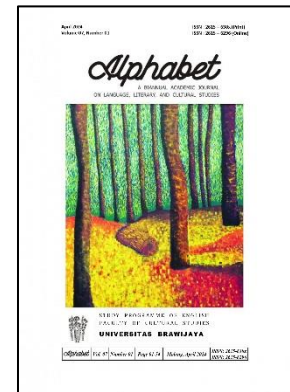


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## The Perlocutionary Effect of “Insyah Allah” among Indonesians: A Gender-Based Analysis

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Alphabet / Volume 07 / Number 01 / April 2024, pp. 20-26  
doi: 10.21776/ub.alphabet.2024.07.01.03, Published online: April 2024

### How to cite this article :

Sapran, A.R.W. & Rusmawati, R. (2024). The perlocutionary effect of “Insyah Allah” among Indonesians: A gender-based analysis. *Alphabet*, 07(01), 20-26. doi: 10.21776/ub.alphabet.2024.07.01.03

# The Perlocutionary Effect of “*Insha Allah*” among Indonesians: A Gender-Based Analysis

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ISSN: 2615-630x (print)  
2615-6296 (online)  
Vol. 07, No. 01

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## Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the perlocutionary effects of the utterance *Insha Allah* in commissive speech acts among Indonesians. Other studies have explored the roles and the illocutionary effects of *Insha Allah*, but none have pinpointed the perspective of the addressees upon hearing the utterance of a promise. The data were extracted from questionnaire results completed by 20 college students in Malang, an ideal city to represent Indonesia because it has more than 70% of students enlisted from various parts of Indonesia. This paper employs a descriptive qualitative method equipped with various technical analyses. The analysis includes investigations of the perlocutionary effects of *Insha Allah*. The analysis continues by addressing the details of the perlocutionary effects based on gender, followed by classifying the rationale behind such effects. The findings show a tendency from the respondents of being indecisive as the most prominent perlocutionary effect. The study also reveals three rationales behind the effects: theo-based, trait-based, and experience-based. Despite the religious value of *Insha Allah*, many Indonesians are reluctant to associate this utterance when it is inserted into a promise.

**Keywords:** perlocutionary effect, *Insha Allah*, commissive speech act

*Insha Allah* is an iconic phrase from Arabic that has been adopted into many languages including Indonesian. According to Clift and Helani (2010), *Insha Allah* literally means “God Willing”. In Indonesian, *Insha Allah* means “If Allah allows” (Tim Penyusun Pusat Kamus, 2005). Although the semantic meaning of *Insha Allah* is relatively simple, its usage in real life context is quite complex. For instance, Pishghadam & Kermanshahi (2012) mentioned eight main functions of *Insha Allah* in Persian. However, there were very few linguistics studies on the use of *Insha Allah*, especially among Indonesians. Even if there were, they specifically focused on the illocutionary aspect of the expression. Thus, the previous studies only explored the point of view of the addresser, despite the

fact that a discourse, inevitably, also involves addressees. Therefore, it is equally intriguing to analyze *Insha Allah* in the perspective of the addressees, namely the perlocutionary effect.

Indonesia has the largest Muslim population, with the number exceeding 240 million in 2023. Along with the huge population, Indonesia comprises of numerous tribes with varying customs and cultures. Many studies have shown how Islam in Indonesia, also known as Islam Nusantara, is perceived and practiced differently throughout the nation due to distinct traditions (Hermansyah, 2014; Hutagalung et al., 2022; Kasdi, 2018; Nazzal, 2005; Oh, 2017; Wajdi, 2020). Therefore, it is intriguing to see how *Insha Allah* is perceived by Indonesians

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from various backgrounds, to see if having different cultures and customs project an impact to a specific utterance.

The two biggest universities in Malang, based on the 4 International College and Universities (4ICU) UniRank 2023 index (UniRank, 2023), reported that the number of enrolled students from outside of Malang reached 74%-85% (Novrian, 2023). This shows the heterogeneity of the student population in Malang, which inevitably results in various cultures and beliefs coexisting in the same city, representing Indonesia as a heterogeneous nation. This student demographic in Malang advocates the city as an ideal location to investigate the perlocutionary effect of *Insya Allah* among Indonesians, with two questions as follows:

- 1) How do Indonesians perceive *Insya Allah* as a commissive speech act?
- 2) What are the reasons behind the perception of Indonesians regarding *Insya Allah* as a commissive speech act?

Since *Insya Allah* generally means "God Willing", it should be an expression to show sincere promise, consequently generates better trust between speakers and hearers. This study aims to find out whether *Insya Allah* serves its semantic purpose among Indonesians in a commissive speech act, or the omission of the expression purports a distinct level of trust.

Pishghadam and Kermananshahi (2012) mentioned eight main functions of *Insya Allah* in Persian: (1) to strengthen the speaker's intention, (2) to show a fatalistic intention, (3) to show religious identity, (4) to express hope, (5) to curse, (6) to support someone, (7) to evade, and (8) to postpone things. Pishghadam and Kermananshahi's (2012) study is interesting because it showed how *Insya Allah* could also be used to curse someone in Persian. The use of *Insya Allah* to curse is presumably difficult to be obtained in the Indonesian context.

Studies of both semantic and pragmatic analyses of *Insya Allah* in the Indonesian context are still limited. Susanto (2006) did an analysis of *Insya Allah* as a feature of code-switch-

ing. However, Susanto's analysis was only sociolinguistics in nature. The results of Susanto's study showed that the occurrences of code-switching using *Insya Allah* mostly were influenced by metaphorical factors rather than situational factors (Blom & Gumperz, 1972).

A conversation analysis done by Clift & Helani (2010) showed that *Insya Allah* is not always used in the context of Al-Quran. It has become a part of both Arabic and non-Arabic daily interactions. Using conversation analysis, Clift and Helani argued that *Insya Allah* could function as a signal to end a conversation. It could also function as a marker to give hope to future desired outcomes. *Insya Allah* could also be used to maintain the ongoing topic being discussed. The fourth function was to signal a new topic.

The latest research conducted by Pratama (2017) concluded that most of the time, *Insya Allah* indicated commissive speech acts (57%). Furthermore, the study found that *Insya Allah* functioned to strengthen the speaker's utterance, to wish for a good outcome, to show a fatalistic attitude and to show religious identity.

All of the studies above relied heavily on the illocutionary aspect of the discourse. They wanted to analyze the speaker's intention more than the hearer's perception. As a result, the hearer's perception regarding *Insya Allah* remains vague.

### Commissive speech act

The theory of speech acts was initiated by Austin (1975). Austin proposes a set of three simultaneous types of acts, namely locutionary act (the meaning of the statement itself), the illocutionary act (the contextual function of the act), and the perlocutionary act (what is achieved by saying something). Continually, Searle (1979) developed the notion of illocutionary act or the direct theory of speech acts and proposed five basic types of Illocutionary acts, namely directive (e.g., ask, order, command, request, beg, plead, pray, entreat, invite, permit, advise, demand, etc.), commissive (e.g., guarantee, promise, swear, refuse, threaten,

etc.), representative/assertive (e.g., affirm, believe, conclude, deny, report, state, etc.) declarative (e.g. declaring war), and expressive (e.g., apologizing, thanking, inviting, etc.).

This research applies commissive speech act as the main focus since the expression *Insyah Allah* is often used among Indonesians as a promise (Pratama, 2017).

### Perlocutionary effect

As for perlocution, there were several dispositions. It was compared to the Achilles' heel (Marcu, 2000), and its research has slipped into an impasse. Thus, a firm definition of perlocution is required. Zhang (2016) defined perlocution as the act of affecting and changing the context by the speaker's locution.

With the firm definition acquired, it's important to differentiate perlocutionary act to perlocutionary effect. Gaines (1979, pp. 214–215) defended the position that perlocutionary acts are “always the product of the speaker's intention”, since “a speaker's attempt to produce a perlocutionary effect implies that the speaker intends to produce that effect”. Therefore, perlocutionary effect relies on the hearer's perception of the discourse, whereas perlocutionary act requires an utterance to produce the perlocutionary effect.

Since one of the objectives of this study is to pinpoint the perception of Indonesians towards *Insyah Allah*, so the perlocutionary effect theory by Gaines (1979) is applied.

### Gender role in perlocutionary effects

Gender often plays a crucial role in applied linguistics studies. For instance, male reviewers in Russia reveal higher hedging frequency than female reviewers (Viktorova, 2024). In the perlocutionary effect dominion, female K-Pop artists are criticized and receive hate comments more often than their male counterparts (Rika et al., 2024). Another study by Murtadho (2022) that gender factor affects the behavior in direct persuasive perlocutionary.

Due to its nation-wide use in Indonesia, it is foreseeable that *Insyah Allah* is perceived differently by male and female as the hearers. Therefore, this study aims to provide a new perspective regarding the perlocutionary effect of *Insyah Allah* in Indonesia through gender-based analysis.

## METHOD

Morse (1995) argues that qualitative research aims for depth and detail, and a smaller sample size allows researchers to explore individual experiences more thoroughly. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest that a focused analysis of a smaller dataset can lead to a richer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In order to pursue a thorough investigation, the data of this research are results of a questionnaire gathered from 20 Indonesian college students in Malang who agreed to be involved. To pinpoint the possibility of gender role in the perlocutionary effect, this study gathered ten male students and ten female students as the respondents.

The data collection method employs several steps. First, the students engaged in an interaction which triggered the expression *Insyah Allah* as a promise (e.g. borrowing money or any other important items). *Insyah Allah* is uttered by an addresser. The students, as the addressee, are the target of the perlocutionary effect. Right after the interaction, the students were given a questionnaire regarding the perlocutionary effect of *Insyah Allah*.

The questionnaire is materialized in an online Google Form. The questionnaire is in Indonesian language containing a mixture of open-ended and close-ended questions (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The respondents complete the form anonymously, but they must state their gender for analysis purposes in which the perlocutionary effects are dissected based on male and female perspectives.

There are three questions to be answered:

- 1) When someone said *Insya Allah* to you as a promise, are you confident that the promise will be fulfilled?
- 2) Does *Insya Allah* affect your trust towards a promise?
- 3) What is your reason(s) to have such perception?

**Figure 1.** The upper content of the questionnaire

**Figure 2.** The main content of the questionnaire

Using the descriptive qualitative method, the results of the questionnaire are categorized based on the confidence and trust level, congruent with the first two questions, as a representation of the perlocutionary effects from each gender. Then, to analyze the third question, the reasons behind such effects are summarized into several categories with a descrip-

tive examination to pinpoint the interplay between the perlocutionary effects and the rationales behind them.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first question that the respondents are required to answer is “When someone said *Insya Allah* to you as a promise, are you confident that the promise will be fulfilled?”. This question functions as an indicator of the perlocutionary effects of the addressees upon hearing *Insya Allah* embedded in a promise, with four options available: “very confident”, “moderately confident”, “indecisive”, and “not confident”. The confidence level in the positive spectrum is divided into “very confident” and “moderately confident” to dissect the enhancing effect of *Insya Allah* in a promise.

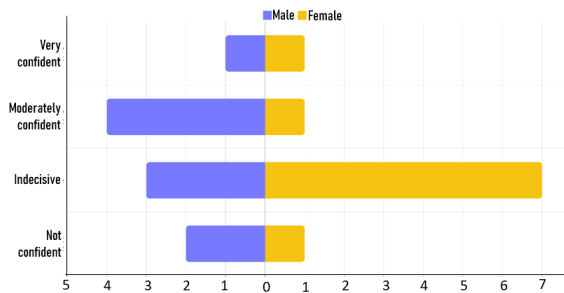
**Table 1.** The perlocutionary effects of *Insya Allah* among male and female Indonesians

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
<b>Very confident</b>	1	1	2	10%
<b>Moderately confident</b>	4	1	5	25%
<b>Indecisive</b>	3	7	10	50%
<b>Not confident</b>	2	1	3	15%

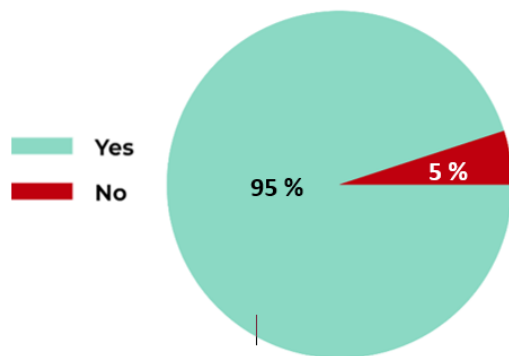
The result shows that, although *Insya Allah* is uttered, half of the respondents remain indecisive about whether the promise will be fulfilled or not. Furthermore, only 10% claimed that *Insya Allah* makes the promise highly trustworthy. 15% of the respondents even perceived the promise with *Insya Allah* as unreliable. The complete result of the perlocutionary effects is displayed in Table 1.

In closer detail, the male respondents project more varying answers than the female counterparts (Figure 3). While 70% of the female students are indecisive about the promise with *Insya Allah*, the male students spread the

same percentage almost equally between “moderately confident” (40%) and “indecisive” (30%). Additionally, more male students (2) are not confident with the promise, while only one female student has the same negative perception.



**Figure 3.** Perlocutionary effects comparison between male and female respondents.



**Figure 4.** Comparison of whether Insyah Allah affects a commissive speech act.

Interestingly, despite the fluctuating perlocutionary effects shown in Figure 3, almost all respondents (95%) agree that *Insyah Allah* influences the trustworthiness of a promise either positively or negatively (Figure 4).

The positive or negative impact of *Insyah Allah* in a promise is elucidated in the last question in the questionnaire, “What is your reason(s) to have such perception?”, with an open-ended format. This question produces varying rationales with unique elaboration in each answer. However, upon reflecting on the responses to their core reasons, these answers are sorted into three main categories: theo-based, trait-based, and experience-based.

The theo-based rationale is when the respondents unambiguously stated God as the main motive behind the influence of *Insyah Allah*. For instance, one student wrote, “*Insyah Allah*, when pronounced in a promise, will be sacred because there is Allah in every step we take. No matter how much trust we put in a promise, we don't know what will happen in the future.” Another student stated that “...we entrust the results to the Almighty, so that the effort expended is much greater and free from any burden”. These two testimonies, along with some similar others, placed God as the sole reason behind the credibility of *Insyah Allah*, eliminating other factors such as who said it, when it was said, or where it was said.

The next category is the trait-based rationale, i.e. when the respondents testified that the trustworthiness of *Insyah Allah* in a promise relies on the quality, amenity, or personality of the addresser. For example, one student responded, “...the average pious person who says this shows that they will keep their promise, but ordinary people seem to have the intention not to keep their promise.” People in this category believe that *Insyah Allah* in a promise has little to do with God, and that the credibility of the utterance is subjectable through analyzing who the addresser is. They tend to have a higher trust if the addresser is someone pious, or an individual whom they have known for an extended period of time.

The last category is the experience-based rationale which purports real events in the past as the indicator of trustworthiness upon hearing *Insyah Allah* in a promise. One student wrote, “Maybe because I have experienced a lot of things like that, words like *Insyah Allah* have experienced a shift in meaning due to being misused as a word to undertake something.” Another respondent even boldly stated that most of the people who made a promise with *Insyah Allah* are liars. Almost half of the respondents (40%) reside in this group. Furthermore, according to the result of the second inquiry in the questionnaire, they link this rationale to the main cause of being indecisive or not confident regarding a promise.

The result of the questionnaire divides the respondents rather equally into these three categories. The theo-based and the trait-based rationale project the same percentage (30%), while the experience-based rationale is slightly higher (40%) with identical population between male and female respondents (4). More male students (4) use theo-based rationale than the female (2), while the trait-based rationale is favored among female students (4) compared to the male (2). The complete result of the perlocutionary effects’ rationales is displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The division of male and female respondents’ rationale

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Theo-based	4	2	6	30%
Trait-based	2	4	6	30%
Experience-based	4	4	8	40%

The fact that only 30% of the respondents associate *Insya Allah* with God and religious belief indicates a diversion of the initial purpose of *Insya Allah* in the Islamic culture. Even if most Indonesians agree that the expression *Insya Allah* affects the quality of a promise, the impact is not always positive. They still tend to determine the quality of the promise based on the addresser or their own past experience. In other words, *Insya Allah* is now mostly considered as a mere formality rather than a sign of commitment.

### CONCLUSION

*Insya Allah*, which means “God Willing”, is an iconic phrase from Arabic with an Islamic influence that has been adopted into many languages including Indonesian. Numerous studies have investigated the illocutionary effects of *Insya Allah*, leaving a gap regarding its perlocutionary effects. This study shows that inserting *Insya Allah* in a commissive speech act affects

the perception of most Indonesian respondents (95%). Regarding the perlocutionary effect, 50% of the respondents are indecisive about the quality of a promise embedded with *Insya Allah*. Despite the utterance’s religious value, only 30% linked *Insya Allah* to God and religious belief. Most respondents are inclined to evaluate the promise through trait-based or experience-based rationale, indicating a shift of *Insya Allah*’s initial purpose into a trivial formality. However, this paper extracts a limited number of respondents. Therefore, the consistency of its findings can be tested more extensively in the future. The improvement can be explicitly made by asking more Indonesians through face-to-face guided interviews instead of limited inquiries in a questionnaire. As for now, the findings can serve as a foundation to establish a comprehensive evaluation concerning the perlocutionary effects of *Insya Allah* among Indonesians.

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