that by a frequently used expression



in the western culture 'Trust me' and a statement that implies the act of inviting:

Trust me, you'll be with us next time. Won't you? (Tr. A)

Don't worry please. You will be with us next time if you so wish. What do you think? (Tr. B)

However, the *deletion strategy* cannot be always reliable; it may affect the accuracy of the context of translation, and reduces the intended emotive effect of the swearing expression on the TL reader/addressee. Therefore, **Compensation strategy** has been employed in many instances, especially when a swearing expression or part of it is deleted because it cannot be translated; the missing meaning is provided elsewhere in the TL.

The strategy that comes next in frequency is substitution by a cultural equivalent or adaptation; it has been employed seven times. Consider for instance, the translation of haawiilukh 'iiman wutkol (25) which has the illocutionary force of encouraging:

Trust me; such a thing cannot happen twice in life. (Tr. A)

Believe me and have trust in me that such a chance doesn't knock twice at your door. (Tr. B)

Both translators substituted the SL expression by the act of trusting that is frequent in the western culture. However, In order to come up with an appropriate translation, the translator should have attended to contextual variables, including the relationship between the participants in the interaction (i.e. friends) and the general setting in which the swearing took place. .Therefore, a better cultural translation could be one of the following equivalents suggested by the native speaker in his evaluation of the situations:

a. Opportunity doesn't knock twice.

b. Carpe diem!

c. [Time and tide wait for no man], take this chance while you can!

#### 7.2.4 Evaluation and Suggestions of the native Speaker

For each of the thirty situations a suggested equivalent or equivalents have been given by the native speaker according to its description with reference



to the two translations (see the Appendix). The total number of his suggestions was 60 distributed as illustrated in Table (4):

Table (4). Frequency distribution of the native speaker's evaluation

| <i>Indication to swearing</i>      | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Believe/Trust me</i>            | 2                | 1.2               |
| <i>Idiomatic usage of language</i> | 28               | 16.8              |
| <i>I promise</i>                   | 3                | 1.8               |
| <i>I swear</i>                     | 2                | 1.2               |
| <i>God</i>                         | 3                | 1.8               |
| <i>Statements</i>                  | 19               | 11.4              |
| <i>Conditionals</i>                | 3                | 1.8               |
| <i>Total</i>                       | 60               | 100%              |

The suggestions given by the native speaker encompass the spirit of the situation as it has been understood. Further, most of the suggestions are idiomatic, as these are what such an English native speaker might use there.

1. The majority of the swearing expressions were rendered into figurative language, i.e. idiomatic usage of language (1, 4 - 5, 7, 10 - 13, 15 - 18, 20, 23, 25, and 27 - 29). For instance, in (17), the situation yielded two equivalents: a. 'Please take care in this weather' which means no invitation is extended); and this is culture-specific. and b. 'You're very welcome to stay the night', where the opposite meaning is intended. However, sometimes one might give an equivalent such as 'I'll move Heaven and earth to make it work' to a situation like that in (5) where someone is trying to let his friend believe him. This is possible but over-dramatic.

2. Several swearing expressions in different situations were seen as simple statements about the situations which might not imply any act of swearing unless accompanied by non-verbal behavior (3, 6 - 9, 13 - 15, 19 - 24, and 30). For instance, the act of advising in (14) has been rendered into 'It's probably not a good idea to keep that hairstyle. People may talk', which is a sort of understatement. Similarly, the act of blaming in situation (20) has been given the equivalent 'I feel a bit let down, actually' which is again a sort of understatement. Therefore, resorting to a statement that implies blaming indirectly is more preferable such as, 'the angrier we are, the more understated we become'.



3. In some instances, the situations have been restated as conditional sentences used to convey the intended meaning of the swearing expressions (13, 15 – 16, and 23).

4. Most of his proposed equivalents to the SL swearing expressions start with '*I promise*' (2, 3, and 4); *I assure* (6); *I swear* (9 and 5); *Trust/believe me* (1, 6, and 9).

5. Swearing by God and other religious symbols (4, 9, and 26). This happens and could be possible when the situation is very serious; or probably if the speaker is an elderly catholic. However, all types of swearing by religious beliefs and symbols, '*God*' in particular, are possible but outdated.

Finally, further studies could take these results as hypotheses to be investigated and determine to what extent these results are objective.

### 8. Conclusions and suggestions

The current study concludes the following:

1. Swearing in Syriac is not exceptional from English, and probably other languages, in that it has a social and psychological effect on the recipient of the swearing that the one who performs this act is assuring, promising etc. to be up to one's words. Therefore, swearing is an act of committing oneself to perform an act (promise in particular) or willingly carry out a future task, i.e. a commissive speech act in terms of the pragmatic theory.

2. Our data gives support to the fact that swearing is a performative act with inherent force and effect on the addressee. This is evident in the Syriac language users' employment of direct speech acts to prove the truthfulness of their swearing act.

3. Swearing serves a great number of pragmatic functions in different speech situations such as: promising, ordering, emphasizing or confirming a claim, denying an impeachment or accusation, convincing to accept something, strengthening a warning, inviting, complaining, suggesting, etc. In other words, the pragmatic function swearing serves in Syriac dialect of Baghdeda is adding a convincing force to any speech act in any speech interaction.

4. Christianity seems to have a great influence on the way Syriac language users utter their swearing expressions. The data shows heavy reliance on



religiously-based swearing such as: '*alaaha, mshiiHa, maryam, qadiishô, 'ônjôl, kthaawa mqucha* 'God, Christ, Mary, Saints, Gospel, and Holy Bible, respectively', and many other terms of Christian faith value.

5. The study also concludes that the context is one determinant of the pragmatic functions of swearing. The same swearing word or expression can be used in two different situations to convey different messages, express different emotive meanings, or show different attitudes. Therefore, just like other human linguistic actions, swearing serves an unlimited number of pragmatic functions that satisfy the language user's immediate or urgent needs in a certain situational dialogue or conversation and support his/her moral and cultural values. This might cause problems for translators who are not aware of such pragmatic functions and their effect on the target language readers.

6. This study revealed that literal translation (i.e. giving a word-for-word translation) is the most frequently employed strategy for rendering swearing expressions from Syriac into English. The translators resort to this strategy to avoid communication failure. In most of other cases, the translators used the closest **natural equivalent** of the Syriac language in terms of meaning.

7. Compared to Syriac, English is more flexible in that it can dispense with the explicit Syriac utterances of swearing and make use of either '*I swear*' or have it implied in the body of the text, whether in words, phrases, or utterances as in ***b'allaha... 'I swear by God that ...'***, or '*Trust/believe me*'. Sometimes, the explicit direct performative verb ***ymaaya*** 'swearing' is replaced by other verbs to indirectly imply swearing as in ***kbi'ônwa dla'aaTHôt mbaaTHôr 'ôssar*** 'Just I wished you not to come after ten! '. However, this is always associated with non-verbal behavior such as the use of intonation, body language, etc.

8. From the perspective of a contemporary English native speaker, whose background is generally from England (as opposed to another English-speaking country such as Ireland), there are few if any of the situations where swearing on God or in a religious way would be considered at all normal. The English, as he claims, are quite reserved and honor – the word of a gentleman – is very important. Their word is enough to be believed. It



would only be in an extremely serious or unusual situation where an expression such as 'As God is my witness' would ever be used, and rarely at that. It might possibly be used as a statement of last resort, for example, or in a 'life or death' situation.

8. Further studies could be conducted to tackle the other common sense of swearing that includes vulgarism, profanity, and cursing. Other future studies could also tackle swearing in the speech of people of different age, social class, education, gender, and dialect.

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### Appendices

**Appendix A:** Source Language Data with Contexts and Situations, Transliteration, Translators' (A & B) performance, Native speaker's evaluation of the situations and suggested translations for the swearing expressions in the TL.

**14. Someone is telling his partner that he will not deny or reject his proposals from now on. He knows that he has done something grave. He is asking for the last chance to show his good intention.**

[bðSliwid Haayð dðg <aabðdlð kul suraaya, 'aathi naqla kðm 'aawðthnaaya, khðrta naqla lag-HaSlā. w'aana mðn daha m'aathi 'iithukh l'aathi 'iithukh].

**Literal:** By the live Cross that every Christian worship. I have done it this time; I'll not do it again. From now, I am yours from this hand to the other hand.

**Tr. A:** I swear by the Holy Cross, I did it this time; it will never happen again. I'll be your obedient servant from now on.

**Tr. B:** Solemnly swear I'll never do it again. From now on I shall do whatever you want me to/ I swear by the Live Cross that is worshipped by every Christian, that I shall never do it again. From now on I'm your obedient servant.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** Please believe me, this is the last time it will happen. Can't we draw a line under it [and move on]?

**15. Someone is telling his friends that he was unfair during the final exams; it was a life mistake. He is asking them to tell the teacher that he feels sorry for what happened and he'll not do it again.**

[qami 'alaaha khlaapðH wgamekhun kbi'ðn tewðnaH, laTHwaali Haq d'othðn\_haadakh m'aatha molpaana briikha].

**Literal:** I want to state it before the almighty God and in front of you that I had no right to behave like this with this blessed teacher.

**Tr. A:** I put that on God and on you, I hadn't the right to do what I did with this good teacher.

**Tr. B:** I'd like to say loud and clear that I had no right to behave like that with this upright teacher.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** I was completely out of order to be like that. I promise you it won't happen again.



**16. Someone is trying to make his mother believe him that he has given up smoking. He is trying to skip his father's punishment.**

[bqorid saawi, 'iithô bôsh <aziiza mōnnôH? 'aathi naqla qameTHa wkharetha 'ôddaarinaH bkummi].

**Literal:** By the grave of my grandfather; is there dearer than him? This is the first and the last time that I put it in my mouth.

**Tr. A:** By my beloved grandfather's grave, I'll not do it again. I'll give it up forever.

**Tr. B:** I swear on my grandfather's grave next to whom nothing is dearer that I shall never smoke again.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** Please don't tell Dad – this really is the last time [I promise you].

**17. Someone is doing his best to let a friend of his believe he has not cheated him; he was fair with him as regards the price of the books that he has bought from the Book Fair.**

[ʼalaaha mbadaalukh, kha fôlôsh lashqôlli zayoda. dôkh gshekôt bgaawi w'akhni khorawaaTHa?].

**Literal:** God is on your behalf that I haven't taken an extra penny. How do you suspect me and we are friends?

**Tr. A:** God witnesses my words; be sure, I haven't taken more than I deserve. I still cannot believe that you suspect me at a time we are close friends.

**Tr. B:** Trust me I have not overcharged you even for an extra penny. How come you mistrust me?

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. I promise you, I haven't made/taken a penny more.

b. Scout's Honor, I haven't made/taken a penny more.

c. As God is my witness, I haven't made/taken a penny more.

**18. Someone usually promises his friend to have business together; but he does not keep his word. Now he is trying to let his friend once more believe that they'll have a joint work together soon.**

[wulukh 'ôbmaa gbi'ôt dyaamiinukh Hatta dômhemnôt, wôkhleyyit dla'alaaha. bkhorawuuTHan 'ôyyôn gyaamiinukh, wôbjaah dkul man dô'ôtlô jaah, 'innaqla bid ya'lôt mōnni shariika,

**Literal:** By what you want me to swear so that you believe me. Are you without God? By our friendship and by whoever has a prestige, I'm swearing, this time you'll be my partner.

**Tr. A:** Are you unbeliever not to believe me? By our friendship and by whoever has the prestige I swear we'll have a joint work together this time.



Tr. B: *On what would you like me to swear to make you believe me, pal? Don't tell me you don't believe me after I swore by God! I'm swearing on our own friendship and on all saints this time you will be my business partner.*

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. *[Come on], I swear to you, this time we'll make it work. [You know you want to...]*

b. *I'll move Heaven and Earth to make it work.*

**19. On the Good Friday, someone is saying to his friend, who does not seem to believe him that he is going to support him financially this time.**

*[bSalabuut dmaaran lapaayish baalukh 'aana qaamukh mfôlôds l'alpa].*

**Literal:** *By the Cross of our Lord don't worry; I'm ready to pay from one penny to one thousand.*

Tr. A: *By the Crucifixion I swear, don't worry. I'm ready to help you financially unreservedly.*

Tr. B: *I assure you not to worry. I'm ready for any amount you ask from me.*

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** *Trust me / believe me, I gave you my word [that I'd help you out].*

**20. Some of John's friends are in doubt about his allegiance to the Students' Union that he is a member in. He is telling them he'll prove the opposite during the next elections.**

*[Latli mândi d'amôn, bas b'aathi 'ar'a mqudashta wôb sahthaH, bôd khaazetun Sindoqô ma bôdômHaake].*

**Literal:** *I have nothing to say; however, by this sacred soil and by the martyrs, you'll see what the election boxes would say.*

Tr. A: *I won't comment. By this blessed land and her martyrs I testify, the elections will speak louder.*

Tr. B: *I have nothing to say, but I swear on this holy land and its holy martyrs, you will see what the ballot boxes will say.*

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. *Well, I'll prove you all wrong ...*

b. *I'll show you ...*

c. *Let's see what happens on Polling/Election Day ...*

**21. While in funeral services the main Cemetery, someone tells his cousin not to worry about the expenses of the funeral and the money he lent to him before; he'll pay it back soon.**

*[aana leyyôn mkhaSôd baabi 'ôn la smôkhli mônnokh hal khareTHa, la mhemnôt dshaawuqnokh rkhothukh].*

**Literal:** *I'm not from my father's spine if I won't stay with you. Don't think I'll let you alone.*

Tr. A: *I'm not from my father's loins if I desert you. Be sure, I won't let you alone.*



Tr. B: I shall not be the true son of my father if I didn't support you to the end. Don't you ever think that I will leave you alone.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** it's not the time or the place to be worrying about that now. I'll give you as much time as you need ...

**22. Someone is saying to his friend for the second time that he has nothing to do with the current problem. He is asking him not to believe the rumors.**

[‘iimuri qay leyyōt kōmhēmndōt? hemōnni, briishi wōb shōmmōd 'alaaha 'aana latli da<wō bchumōndi].

**Literal:** Tell me why you don't believe. Believe me. By my head and by the name of God, I have nothing to do with it.

Tr. A: Why don't you believe me, man? I take an oath by my head and I call God as my witness I have no hand in it.

Tr. B: But why on earth don't you trust me? Believe me! I swear on the name of God I'm not involved.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. [As God is my witness], it's not true. Don't believe everything you hear.

b. I swear to you, it had nothing to do with me.

c. For the hundredth time, it had nothing to do with me.

**23. Someone is saying to a close friend that he'll support him in his attempt to defend the rights of the minorities in the town council.**

[tunethōd guurō shqol mōnni bōd haawōn mōnnukh lakaawōt rkhothukh, wgora 'ōibtuneTHōH].

**Literal:** Have a word of men from me; I'll be with you; you'll not be alone.

Tr. A: A word of honor, you won't be alone. I'm the man that keeps his word.

Tr. B: I promise you solemnly that I shall be with you. You will not be alone. Man is only judged by his promise.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. My word is my bond.

b. You have my word.

c. On my honor.

**24. Someone is saying to his friend in front of others outdoors that he will help him collecting field data for his research project.**

[b'aathi shōmmōd zarqō hald methōn laknaashiinukh 'ōn kaawō taayiibukh dmō<iinōtli bōlyaamōd bayaanaat dōyyōn kōmshaglōn lehōn].

**Literal:** By this blue sky, I'll not forget your favor if you can help me collecting data on the research topic I'm working on.

Tr. A: I'll never forget your favor; I swear... if you help me collect data on my research topic.

Tr. B: I swear by heaven I shall not forget you to the last day of my life if you could help me with collecting the data I'm working on.



**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** As sure as eggs is eggs, I'll help you with the data collection.

**25. On the Christmas Eve, someone is telling his friend that he'll pay him back the money he owes him as soon as possible.**

[b'aatha bōyalda briikha, wbkheḷōd maaran laa 'ōdju rshoma bōd maaTeluk pōlsukh dō'ōtlukh 'ōlli. 'alaaha saahōth lkummi 'ōn 'iyyōn kōmdaglōn].

**Literal:** By this blessed Christmas and by the power of God, you'll receive the money I owe you tomorrow if not today. God witnesses my mouth if I'm lying.

**Tr. A:** By this blessed Christmas and by the Almighty Lord, you'll certainly have the money I owe you back tomorrow. God witnesses my words I'm telling the truth.

**Tr. B:** I swear on this blessed Christmas and on the Lord's Temple that by tomorrow you shall get back the money you owe me. God is witness if I were lying.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** Come on, have a heart. It's Christmas after all. I'll get you your money as soon as I can.

**26. Someone is saying to his classmate not to cheat. Otherwise he will be openly disgraced.**

[asōm baalukh dnaqlōt khōrta gaha; kawi briishi wriishukh, bōd faSliilukh ].

**Literal:** Take care not to cheat another time; otherwise, by my head and yours, you'll be dismissed.

**Tr. A:** Beware; if you cheat again, I swear you'll be deregistered.

**Tr. B:** Beware next time, for I swear to God, I shall tear you up to pieces.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. I really wouldn't do that if I were you.

b. It's really not worth the hassle ...

c. You really ought not to do that / people may talk.

**27. Someone is telling his friend who recently has come from Europe not to have this style of hair-cut, otherwise he'll face some social troubles.**

[bqurbana qadisha bōd peshōt gōkhka da ekōd 'iithō wleTHō b'aatha shōklōd kosa dō'ōtlukh].

**Literal:** By the Holy Communion, you'll become a joke for all with this style of hair that you have.

**Tr. A:** By the Holy Communion, you'll be ridiculed by even the mob with having your hair cut like this.

**Tr. B:** I swear by the Holy Communion that, with this hair style of yours, you will become a laughing stock for everybody.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** It's probably not a good idea to keep that hairstyle. People may talk.

**28. Someone is telling his relatives, while having lunch with them, to solve the problem with their neighbor; otherwise the consequences will be grave.**

[b'aathi nō<mō, 'ōn 'ibkhun dHeliitula bshena wbōshlama, bōshTulō ghdalkhun].



**Literal:** By this blessing, if you can solve it peacefully, it is better for you.

**Tr. A:** By this food which is a blessing from God, it's better for you to settle it peacefully.

**Tr. B:** I swear on this blessed food we are having that it would be better for you if you settle this matter peacefully.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. I really would sort it out if I were you.

b. You really ought to talk to them.

**29. Someone is saying to a friend at the yard of the church that he'll disclose his secrets if he insists on behaving badly.**

[pθok enukh baash, b'aathi qadamta wōb'aathi iita brōkh̄ta 'ōn lam 'udōlukh rkhashtukh bōd peshōt HukiiTHōd kuulō 'alma].

**Literal:** Open your eyes well; by this morning and by this blessed church, if you will not correct your way, you'll be a story for all the people.

**Tr. A:** Beware. By this day and by this blessed church, you'll be humiliated in front of all the people unless you behave well.

**Tr. B:** Watch out carefully! I swear on this blessed morning if you don't behave yourself up, you shall be disgraced amongst all folks.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. If I were you, I'd wind my neck in.

b. You really ought to wind your neck in.

c. You really wouldn't want the truth to get out, would you?

**30. Someone's relative intends to go back home on foot late at night. He is telling him the weather is bad outside and dangerous as well.**

[Haram lagpalTōt mōndaakha lbeTHkhun kha Siita b'aatha lelō].

**Literal:** No way, you'll not go home one span outside at this night.

**Tr. A:** By all means, I won't let you go back home at this late time.

**Tr. B:** I shall in no way let you make a single step to go home at this dark night. / I will not let you go home in such a dark night.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. Please take care in this weather. (i.e. no invitation is extended).

b. You're very welcome to stay the night, (i.e. the opposite meaning is intended)

**31. Someone, in the presence of his parents, is asking one of his relatives not to interfere in his family's affairs. Otherwise he'll end any sort of contact with him.**

[bqorōd baabi wbaabukh, 'ōn latuulukh raaHa, la khaazōtli wla khaaziinukh hal 'abad].

**Literal:** By the grave of my father and your father, if you don't sit quiet, you won't see me forever.

**Tr. A:** By the grave of our fathers, if you won't keep quiet, you won't see me anymore.

**Tr. B:** I swear on my father's grave and on the grave of your father that, unless you stop making troubles, we shall not set eyes on each other for ever.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. It really would be better if you kept your nose out [of our affairs].



b. You really need to wind your neck in.

c. You really wouldn't want the truth to get out, would you?

**32. Someone in the cafeteria, is saying to a friend why he has not supported him in his crisis, and for coming too late to ask for his safety.**

[b'aatha pōrzōd lakhma la mkhushuuli dhaawōt haadakh. laa bas lakōmmō<iinōtli; laTHiilukh mbuqiirukh 'aSlan.

**Literal:** By this piece of bread, I didn't expect you to be like this. Not only haven't you supported me, you also didn't asked about me.

**Tr. A:** By this piece of bread without which one cannot survive, I didn't expect you to be indifferent. Not only you didn't support me but also you didn't even ask about me.

**Tr. B:** I swear it never occurred to me that you'd ever turn out to be what you are now. You didn't help me nor did you even check on me.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** You haven't once asked about me. How do you think that made/makes me feel?

**33. Someone's relative is telling his cousin that he is extremely unhappy and upset for his cousin's indifference about attending his birthday party.**

[‘iimuri lankhōplukh lrokhukh dlathiilukh wmiirukh briikha. Hemōn whemōn diilō 'alaaha. ‘ōlla hoyaaawa nashwotuTHan, Helō bōd za<lōnwa].

**Literal:** Tell me, don't you feel ashamed of yourself not to come and say congratulations. Believe me, if you were not dear, I would have been angry.

**Tr. A:** Shame on you not to come and congratulate me on my birthday. God bears witness to my words, I would have become angry of you unless you were very dear to me.

**Tr. B:** Weren't you ashamed of yourself not to come and say 'congratulation'? I swear to God were it not for our kinship, I would be very upset.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. I feel a bit let down, actually. the angrier we are, the more understated we become.

b. Couldn't you at least have called me / sent a card?

**34. Someone is saying something while he is under the influence of what one of his close friends has done against him.**

[‘ōbōhrōd eni 'ōn lahaawōtwa <aziiza, ma dōwōthlukh lakaathō l'afotō].

**Literal:** By the light of my eyes if you were not dear to me what have you done cannot be forgiven.

**Tr. A:** By the light of my eyes. Only because you are dear to me, I cannot but to forgive you for what you have done.

**Tr. B:** Weren't it that you are dear to me, I solemnly swear that what you have done cannot be forgiven.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** Well, you've only yourself to blame.



35. Someone is telling that an unexpected or undesired accident that happened to one of his colleagues prevented him from coming, and for not being there and being unable to help.

[b'aatha yoma briikha wubriishôd baabi, la shmô'li b'aatha môndi wla kha' kômmaamiiri].

**Literal:** By this blessed day and by my father's head, I haven't heard anything about this issue; no one told me about it.

**Tr. A:** By this blessed day and by my father's head, I've neither heard about this issue, nor did anyone tell me about it.

**Tr. B:** I swear on this blessed day and on my father's head, I have not heard about this and no one has told me about it.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** I'm so sorry to hear that, but this is the first I've heard of it.

36. Someone is openly saying something to one of his colleagues regretting what he has said about the recent rumors.

[Qami 'kul 'aatha 'alma, bôd hewunnukh tonetha dla shamôt mōnni haadakh mōndi mōn daha wzaalô].

**Literal:** In front of all of these people, I give you my word not to hear from me such a thing from now on.

**Tr. A:** I testify it openly that you won't hear from me things like this anymore.

**Tr. B:** I promise you in front of everybody present here that from now on you will not hear any such thing from me.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. If I could turn back the clock, I wouldn't have opened my mouth.

b. I'm really sorry, don't hold it against me.

37. Someone realized that he has done something wrong to his friend unintentionally.

[mkarôskhôn wdaha qoriili bmuqurtaaya 'ôndyyinwa <algôSTaana. Bas haadakh HSôlla].

**Literal:** May I collapse and being soon buried if I did it intentionally. However, it happened.

**Tr. A:** May I collapse and being soon buried in Muqurtaaya Cemetery if I did it intentionally. Unfortunately, it happened.

**Tr. B:** May I perish and be buried in Muqurtaya (a cemetery) right now if I did that intentionally. It only so happened.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** It's completely my fault, I'm so sorry.

38. Someone is an expert in financial affairs. He is telling his friend it is a suitable time to exchange the local currency by the hard ones.

[haawiilukh 'iiman wutkol, haadakh mōndi lakaaTHô tôte' naqlô bkhaayô].

**Literal:** Have faith and decide; such a thing cannot happen twice in life.

**Tr. A:** Trust me; such a thing cannot happen twice in life.



Tr. B: Believe me and have trust in me that such a chance doesn't knock twice at your door.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. Opportunity doesn't knock twice.

b. Carpe diem!

c. [Time and tide wait for no man], take this chance while you can!

**39. Someone feels hopeless; his situation or personal affairs are so terrible and difficult to deal with. His performance in the exam was bad. He is responding to his friends' accusation of being careless and indifferent.**

[brabbi wɔbriishɔd baabi 'ɔn kɔthiituwa maa'ɔtli wmaa latli, walakha' mɔnkhun bɔd paaTHɔkhwa kummɔH].

**Literal:** by my Lord and by the head of my father, if you knew what I had and what I had not, none of you would have opened his mouth.

Tr. A: By our Lord and by my father's life, if you knew what troubles I had, none of you would have opened his mouth).

Tr. B: I swear to God and on my father's head that had you known what has befallen me you would all shut up and utter nothing.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** God only knows what I've [just] been through recently.

**40. Someone is saying to his friend to have self-confidence and not let anybody interfere any more in his own affairs.**

[hwi bɔrd baabukh, 'ɔn kbi'ɔt 'iibukh dhaawɔt gorɔd mHaqqa].

**Literal:** Be your father's son; if you want you can be a real man.

Tr. A: Trust in yourself. You can be a real man if you want.

Tr. B: Be a true son of your father, if you so wish you will be a man in the true sense of the word.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. Man up and get on with it!

b. You are the master of your own destiny.

**41. Someone insists on a friend to go together to the canteen.**

[bmaryam khlaapaH bɔd 'aathɔt ya<ni bɔd 'aathɔt mɔnnan 'aathi naqla wud la Hushta].

**Literal:** By Mary you'll come; it means you'll come with us this time and without any pretext.

Tr. A: By Saint Mary I swear, you must come this time and without any pretext'.

Tr. B: I swear to Mary you must come. I mean this time you are coming without any excuse.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** Come on, [it's] my treat!

**42. Someone is saying to his friend that though he was not invited to the party a few days ago, he will be with them next time.**

[hwi tasal. bɔd haawɔt mɔnnan naqlɔd 'aTHya kaan k'aajɔblukh. maakamɔt?].

**Literal:** Be sure. You will be with us next time if you like. What do you say?



Tr. A: Trust me, you'll be with us next time. Won't you?

Tr. B: Don't you worry please. You will be with us next time if you so wish. What do you think?

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** a. you'll be at the head of the table next time.

b. There's always a next time.

**43. Someone is insisting on his cousin to come and see his parents.**

[bthômmôtti wôbsharaafi bôd 'aaTHôl lgiiban wkhaazôl 'ômmi wbaabi. lampalTôl chu Hushta].

**Literal:** by my conscience, you will come to us and see my father and mother. Don't find any pretext.

Tr. A: By my honor I swear, you must come and see my parents. No apology is accepted.

Tr. B: I swear on my honor that you visit us and see my parents. Don't make any excuses.

**Native Speaker's Suggestion:** [Honestly], my parents would really like / love to see you.

### Appendix B: Key to Transliteration Consonants

| Trans-literation<br>n<br>Symbol | Phonemic<br>Symbols | Sound Description                     | Syriac Example       | Meaning  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| th                              | ð                   | Voiced dental fricative               | Gthotha /gðoða/      | hedgehog |
| TH                              | Θ                   | Voiceless dental fricative            | kTHaawa /kΘæwa/      | book     |
| T                               | t                   | Voiced alveolar plosive               | Twaa'a /tʷæʔa/       | sleeping |
| H                               | h                   | Voiceless pharyngeal fricative        | HimTHA /himΘa/       | anger    |
| kh                              | x                   | Voiceless velar fricative             | Khyamta /xjamta/     | fever    |
| ch                              | tʃ                  | Voiceless alveolar affricate          | Chu naasha /tʃunæʃa/ | No one   |
| j                               | dʒ                  | Voiced alveolar affricate             | jimbad /dʒəmbad/     | rose     |
| sh                              | ʃ                   | Voiceless alveolar fricative          | shômsa /ʃimʃa/       | sun      |
| S                               | ʂ                   | Voiceless emphatic alveolar fricative | Salma /ʂalma/        | face     |
| <                               | ʕ                   | Voiced laryngeal plosive              | <amma /ʕama/         | uncle    |
| gh                              | ɣ                   | Voiced velar fricative                | ghadaaya /ɣadæja/    | lunch    |
| q                               | Q                   | Voiceless velar plosive               | Qay /Qaj/            | why      |
| y                               | j                   | Voiced palatal fricative              | yoma /joma/          | day      |
| ə                               | ə                   | shwa                                  | kôlwa /kôlwa/        | thorn    |
| '                               | ʔ                   | Voiced glottal stop                   | 'ômma /ʔəma/         | mother   |



## Vowels

| Short Vowels |                |         | Long Vowels |                |         |
|--------------|----------------|---------|-------------|----------------|---------|
|              | Syriac Example | Meaning |             | Syriac Example | Meaning |
| <b>a</b>     | 'alma /ʔalma/  | world   | <b>aa</b>   | baaba /bæba/   | father  |
| <b>i</b>     | 'imma /ʔinʕə/  | women   | <b>ii</b>   | 'iita /ʔi:ta/  | church  |
| <b>u</b>     | 'ubra /ʔubra/  | son     | <b>uu</b>   | Nuura /nu:ra/  | fire    |

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