Invocatory duration of vowel for ritualistic effects: "Muḥammad" and "Ḥusayn" in Persian Shiite sermons

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An explicit Koranic injunction (the Holy Koran 33: 56) orders Muslims to utter the *salawaat* ([with stress on the last syllable] a special formulaic salaam particularly in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad) whenever they come to mention his name or hear it being mentioned. However, there is an additional practice, conducted by Iranian Twelver Shiite preachers while delivering religious lectures. That is, in order to induce people to utter the *salawaat*, a preacher or elegizer (one who orally recounts the incidents) does as follows: He pronounces the /h/ sound in a more pharyngeal manner (here shown as /ḥ/) to make it closer to its Arabic pronunciation, and also gives extra length to the second syllable of the name "Muḥammad" (while in Persian the last syllable receives stress). Hence, instead of pronouncing the name as /mu.ham.'mad/, it appears as /mu.ḥa:::m.'mad/ (with a rising-falling contour). (Although there are variant spellings of the name "Muhammad", the spelling used here, viz. Muḥammad, is regarded as the "academic" spelling of the name).

Another instance concerns the name of the third Infallible Imam al-Ḥusayn. He was the younger grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad who was martyred (together with at least seventy of his close relatives and adherents) by the forces of the Umayyad ruler Yazīd at Karbala, Iraq, on Ashura, that is, on 10th Muharram 61 AH/ 10 October 680. Since Imam al-Ḥusayn symbolizes tragic martyrdom in the cause of God, he is a highly-venerated Infallible Imam whose afflictions are recounted in a very moving way, especially in the Muharram observances.

Some noteworthy linguistic changes are observable, too. Phonologically, the Arabic pharyngeal /ḥ/ sound is changed to glottal /h/ in Persian. Additionally, the Arabic diphthong /ay/ changes to the Persian diphthong /ey/. Morphologically, the Arabic definite article is often deleted in Persian from the beginning of the name (as Persian does not have any morphologically distinct form of the definite article, corresponding with *the* in English or *al-* in Arabic). Hence, the Arabic name "al-Ḥusayn" appears as "Hoseyn" in Persian.

Persian Shiite preachers and elegizers sometimes pronounce the Persianized form of the name *Hoseyn* with extra duration given to the stress-bearing, second syllable. This is for the purpose of giving more mourning coloring to the religious meeting atmosphere. Hence, in the vocative formulaic Arabic phrase of "*Yā Ḥusayn* (O Husayn)", instead of pronouncing his name simply as /hoseyn/, they utter it as /hose:::yn/. Uttered in this way, most of the listeners would burst into tears, and the session reaches its highest degrees of grief and the desired melancholic atmosphere is attained.

According to the above observations (limited to men's religious gatherings), it could be inferred that when typical Persian Shiite preachers and elegizers wish to elicit an appropriate ritualistic response from their audience, they resort to producing a phonetic effect. As such, these instances might provisionally be termed as "non-sentential elicitative" speech acts, or simply "non-sentential elicitatives" (devised on analogy with the five-fold Searlean or Austinian types of speech acts which have suffixal *–ives*).

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