

# Semantics, pragmatics and regional variation of *inschallah* in German

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In this talk, I examine the semantic and pragmatic characterization as well as regional variation in the use of the unverbated phrase *inschallah*, which translates to ‘God willing’ in Arabic, and has been borrowed into German through language contact. I argue that *inschallah* is a multipurpose expression serving predominantly as a modal adverbial (1) or as a discourse marker (2) conveying speaker-attitudinal, discourse structuring or politeness-related functions.

- (1) Hab so hunger insallah gibts daheim was geiles

‘I am so hungry, inshallah there’s something delicious at home.’

[1201575344014315520, 2019-12-02, X-GTA Corpus]

- (2) ASKIM so süß neben mir inshallah

‘MY DARLING (looks) so sweet next to me inshallah’

[793235358452514816, 2019-12-08, X-GTA Corpus]

With discourse markers occupying the top of the borrowability scale (Matras 2009), *inschallah* has been borrowed into urban vernaculars of German. Similar to *wallah*, it certainly has an emblematic function associated with multiethnolects (Quist 2024). Besides a modal adverbial use affecting truth conditions, it shows a variety of pragmatic uses, i.e. conveying expressive or emphasizing functions, or serving as a frame marker at the end of a discourse sequence. Interestingly, in commissive speech acts, *inschallah* can mitigate the commitment of the speaker (to a previous request), minimizing the face threat for both interlocutors (Brown and Levinson 1987), or even signal the absence of relevant intentions to carry out the action, potentially presenting impolite behavior (Locher and Watts 2005). Regarding inter-individual variation, *inschallah* shows a third-order indexical, ironic function associated with negative stereotypes of Muslim speakers, similar to Mock Spanish (Ochs 1990; Hill 2008). This use is commonly attributed to jocular contexts or with

speakers of right-wing party affiliation, representing sarcasm/mock politeness (Culpeper 1996).

The data come from the *Cross-Topic German Twitter Archive* (X-GTA Corpus), which comprises a near-complete collection of all German-language tweets between 2018–2023 and is annotated for geo-locations (Tsolak et al. 2023). In my talk, I will discuss inter-individual variation in the use of different functions of *inschallah* by aligning regional properties like urbanity with socio-demographic factors, familiarity, i.e. through any language which actively employs the term, and metapragmatic as well as political and racial/ethnic stances in the individual Twitter profile descriptions. Findings are anticipated to be highly relevant for similar multilingual contact settings cross-linguistically.

## References

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Dr. Semra Kizilkaya is currently a postdoctoral researcher in German linguistics at Bielefeld University's Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies. She earned her PhD in linguistics from the University of Cologne with a dissertation titled *Marking Changes: Affectedness at the Syntax-Semantics Interface*, which was awarded the Wilhelm-von-Humboldt Prize by the

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