Facework Interpretation as Pragmatic Competence: Evaluating the Pragmatic Functions of "May God Grant You Health" in Jordanian Arabic

DOI: https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes1086

Rania Za'rour, Ola Musmar and Fatima Alqaisiya
The University of Jordan, Jordan

Received: 20.4.2025 Accepted: 22.9.2025 Published Online: 25.9.2025

Abstract: This study examines the impact of face orientation and face threat levels on the acceptability of the religious expression /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ in Spoken Jordanian Arabic. This research is grounded in politeness theory and contemporary face management frameworks. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study first identifies the main pragmatic functions of the religious marker. Next, it examines how native speakers interpret face-related factors and how these interpretations affect which pragmatic functions they consider most appropriate in context. The findings challenge prevailing assumptions that collectivistic values and a preference for positive face orientation consistently determine communicative practices in Middle Eastern contexts. Instead, the data suggest that speakers frequently select negative face orientations, emphasizing autonomy and minimizing imposition, rather than consistently favoring pragmatic functions that reinforce group harmony and positive face. Particularly as the perceived social threat increases. However, the findings also suggest that the sanctity of religious expressions limits respondents' willingness to use them in high-stakes situations. Notably, there were no instances in the data where participants used religious expressions to convey negative face in high-risk scenarios, indicating a clear boundary in their pragmatic choices. The study advances theoretical discussions on face and politeness and suggests a novel methodological framework for exploring religious communication practices.

Keywords: facework, Politeness Theory, pragmatic competence, pragmatic functions, religious markers, Spoken Jordanian Arabic

1. Introduction

In cultures with strong communal values and religious practices, facework is crucial for managing self-presentation in public. Politeness, which includes using language to reduce social distance and keep harmony, also plays a key role in social interactions (Morand 2003; Spencer-Oatey and Wang 2019). Religious expressions, in particular, offer a unique perspective into the interplay of language, culture, and social norms (Nofal 2023b; Yaeger-Dror 2014). In Arabic, religious expressions are deeply integrated into daily communication, serving as tools for interaction and markers of cultural identity (Musmar, Za'rour and Altakhaineh 2025). Their frequent use in spoken Arabic highlights the connection between sacred language and everyday conversation (Nofal 2023a).

Within Jordanian Arabic, formulaic expressions are highly versatile linguistic tools used in a wide range of situations. For example, the idiomatic expression "Tamam" (meaning done or okay) demonstrates a wide range of pragmatic functions that can be broadly categorized as either relatively positive/face-keeping (expressing approval, seeking confirmation, showing understanding, conveying appreciation) or negative/face-threatening (expressing dissatisfaction, ending a conversation, expressing impatience, ridiculing or mocking, threatening, conveying shock and disappointment) (Al-Hanaktah and Hamdan 2024).

This pattern of context-dependent use of pragmatic functions seems to persist in religious expressions within Jordanian Arabic as well. For instance, religious expressions like /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ (may God grant you health) can be used to initiate conversations, convey positive feedback, and/or express goodwill, gratitude, and encouragement. Alternatively, the same religious expression can be used to manage subtle criticisms and express dissatisfaction. This multifunctionality of religious expressions in Arabic makes them vital pragmatic tools for navigating complex face concerns.

Given the centrality of facework to politeness and pragmatic competence, it becomes compelling to examine how these processes unfold in contexts where language use is deeply intertwined with cultural and religious values. Highly sacred religious expressions in culturally collectivist communities present a unique opportunity to explore the negotiation of face. Such expressions are not only linguistically marked but are also embedded in social norms that prioritize group harmony and respect. This investigation is particularly relevant in collectivistic cultural contexts, like Jordan, where group harmony often takes precedence over individual expression (Hofstede 1983).

Although previous studies have examined face work and politeness across cultures (Oetzel et al. 2001; Morand 2003; Spencer-Oatey and Wang 2019), less attention has been paid to how native speakers' interpretations of face-related factors affect the perceived acceptability and ranking of different pragmatic functions, tied to the same linguistic form. The current study addresses this gap by investigating pragmatic competence, an essential part of communicative competence that involves contextually appropriate language use (Hymes 1972; Thomas 1983). The research examines how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic evaluate face orientation (positive, negative, or dual) and threat level (low, moderate, or high) when they use the expression /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/. The goal is to develop a predictive model explaining why some pragmatic functions are preferred over others in actual discourse.

Our central hypothesis, built upon Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework and Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (1980, 1983, 2001), posits that pragmatic functions that preserve or enhance face will occur more frequently in everyday discourse. Conversely, when a pragmatic function of the same expression potentially threatens face, speakers will employ it less frequently.

Unless it simultaneously fulfils another important social function, such as solidarity-building.

Within the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, Jordan is typically characterized as a collectivist country (Hofstede 1983, 2001). Collectivist societies tend to prioritize group goals and to exert social pressure for conformity to societal norms (Hofstede 1983, 1997, 2011). This emphasis on social cohesion directly influences communication patterns, including how face is managed and preserved (Amarasinghe 2012; Spencer-Oatey and Wang 2019).

In collectivist cultures, maintaining group harmony and social relationships is paramount (Khosh et al. 2020). We hypothesize that this societal value can manifest in communication by favoring pragmatic functions that uphold "face" within the group, thereby reinforcing social bonds (Brown and Levinson 1987; Khosh et al. 2020). Consequently, strategies that preserve face are likely to be more frequently employed in everyday discourse. Conversely, pragmatic functions that pose a threat to an individual's face are expected to occur less often in a collectivist context. This is because face-threatening acts could disrupt social harmony and damage interpersonal relationships (Hofstede 1980; Khosh et al. 2020).

We also hypothesize that face-threatening pragmatic functions serving a crucial social purpose, like building solidarity or reinforcing group identity, might still be used more frequently, even if it carries a risk to face. This approach to face management is consistent with the understanding that cultural values, such as collectivism, shape how pragmatic functions are utilized and perceived (Spencer-Oatey and Wang 2019). This study advocates for a comprehensive conceptualization of politeness and facework that moves beyond Western-centric models.

2. Literature review

"Face" is the public image individuals carefully construct to express their identities and signal group membership. In everyday social settings, people employ a range of resources, including gestures, vocal and prosodic cues, and language, to build and maintain this persona. Relatedly, facework refers to the strategies and practical actions people use to protect, restore, or enhance their face or that of others during interactions. These strategies include verbal tactics like politeness, humour, and deflection to manage impressions and negotiate social roles effectively.

The concept of face was first introduced in social psychology by Goffman (1959), who described it as the public image individuals seek to maintain during social interactions. This idea later influenced linguistic studies, most notably Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987), which explained how people use language to reduce face-threatening acts by appealing to positive face (the desire for approval) and negative face (the desire for autonomy).

Subsequent research further expanded on these ideas by analyzing the use of politeness strategies in everyday conversations (Leech 1983; Watts 1989). For example, Leech's (1983) maxims clarify how language supports face needs. The tact maxim protects negative face by minimizing imposition, while the approbation

maxim supports positive face through praise and acceptance. These strategies help speakers soften requests, hedge statements, and show empathy. Building on this, Watts (1989) emphasized that politeness is context-dependent and negotiated in real time. He showed how speakers adjust their language to balance face needs, using indirectness and hedging to protect negative face, and positive remarks to support positive face and strengthen social bonds.

More contemporary contributions have refined this framework. An intercultural model of face negotiation was advanced, highlighting cultural variability in managing face (Ting-Toomey 2005). Later work bridged theories of identity with face analysis to reveal how personal identity and social recognition are interwoven through discourse (Spencer-Oatey 2007). Face was then redefined as an interactional achievement, emerging through argumentative and cooperative sequences in conversation (Arundale 2010). The updated perspective in Goffman and Best's work (2017) integrates classical insights with newer considerations of the changing landscape of human interaction.

Linguistic research has shown that perceptions of politeness vary across cultures, reflecting different social norms and values (Leech 2014). This supports the view that politeness is both a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. Leech (2014) distinguishes between pragmatic politeness, which involves specific linguistic choices on a unidirectional scale of formality, and sociocultural politeness, which depends on context, power relations, and cultural norms, operating on a bipolar scale where both too little and too much politeness can be inappropriate. Though distinct, these competencies are closely linked as pragmatic politeness expresses what is socioculturally appropriate. This dual framework aligns with the present study, which treats native speakers' facework as a form of pragmatic competence, reflected in their ability to rank and select among different pragmatic functions based on both linguistic and cultural understanding.

Recent work in intercultural pragmatics supports this view. Cultural patterns are believed to influence the nature of interaction as it unfolds within particular communicative activities (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2020). Studies within this line (Spencer-Oatey, Lefringhausen and Debray 2019) emphasize a situation-based (contextual) and communicative activity approach to politeness. This means that the details of each interaction matter. Factors such as power, social distance, and relationship dynamics collectively influence how politeness is navigated (Musmar et al. 2025).

Unlike earlier models that posited politeness as primarily a set of strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts, contemporary intercultural pragmatics views politeness and its counterpart, impoliteness, as relational achievements (Bousfield 2008; Culpeper 2011; Culpeper and Haugh 2014; Haugh 2014; Spencer-Oatey 2008). These are actively constructed and interpreted through interaction, making their meaning contingent on social context, individual judgments, and the evolving relationship between participants. This pragmatic competence of interlocutors to simultaneously assess various contextual, relational, and social judgment factors explains the multifaceted nature of religious expressions. Rather than possessing

static, predetermined uses, these expressions become highly adaptable linguistic resources. Their perceived politeness or impoliteness, and thus their effectiveness in managing face and relationships, is actively *negotiated* through the interlocutors' dynamic interpretation and linguistic decision-making.

Empirical research suggests that the observation that religious discourse functions on several pragmatic levels is a universal linguistic capacity. Research on English-based Islamic Friday sermons (Alkhawaldeh 2022) indicates that preachers used deictic expressions to manage the audience's face, negotiate politeness, and signal cultural affiliation. Crucially, collectivist attributes like group harmony and shared identity are linked to specific communities of practice[i] rather than language or nationality alone.

Data from Arabic dialects demonstrate that religious expressions fulfil various pragmatic roles, highlighting speakers' pragmatic competence. Studies on politeness in Arabic indicate that Western models, primarily centered on face-management strategies, do not always capture the culturally specific practices found in multicultural and non-Western contexts. For example, analyses of Quranic discourse markers show that religious expressions frequently transcend the direct-versus-indirect polarity typical of Western politeness theories (Al-Hee and Itmeizech 2017). These expressions function to foster solidarity with marginalized communities, soften potentially controversial statements, and uphold positive face in sensitive interactions (Al-Hee and Itmeizech 2017).

In Jordanian Arabic, native speakers use /wallɑːhɪ/ (I swear by God) when accepting an invitation to enhance respect and friendliness. The expression mitigates imposition and protects the addressee's face. In apologies, it indicates sincerity and a desire to restore social balance (AlKhawaldeh 2018). Another example from Jordanian Spoken Arabic illustrates how Native speakers leverage their interpretation of contextual factors to serve a diverse range of pragmatic functions (Al-Hanakta and Hamdan 2024; Musmar et al. 2025). This multifaceted usage demonstrates how power dynamics and the inherent need for politeness and face management influence the use of religious expressions.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing a wide range of linguistic tools and advanced statistical techniques to gather, analyze, and interpret the data. The aim was to explain how native speakers of spoken Jordanian Arabic draw on their pragmatic competence regarding face-related factors when determining the acceptability of the religious expression /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ in Jordanian Arabic. The investigation began with a pilot group who responded to a mini-survey designed to assess the salience and sociolinguistic relevance of the target expression. Open-ended questions were used to determine participants' awareness of the expression as a sociolinguistic marker and the frequency of its use.

Building on these insights, we developed an elicitation tool by recording two naturalistic conversations featuring the expression in real-life contexts. These recordings were played to the pilot group to facilitate the recall and identification

of the expression's possible pragmatic functions. Subsequently, linguistic experts were consulted to evaluate the validity of the identified functions, which then formed the basis for an acceptability judgement task. This task enabled us to determine the acceptability rates associated with each pragmatic function. Once a baseline of functions was established, we conducted sophisticated statistical analyses to rank the pragmatic functions.

We then conducted a preliminary cross-tabulation analysis between the face-related factors. Cross-tabulation is a straightforward statistical method that shows how two categories (here face orientations and social threat levels) interact, then it displays the output in a table. We used it as a precaution to make sure that any patterns we found between pragmatic functions and face-related factors were real and not just due to chance or hidden overlaps. This step helped confirm the reliability of our results before mapping acceptability rates onto face-related factors, ensuring our analysis accurately reflects how pragmatic competence shapes language use. Finally, we mapped the acceptability rankings against face-related factors, examining how native speakers interpret the appropriateness of each function. All statistical measures and tests were conducted in Python, utilizing packages such as Pandas, NumPy, SciPy, and stats models for data manipulation and analysis (Python 2025).

3.1 Sample

We collected data from 59 native speakers of Jordanian Arabic, recruited through purposive sampling for their fluency in the dialect and familiarity with the religious expression being studied. All participants were students at the University of Jordan, comprising 76.27% female and 23.73% male. Most were young university students aged 18 to 21 (59.32%), while the rest were graduate students (40.68%). Demographic information, including age and gender, was collected but excluded from the main analysis because preliminary analyses indicated no significant variation in responses based on these factors. Participants were fully informed about the study and provided explicit consent, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality while maintaining their right to withdraw at any time.

3.2 Data elicitation and pilot survey

Before analyzing how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic evaluate the pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/, it was essential to establish the expression's salience in everyday speech and identify a baseline for its associated pragmatic functions. To this end, a mini-survey was administered to a pilot group of eight participants, who were asked about the frequency of their use and exposure to the phrase. Findings showed that the expression is both widely recognized and frequently used, with 57.1% reporting usage more than once daily, and the remainder indicating at least daily use, confirming its relevance for linguistic analysis.

Next, the pilot group was exposed to audio recordings featuring the expression used naturally in conversation, demonstrating its varied pragmatic functions, such as expressing gratitude, dissatisfaction, or mockery (see Appendix A). Participants then completed an open-ended recall task, where they identified and described the functions based on their personal experiences. This step provided valuable insights into native speaker intuitions and highlighted the expression's versatility across different social contexts.

3.3 Acceptability judgment task (design and validation)

The pragmatic functions identified by pilot participants were reviewed and refined by three native-speaking linguistic experts (the authors) to ensure contextual relevance and pragmatic distinctiveness. This iterative process resulted in nine distinct functions representing the various roles of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/in Jordanian Arabic discourse. These functions formed the basis for an acceptability judgment task, i.e., an empirical method in linguistics used to systematically measure native speakers' intuitions about the appropriateness and naturalness of expressions in specific contexts (Sprouse 2013; Schütze et al. 2014). In pragmatics, such tasks evaluate how well linguistic forms perform communicative functions within social scenarios.

The judgment task involved a set of dialogue-based scenarios, each illustrating a specific pragmatic function of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/. These scenarios varied systematically in setting, relationship type, and formality to reflect distinct communicative stances. Expert reviewers validated the clarity, distinctiveness, and cultural appropriateness of each function and scenario through an iterative consensus process, ensuring no overlap among functions. Nine scenarios were developed to cover diverse social contexts, and participant responses were qualitatively coded with strong inter-coder reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.82), demonstrating the coding scheme's consistency. Scenarios were presented in Arabic script to preserve natural processing, with translated examples included per journal requirements, for instance a coach speaking to a younger athlete in a public gym:

> Ahmad at the sports center with his trainer:
> Trainer: Come on, Ahmad, what's wrong with you? We want to win the championship this year.
> Ahmad: That's it. I can't continue training more than this; I'm tired; I've been in training since morning!
> Trainer: Okay, may Allah give you strength (Allah ya'teek al-afiya); let's take a 10-minute break and then continue.

The scenario unfolds in a bustling sports centre, where a personal trainer and a young athlete interact within a semi-private, dynamic environment. Their relationship is both hierarchical and familiar, allowing for a semi-formal tone that blends professionalism with camaraderie. The trainer employs a religious

expression to acknowledge the athlete's effort and fatigue, using it to soften directives and maintain a supportive atmosphere. This approach helps protect the athlete's positive face, fosters mutual respect, and reinforces solidarity between them. For further scenario details, refer to Appendix B.

Participants were required to rate their level of agreement on the appropriateness of the expression (for the nine pragmatic functions outlined) using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing nuanced measurement of agreement levels. The task was initially distributed in Arabic and is presented in a culturally adapted English translation in Appendix B to meet the journal's readership requirements.

Following the collection of acceptability ratings, we employ a systematic coding framework to analyze the scenarios according to their face-related attributes. Each dialogue is independently coded by trained analysts using detailed criteria, with inter-rater reliability assessments to ensure consistency and accuracy.

3.4 Data handling and coding

Central to this investigation was understanding how face-related factors influence the attractiveness of certain pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ compared to others. The qualitative investigation of acceptability patterns necessitated the development of a systematic coding framework grounded in politeness theory and face management. Each scenario in our dataset is coded using a two-tiered approach. First, the scenario is evaluated based on its primary face orientation, considering the underlying communicative intent and the nature of the interactions depicted. Subsequently, we assess the face threat level by considering the scenario's potential impact on the interlocutors' face needs.

3.4.1 The coding Scheme

This coding system comprises two primary dimensions: (1) face orientation and (2) face-threat levels. A detailed outline of the coding scheme for each factor is provided here:

1. Face Orientation:

Positive Face Work (PF): Codes under this category denote actions that primarily serve to reinforce social bonds, promote solidarity, and enhance a sense of belonging and appreciation. Scenarios coded as PF are those in which the expression strengthens relational ties and affirms shared identities, often contributing to a positive self-image and mutual respect.

Negative Face Work (NF): These codes indicate actions that address the interlocutor's need for autonomy, respect for personal space, and freedom from imposition. Scenarios marked with NF typically involve communicative acts that assert independence and minimize obligations or intrusions, thereby safeguarding the individual's right to act without constraint.

Dual Face Work (DF): Aspects of positive and negative faces characterize some pragmatic functions. DF codes are assigned to scenarios where the expression simultaneously offers solidarity while also mitigating impositions, reflecting a balanced approach to managing both parties' face needs.

Face Neutral (FN): This category is reserved for scenarios in which the use of the expression carries minimal face implications. In such instances, the expression appears to serve a more functional or routine role without overtly influencing the interpersonal dynamics of face maintenance.

2. Face Threat Level:

High Threat (HT): Codes under this level are assigned to scenarios where the expression has a significant potential to damage the face of one or more interlocutors. High-threat scenarios often involve contexts where the stakes of miscommunication or damage to relationships are considerable, typically due to factors such as exposure, power imbalances, or culturally sensitive topics.

Moderate Threat (MT): These codes indicate that the expression carries a noticeable but less severe risk of causing face damage. In moderate threat scenarios, the potential for adverse effects exists; however, it is mitigated by contextual factors or how the expression is deployed.

Low Threat (LT): Scenarios marked as low threat suggest that the expression is unlikely to affect the face of any interlocutors significantly. These situations are typically characterized by a supportive or less confrontational context, where the marker is used in a manner that poses minimal risk of generating face-related concerns.

4. Analysis and results

This section presents a benchmark for the acceptability and ranking of the nine pragmatic functions associated with the religious expression. We then present the results of a cross-tabulation between the face-related factors to illustrate how face orientation and threat level may interact or exhibit interrelations. This approach allowed us to: (i) observe how different combinations of face orientation and threat level are distributed within the dataset. and (ii) to identify clustering and emerging data patterns, which in turn supports the interpretation of how these factors shape pragmatic choices among participants.

4.1 Acceptability rates of the nine pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/

The main objective of this section is to establish a statistical benchmark that reflects the overall acceptability of the pragmatic functions linked to the religious marker /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ in everyday spoken Jordanian Arabic (SJA). This benchmark precedes the analysis of how face-related factors influence acceptability rates. To capture these preferences, a 5-point Likert scale was employed as a continuum ranging from strong disfavor to strong favor. The scale values were then normalized to account for nuanced variations in acceptability across different

functions. This normalization process is crucial for adjusting potential response biases and ensuring that the results accurately represent the true distribution of attitudes (Boone and Boone 2012; Sullivan and Artino 2013).

The midpoint of (3) is not viewed as a mere arithmetic average but rather as a critical benchmark that distinguishes neutral attitudes from clear levels of acceptance (values above 3) or rejection (values below 3). This threshold is crucial for understanding how respondents perceive the pragmatic appropriateness of the expression within various social contexts and for examining the interplay between these patterns and the dynamics of face work in interaction.

To further elucidate genuine patterns of use, we calculated mean ratings, standard deviations (SD), standardized scores (Z-scores), t-statistics, p-values, and effect sizes (Cohen's d). These statistical measures offer a comprehensive evaluation of central tendencies and the significance of deviations, ensuring that the analysis reflects the intensity and consistency of preferences in using this religious expression (see Table 1). All statistical measures and tests were conducted in Python (Python 2025).

Table 1. Acceptability of the pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə / in SJA

Pragmatic Function	Mean Rating	SD	Z-score	t-statistic	p-value	Cohen's d	Sig
Appreciation and gratitude	4.288	1.403	0.381	7.054	0.0	0.918	***
Motivation and encouragement	4.136	1.332	0.274	6.548	0.0	0.853	***
Starting conversations and getting attention	4.017	1.468	0.19	5.321	0.0	0.693	***
Expressing anger and disapproval	3.949	1.345	0.143	5.422	0.0	0.706	***
Feeling of sympathy	3.847	1.472	0.071	4.423	0.0	0.576	***
Sarcasm and mockery	3.559	1.43	-0.131	3.005	0.004	0.391	**
Feeling of accomplishment	3.542	1.343	-0.143	3.102	0.003	0.404	**
Understanding and support	3.203	1.31	-0.381	1.192	0.238	0.155	ns
Resentment	3.169	1.354	-0.404	0.962	0.34	0.125	ns

The significance levels (*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, ns = not significant) indicate the reliability of differences from the neutral point (3.0) on the 5-point scale.

The analysis provided a comprehensive dataset that consists of 531 individual ratings for the pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ in SJA. The distribution of the ratings showed that the mean rating is 3.75 (on the 5-point Likert scale), with a standard deviation of 1.43, and a median value (50th percentile) of 4. These values suggest that most ratings are on the higher end of the scale. The quantitative acceptability ratings will be mapped against the face-related factors to identify patterns of use across the sample. This approach moves beyond descriptive accounts of acceptability patterns (frequency counts) to develop a theoretically grounded explanation of how this religious expression functions within the complex social dynamics of Jordanian-Arabic interaction, particularly in relation to face management.

A final preliminary step involved conducting a cross-tabulation analysis between the factors of face orientation and face threat level. Cross-tabulation is a statistical method used to examine the relationship between two or more categorical variables by presenting the distribution of one variable's categories across those of another in a matrix format. In this study, the categorical variables include face orientation (e.g., Positive Face, Dual Face, Negative Face) and face threat level (e.g., Low Threat, Moderate Threat). Organizing the data this way allows researchers to observe not only the individual frequency of each category but also the frequency of specific category combinations. For instance, a cross-tabulation table can reveal how often Positive Face orientations occur in Low Threat versus Moderate Threat situations, or highlight if certain combinations, such as Dual Face with Low Threat, are entirely absent. This side-by-side comparison facilitates the detection of patterns, imbalances, or gaps within the dataset. Understanding these relationships is critical, as it helps determine whether the variables operate independently or show systematic associations. The presence or absence of certain combinations may indicate underlying theoretical or contextual factors influencing the data.

Specifically, the primary analysis of this data set indicated that certain combinations (such as PF with MT or DF with LT) are not presentii. When specific combinations of factors are missing or imbalanced, interpreting the main effects becomes more complex. In these situations, what seems to be an effect of face orientation may be influenced by the level of threat, due to their non-random relationship. Understanding these distributional patterns enables the researchers to contextualize their findings within the theoretical framework of face theory, potentially revealing that certain combinations of face orientation and threat level are inherently more common or theoretically significant than others.

4.2 Cross-tabulating face orientation and face threat levels

The cross-tabulation matrix (available in Appendix C) disclosed the following:

- Positive Face (PF) orientations are exclusively paired with Low Threat (LT) contexts.
- Dual Face (DF) orientations are exclusively paired with Moderate Threat (MT) contexts.
- Negative face (NF) orientations appear in both threat levels, with more in Moderate Threat (118) than Low Threat (59).
- There are no NF orientations in high threat levels.

Positive Face (PF) orientations occur exclusively in Low Threat (LT) contexts, indicating that expressions aimed at reinforcing positive self-image or solidarity are typically reserved for situations involving minimal social risk. Dual Face (DF) orientations appear only in Moderate Threat (MT) contexts, suggesting that strategies balancing both positive and negative face concerns are employed primarily in higher-risk social scenarios. In contrast, Negative Face (NF) orientations are more broadly distributed, occurring in both low- and moderate-threat contexts, but with a stronger presence in moderate-threat situations (118 observations versus 59 in low-threat contexts). This pattern implies that while negative evaluations can arise in any setting, they become particularly prominent in moderately threatening situations, possibly reflecting an increased readiness to express criticism when social risks are elevated but not extreme.

The absence of any facework strategies in high-threat contexts is a notable feature of the data and warrants further reflection. This pattern may be shaped by deeply rooted cultural norms that govern the appropriateness of language use in situations of heightened social risk. In many Arabic-speaking communities, religious expressions such as /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ are imbued with a sense of sanctity and reverence. As a result, speakers may consciously avoid employing these expressions in contexts where the stakes are highest, either out of respect for their sacred nature or to prevent the risk of misinterpretation or escalation.

The reluctance to employ religious language in high-threat situations may serve as a protective strategy aimed at preserving the dignity of both speaker and addressee. During moments of heightened social tension or conflict, the use of religious expressions might be perceived as inappropriate, insincere, or even provocative, potentially compromising the intended facework. This cultural sensitivity toward the sanctity of religious language thus functions as a boundary, restricting its use to contexts where social risk is manageable and the expression is more likely to be received positively. Alternatively, the absence of high-threat data points may reflect limitations in the study design or scenario selection; if the scenarios did not adequately represent extreme social risk, this could explain the lack of observations in this category. See Figure 1 for a visual representation of the patterns identified through the cross-tabulation analysis.

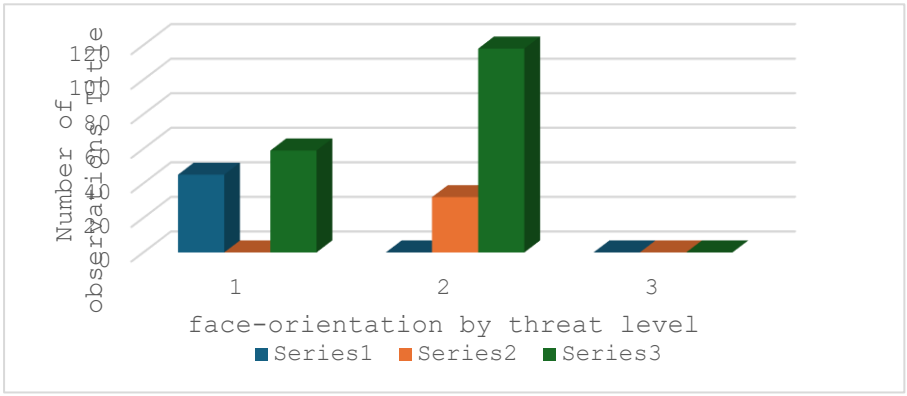

Figure. Cross-tabulation of face orientation by threat levels

Regardless of the underlying cause, the data suggest that the use of religious expressions as facework strategies is not random but is carefully calibrated to both the level of social threat and the cultural value placed on the expressions themselves This pattern is a clear demonstration of pragmatic competence among native speakers. The sample uses language appropriately in different social contexts, taking into account factors such as the relationship between speakers, the level of social risk, and the intended interpersonal outcome. Speakers do not use the expression randomly; rather, they adjust their use of positive, dual, or negative face orientations in direct response to the perceived level of threat in the interaction.

4.3 Main analysis: The impact of face-related factors on pragmatic function acceptability

This section shows the main results of the study, looking at how acceptable different uses of the expression /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ are, based on native speakers' opinions. We focus on how the way people see face (face orientation) and the level of social threat affect their views of this expression in Jordanian Arabic. To accurately model these relationships, we employed a mixed-effects model, which is well-suited for the dataset since each participant provided multiple ratings across the same nine scenarios. By including 'respondent' as a random effect, the model controls for individual differences in baseline rating tendencies, preventing clustering effects from biasing the results. This approach allows for precise estimation of the fixed effects of face orientation and threat level on acceptability judgments, as well as their interaction. The full model details can be found in Appendix D, while Table 2 summarizes the key results.

Table 2. Key findings

Predictor	Effect on Rating	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
Negative Face (NF)	+0.59	< 0.001	Much higher acceptability than Dual Face
Positive Face (PF)	+0.37	0.081	Slightly higher acceptability than Dual Face
Moderate Threat (MT)	-0.26	0.097	Slightly lower acceptability than Low Threat

Group Variance: There is notable variation between individuals.
The significance levels (*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, ns = not significant)

The statistical analysis reveals a clear difference in how face orientation and threat level influence the acceptability of pragmatic functions in spoken Jordanian Arabic. Face orientation, particularly negative face, has a strong and statistically significant effect on acceptability ratings. With an effect size of +0.59 and a p-value of < 0.001, negative face strategies are much more acceptable than dual face strategies. This means that when speakers use pragmatic functions that protect the listener's autonomy or minimize imposition (such as expressing anger, sarcasm, resentment, or offering understanding and support), these are reliably rated as more acceptable. The high statistical significance here indicates that this is a robust and generalizable finding in the data.

Positive face (PF) strategies, which focus on building solidarity and positive social relations (like appreciation, gratitude, motivation, and starting conversations), also show a positive effect on acceptability (+0.37). However, the p-value of 0.081 means this effect is *not statistically significant* at the conventional 0.05 threshold. In other words, while there is a trend toward higher acceptability for positive face strategies compared to dual face, the evidence is not strong enough to confidently assert this effect is reliable across different samples.

In contrast, the effect of threat level, specifically, moderate threat (MT) compared to low threat, shows a negative effect on acceptability (−0.26), with a p-value of 0.097. This suggests that pragmatic functions used in moderate threat contexts tend to be rated as less acceptable than those in low threat contexts. However, like positive face, this effect is not statistically significant, indicating that the influence of threat level on acceptability is weaker and less consistent than that of face orientation.

The mixed-effects model, accounting for respondent clustering, further reveals these discrepancies. Specifically, the NF orientation presents a crucial positive effect on ratings, with an increase of 0.59 ($p < 0.001$) as compared to the reference category of DF. Conversely, the PF orientation presents a positive effect,

with an increase of 0.37; nevertheless, this effect is only marginally significant ($p = 0.081$). Furthermore, the parameter for Moderate Threat shows a negative effect on ratings, with a decrease of 0.26 compared to Low Threat, which is also marginally significant ($p = 0.097$)[iii]. Finally, the group variance of 1.02 suggests substantial variation between respondents, underscoring the importance of accounting for individual differences in this analysis.

This means that, in interpreting the acceptability of pragmatic functions, face orientation is the primary driver, while threat level plays a secondary, less robust role. This distinction is crucial for understanding how native speakers of Jordanian Arabic evaluate the appropriateness of religious expressions in different social contexts.

5. Discussion

While standardized frequencies and mean acceptability ratings provide an initial snapshot of how pragmatic functions are distributed across face orientations and threat levels, they do not fully capture the complex dynamics that shape speakers' judgments. These descriptive statistics are useful for identifying general patterns, but they can be misleading if taken at face value, as they do not account for the relative strength or reliability of each factor's influence on acceptability. To elaborate, if one were to rely solely on the raw rankings of standardized acceptability rates for pragmatic functions of the religious expression as presented in Table (1), it might appear that the results align perfectly with Western models of politeness and face, or that they reflect the prominence of positive face strategies typically associated with collectivist communities. In fact, the order of pragmatic functions as presented there (Table 1) is the exact opposite of what emerges from the more detailed statistical analysis. The raw rankings suggest that positive face strategies are most acceptable, potentially reinforcing familiar assumptions about politeness in collectivist cultures.

However, this surface-level interpretation is misleading. To gain a more accurate understanding of what drives acceptability judgments, it is essential to revisit the results of the statistical analysis (see section 4.3), which directly assesses the effect size and statistical significance of each face-related factor, revealing which aspects of face orientation and threat level shape speakers' evaluations of pragmatic functions. Table (3) summarizes these effects, mapping each pragmatic function to its face orientation, threat level, and the corresponding effect size and statistical significance.

Table 3. Statistical Significance and Strength of Effect for Face Orientation and Threat Level on Acceptability Judgments

Pragmatic Function	Face Orientation	Threat Level	Effect on Rating	Significance (p-value)
Expressing anger and disapproval	Negative Face	Moderate Threat	+0.59	< 0.001
Sarcasm and mockery	Negative Face	Moderate Threat	+0.59	< 0.001
Understanding and support	Negative Face	Low Threat	+0.59	< 0.001
Resentment	Negative Face	Low Threat	+0.59	< 0.001
Appreciation and gratitude	Positive Face	Low Threat	+0.37	0.081
Motivation and encouragement	Positive Face	Low Threat	+0.37	0.081
Starting conversations and getting attention	Positive Face	Low Threat	+0.37	0.081
Feeling of sympathy	Dual Face	Moderate Threat	0 [iv](reference)	—
Feeling of accomplishment	Dual Face	Moderate Threat	0 (reference)	—

Note: "Dual face with moderate threat" serves as the reference category in the regression model. All effect sizes are interpreted relative to this group, which represents strategies balancing both positive and negative face needs in contexts of moderate social threat.

Table (3) shows that while positive face functions often rank highest in raw scores, negative face orientations are more common and have the strongest statistically significant impact on acceptability when all factors are considered. Positive face strategies slightly increase acceptability compared to dual face, but this difference is not statistically significant. Moderate threat contexts show a slight decrease in acceptability, also without strong statistical support. As face threat levels rise, speakers tend to favor strategies emphasizing negative face in their use of religious expressions. This reflects speakers' sensitivity to social dynamics, allowing them to adapt their communication to balance social harmony and respect. The lower acceptability of dual face strategies suggests a preference for more focused approaches tailored to specific social situations.

Rather than confirming a straightforward preference for positive face strategies, typically associated with collectivist contexts strategies (Khosh et al. 2020; Al-Khawaldeh et al. 2023), the results reveal that Negative face strategies,

which emphasize autonomy, indirectness, and respect for personal boundaries, received the highest acceptability ratings among participants. This suggests that, within this community, expressions that protect individual autonomy and minimize imposition are highly valued, even in situations where group harmony is also important (Aslani et al. 2016; Suparno et al. 2023).

The results suggest that the link between pragmatic judgments and language use is more dynamic than we initially hypothesized. We need to rethink our assumptions about cultural expectations, norms, and preferences and how these concepts affect the frequency of pragmatic functions in native speech. This opens the door for a deeper discussion about the assumptions we make regarding collectivist cultures, different types of face across cultures, and the values that shape facework. Some values that seem to be about face may reflect other important cultural beliefs like honour and status. Finally, it is worth noting that religious expressions are inherently sacred, which might incline speakers to use them less in situations that involve high threat or high stakes.

5.1 Assumptions about collectivist cultures

The study's findings begin by questioning the conventional, often Hofstede-influenced, view of collectivist cultures as monolithic entities defined at a national level. This perspective frequently overlooks the significant intracultural variation and individual-level differences in cultural values and behaviors (Hofstede 1980; Fatehi, Priestley and Taasoobshirazi 2020; Khosh et al. 2020). The research suggests that assuming a uniform collectivist mindset across all members of a nation, or even across different collectivist nations, can be an oversimplification (Khosh et al. 2020). For instance, while Chinese culture is considered collectivist, research indicates that individuals within this culture also exhibit concerns for self-face and status, which can manifest differently in various social contexts (Spencer-Oatey and Wang 2019; Oetzel et al. 2001). Similarly, the nuanced use of address forms in Middle Eastern cultures like Persian, Syrian, and Jordanian demonstrates a complex interplay of respect for age, status, and religious values, rather than a uniform collectivist approach (Khosh et al. 2020).

The study's results further challenge the assumption that all collectivist nations behave identically, especially in their linguistic choices. The pragmatic functions of religious expressions in Jordanian Arabic, for example, are shaped by a unique blend of cultural values, social norms, and religious beliefs (Musmar et al. 2025). This contrasts with generalizations that might assume similar patterns of politeness or face management across all collectivist societies (Khosh et al. 2020). The data suggest that speakers are adept at adjusting their communicative strategies based on specific contexts, relational stakes, and the inherent nature of the language used (Musmar et al. 2025).

Danielewicz-Betz (2016) supports these findings by showing that both cultures value harmony and face preservation but use different linguistic tools to achieve them. Japanese speakers often rely on vague or indirect language to soften disagreement, while Saudi Arabic speakers commonly use religious expressions

like "Inshallah" to fulfill multiple pragmatic roles. In Saudi culture, "Inshallah" helps avoid conflict and maintain social harmony, protecting the face of both speaker and listener (Danielewicz-Betz 2016). This cross-cultural insight highlights that although face concerns are universal, the ways they are expressed linguistically differ, enriching our understanding of collectivist cultures and their varied face management strategies.

5.2 The conceptualization of face cross-culturally

The conceptualization of face across cultures is revealed to be multifaceted and potentially misleading if viewed through a single, universalistic lens. While face concerns are universal (Qi 2017; Spencer-Oatey 2019), their linguistic manifestations and the balance between positive and negative face preferences vary significantly across cultures (Ting-Toomey 1988; Spencer-Oatey 2008). The study's findings that Jordanian Arabic speakers prioritize negative face strategies, which protect autonomy and minimize imposition, contradict expectations of collectivist cultures that are often associated with positive politeness (Musmar et al. 2025; Khosh et al. 2020). This finding aligns more closely with patterns typically associated with individualistic cultures (Hofstede 1997, 2011; Grossmann and Santos 2016), suggesting that face orientation preferences may be context-dependent rather than strictly culturally determined, or that cultural frameworks are more complex than initially assumed.

It is also crucial to consider other values that might be misinterpreted as solely face concerns, such as honor and status, which play significant roles in Middle Eastern and Asian cultures (Aslani et al. 2016; Khosh et al. 2020). In honor cultures, self-worth is deeply linked to reputation, and maintaining face often involves assertive actions to protect one's honor and social standing (Aslani et al. 2016; Xue 2025). Similarly, in hierarchical societies, respect for age and status significantly influences communication and face management, as seen in the use of kinship terms to address elders and strangers in Jordanian culture (Khosh et al., 2020).

The strong presence of negative face strategies in the findings can be better understood through the cultural concept of honour, which is extensively explored in sociolinguistic and anthropological studies of Middle Eastern societies (Gelfand et al. 2015; Vignoles et al. 2024). Unlike face, which focuses on social approval and group harmony, honour is tied to personal and family reputation, autonomy, and maintaining social boundaries. For Jordanian Arabic speakers, indirectness, deference, and non-imposition help preserve not only face in the Goffmanian sense but also uphold honour by respecting others' autonomy and boundaries. This is especially important in high-threat situations, where social or reputational risks are greater. These results suggest that negative politeness is not just about individual choice but is deeply rooted in cultural values linked to honour. This understanding broadens our view of pragmatic competence in Jordanian Arabic, highlighting how speakers use both face and honour frameworks to manage complex social interactions.

5.3 Inherent features of religious expression in Arabic

An important consideration highlighted by the study is that religious expressions may inherently differ from other pragmatic tools due to their sacred nature (Alkhawaldeh 2022; Musmar et al. 2025). For example, Hamdan et al. (2023) illustrate that in Jordan, it is common for people to use the discourse marker /wa/ to preface oaths by invoking various revered entities beyond Allah. However, their data only included oaths constructed with /walla:hi/, which combines /wa/ with Allah (God). The authors explained that swearing using entities other than Allah is viewed unfavorably. This highlights how the sacred nature of certain religious expressions profoundly impacts their public manifestation and documentation, distinguishing them from other pragmatic functions that do not face the same level of constraints (Hamdan et al. 2023).

The acceptability of pragmatic functions associated with religious expressions appears to be influenced by a unique set of cultural values, social norms, and religious beliefs that may supersede or modify general cultural communication patterns. This suggests that the sacredness of religious language might lead to distinct facework dynamics, where protecting face, particularly negative face, becomes paramount in navigating these sensitive expressions. This interpretation is supported by the results from the earlier cross-tabulation, which revealed no instances of facework strategies in high-threat contexts. Speakers may refrain from using religious expressions in high-stakes situations out of respect for their sacred nature.

Crucially, the sanctity of religious language in Arabic-speaking societies means that invoking the name of God or religious concepts is not done lightly (Migdadi, Badarneh and Momani 2010). This reverence for religious language may explain why speakers prefer strategies that respect autonomy and minimize imposition. Speakers signal deference and humility, thereby protecting their own and their interlocutor's negative face.

These results align with contemporary theories that conceptualize facework as an interactional and context-dependent achievement (Arundale 2010; Spencer-Oatey 2007; Ting-Toomey 2005). The data from this study support the view that pragmatic competence involves the ability to select linguistically appropriate forms, sensitivity to sociocultural norms, and the specific demands of each interaction (Khosh et al. 2020; Leech 2014; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár 2020).

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to intercultural pragmatics by combining classical speech act theory with modern politeness and face management models, shedding light on how these abstract concepts appear in everyday language. It also offers a detailed analysis of how face orientation and face threat levels interact in Jordanian Arabic, focusing on how pragmatic competence manifests in native speakers' use of a religious expression.

The findings challenge the assumption that positive politeness strategies always dominate in collectivist societies. Revealing that speakers may prioritize strategies that protect individual autonomy depending on the context. Hence, the prominence of negative face strategies in Jordanian Arabic. This highlights that even within culturally homogenous groups, specific linguistic behaviors reflect complex, context-sensitive facework strategies.

This study also proposes a replicable coding framework alongside a mixed-effects modeling approach to evaluate the acceptability of pragmatic functions. It highlights the strength of integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the complexity of pragmatic competence.

The study expands existing research on the pragmatic roles of religious language, showing how expressions like /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/ are essential for maintaining social harmony and managing face across various Arabic dialects. The findings also suggest that religious expressions are inherently sacred, and that this affects how native speakers deploy them.

Despite these advances, several limitations should be acknowledged. The research focused on a single religious expression and was conducted with a limited group of university students, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other age groups, social backgrounds, or communicative contexts. Additionally, the reliance on acceptability judgments, while informative, may not fully capture the richness of face management as it unfolds in natural interaction. Future research should broaden the scope by examining a wider range of expressions and communicative contexts, both within and beyond Arabic-speaking communities. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or ethnographic observation, would further deepen our understanding of the cultural and social dynamics that shape pragmatic choices in religious and everyday language.

Rania Za'rour (Assistant Professor) -Corresponding Author
The University of Jordan, Jordan
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-9873-6099
Email: r.zarour@ju.edu.jo

Ola Musmar, PhD Candidate in Linguistics
The University of Jordan, Jordan
ORCID Number: 0000-0001-9217-7791
Email: omusmar@ju.edu.jo

Fatima Alqaisiya, Full-time Lecturer
The University of Jordan, Jordan
ORCID Number: 0000-0002-1034-5593
Email: f.qaisiya@ju.edu.jo

References

Al-Hanakta, Isra'a and Jihad M. Hamdan. (2024). 'On the pragmatic functions of the idiomatic expression 'Tamam' in Jordanian Arabic'. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 15(3): 984-993. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1503.32

Al-Hee, Sami and Mahmoud Itmeizech. (2017). 'Exploring discourse markers in the Noble Quran: Some verbal clues that facilitate logical hedging, linguistic interaction and language politeness'. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature,* 5(12): 1-25. http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0512001

Alkhawaldeh, Asim A. (2018). 'Uses of the discourse marker Wallahi in Jordanian Spoken Arabic: A pragma-discourse perspective'. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 8(6): 114-123. https://doi.org/doi:10.30845/ijhss.v8n6p1

Alkhawaldeh, Asim A. (2022). 'Deixis in English Islamic Friday sermons: A pragma-discourse analysis'. *Studies in English Language and Education,* 9(1): 418-37. https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i1.21415.

Al-Khawaldeh, Nisreen, Haneen Abuziad, Basil Mashaqba and Anas Al Huneety. (2023). 'A Pragmatic study on managing rapport in responding to reprimands in Jordanian Arabic.' *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 10(5): 67-83. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/1712

Amarasinghe, Amala D. (2012). 'Understanding intercultural facework behaviours'. *The Journal of International Communication*, 18(2): 175-188. https://doi.org/10.1080/13216597.2012.708666

Arundale, Robert B. (2010). 'Constituting face in conversation: Face, facework, and interactional achievement'. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 42(8): 2078-2105. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.12.021

Aslani, Soroush, Jimena Ramirez-Marin, Jeanne Brett, Jingjing Yao, Zhaleh Semnani-Azad, Zhi-Xue Zhang, Catherine Tinsley, Laurie Weingart and Wendi Adair. (2016). 'Dignity, face, and honor cultures: A study of negotiation strategy and outcomes in three cultures'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 37(8): 1178-1201. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2095

Boone, Harry N. and Deborah A. Boone. (2012). 'Analyzing Likert data'. *The Journal of Extension,* 50(2): 1-10. https://doi.org/10.34068/joe.50.02.48

Bousfield, Derek. (2008). *Impoliteness in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.167?locatt=mode:legacy

Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085

Culpeper, Jonathan. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975752

Culpeper, Jonathan and Michael Haugh. (2014). *Pragmatics and the English Language*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-39391-3

Danielewicz-Betz, Anna. (2016). 'Face saving discursive strategies of negation: A Saudi-Japanese comparison'. *Lodz Papers in Pragmatics,* 12(1): 23-51. https://doi.org/10.1515/lpp-2016-0003.

Fatehi, Kamal, Jennifer L. Priestley and Gita Taasoobshirazi. (2020). 'The expanded view of individualism and collectivism: One, two, or four dimensions?'. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management*, 20(1): 7-24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595820913077

Gelfand, Michele J., Laura Severance, Tiane Lee, Bayan Bruss, Janetta Lun, Abdel-Hamid Abdel-Latif, Asmaa A. Al-Moghazy and Sally M. Ahmed. (2015). 'Culture and getting to yes: The linguistic signature of creative agreements in the United States and Egypt'. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(7): 967-989. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2026

Goffman, Erving. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

Goffman, Erving and Joel Best. (2017). *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior* London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203788387.

Grossmann, Igor and Henri C. Santos. (2016). 'Individualistic cultures.' In Zeigler-Hill Virgil and Todd K. Shackelford (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, 1-4. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_2024-1.

Hamdan, Jihad M., Hady Hamdan, Wael Hamdan and Wafa Alkhadra. (2023). 'The pragmatic functions of wa in Jordanian Arabic: A corpus-based study'. *Psycholinguistics*, 34 (2) 132-155. http://dx.doi.org/10.31470/2309-1797-2023-34-2-132-155

Haugh, Michael. (2014). *Im/politeness Implicatures*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110240078

Hofstede, Geert. (1980). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-related Values*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Hofstede, Geert. (1983). 'National cultures in four dimensions'. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 13(1): 46-74. UK: Taylor and Francis.

Hofstede, Geert. (1997). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, Greet. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0005-7967(02)00184-5

Hofstede, Geert. (2011). 'Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context'. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture,* 2(1): 1-26. https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014h

Hymes, Dell. (1972). 'On communicative competence'. In John B. Pride and Janet Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*, 269-293. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books

Khosh, Neda K., Amr Khalil, Hashem Alhaded and Hani Shehadeh. (2020). 'Cultural values and norms of communication: A view from the Middle East'. *International Organization Center of Academic Research,* 1: 396-404.
https://doi.org/10.47696/adved.202096.

Leech, Geoffrey N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315835976.

Leech, Geoffrey N. (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195341386.001.0001

Migdadi, Fathi, Muhammad A. Badarneh and Kawakib Momani. (2010). 'Divine will and its extensions: Communicative functions of *maašaallah* in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic'. *Communication Monographs*, 77(4): 480-499. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2010.502539

Morand, David A. (2003). 'Politeness and the clash of interaction orders in cross-cultural communication'. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 45(5): 521-540. https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.10089

Musmar, Ola, Rania Za'rour and Abdel Rahman M. Altakhaineh. (2025). 'Analyzing the pragmatic functions of the religious expression /ʔallaːh yaʕtiːk ʔilʕaːfje/ (May God grant you health) in Spoken Jordanian Arabic'. *Open Cultural Studies*, 9(1):1-17. https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2025-0059

Nofal, Mohammad. (2023a). 'A corpus-driven exploration of language use in religious discourse'. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 14(1): 41-60. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2023.18067

Nofal, Mohammad. (2023b). 'I'm Praising God in the Language That He Loves': Language Use in Religious Discourse'. *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, 23(2): 19-36. https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes.v23i2.451.

Oetzel, John, Stella Ting-Toomey, Tomoko Masumoto, Yumiko Yokochi, Xiaohui Pan, Jiro Takai and Richard Wilcox. (2001). 'Face and facework in conflict: A cross-cultural comparison of China, Germany, Japan, and the United States'. *Communication Monographs*, 68(3): 235-258. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750128061

Python. (2025). The Python Software Foundation. https://www.python.org/psf-landing/.

Qi, Xiaoying. (2017). 'Reconstructing the concept of face in cultural sociology: In Goffman's footsteps, following the Chinese case'. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 4(1): 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-017-0069-y

Schütze, Carson T., Jon Sprouse, Robert J. Podesva and Devyani Sharma. (2014). *Research Methods in Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139013734

Spencer-Oatey, Helen. (2007). 'Theories of identity and the analysis of face'. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 39(4): 639-56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.12.004

Spencer-Oatey, Helen. (2008). *Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.26754/ojs_misc/mj.20099718

Spencer-Oatey, Helen. (2022). 'Politeness and rapport management'. In *The Cambridge Handbook of Intercultural Pragmatics: Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics*, 484-509. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108884303.020

Spencer-Oatey, Helen and Dániel Kádár. (2020). *Intercultural Politeness: Managing Relations Across Cultures.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316810071.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen, Katharina Lefringhausen and Carolin Debray. (2019). 'Culture, norms, and the assessment of communication contexts: Discussion and pointers for the future'. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology,* 50(10): 1216-20. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022119889165.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen and Jiayi Wang. (2019). 'Culture, context, and concerns about face: Synergistic insights from pragmatics and social psychology'. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 38(4): 423-440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x19865293

Sprouse, Jon. (2013). *Acceptability Judgments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199772810-0097.

Sullivan, Gail M. and Anthony R. Artino. (2013). 'Analyzing and interpreting data from Likert-type scales'. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education,* 5(4): 541-42. https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-5-4-18.

Suparno, Darsita, Ita Fitriana, Nadra Nadra, Fahmi Gunawan and Saad Boulahnane. (2023). 'Redefining politeness: Power and status in the digital age'. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10(1): 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2218195

Thomas, Jenny. (1983). 'Cross-cultural pragmatic failure'. *Applied Linguistics,* 4(2): 91-112. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91.

Ting-Toomey, Stella. (2005). 'The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory'. In William B. Gudykunst (ed.), *Theorizing about Intercultural Communication,*4:71-92. California: Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.131.

Uskul, Ayse K., Paul Hanel, Kirchner Häusler, Alexander Vignoles, Vivian L. Jin, Shuxian Rodriguez-Bailón, Rosa Castillo, Vanessa A. Cross, Susan E. Gezici Yalçın, Meral Harb, Charles Husnu, Shenel Ishii, Keiko Karamaouna, Panagiota Kafetsios, Konstantinos Kateri, Evangelia Matamoros-Lima, Juan Miniesy, Rania Na, Jinkyung Özkan, Zafer Pagliaro, Stefano Psaltis, Charis Rabie, Dina Teresi and Manuel U. Yukiko. (2024). 'Are mediterranean societies "cultures of honor?": Prevalence and implications of a cultural logic of honor across three world regions'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 129(1): 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672241295500

Watts, Richard J. (1989). 'Relevance and relational work: Linguistic politeness as politic behavior'. *Multilingua*, 8(2-3): 131-166.
https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.1989.8.2-3.131

Xue, Ye. (2025). 'Honour versus face: A psycho-cultural approach to US-China great power politics'. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 79(2): 235-256. https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2025.2462105

Yaeger-Dror, Malcah. (2014). 'Religion as a sociolinguistic variable'. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 8(11): 577-589.
https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12114

Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A represents the elicitation tool that was used to evoke native speaker feedback regarding the possible pragmatic functions associated with the religious expression. Below are the transcripts of the two audio conversations that were originally provided to the pilot group in Jordanian Arabic. We present the conversation scripts with phonetic transcription and English translations for compliance with the journal's guidelines.

Pragmatic function 1: Expressing gratitude

[Context]: A husband comes back from work after a long day of hard work, looking exhausted and carrying some shopping bags. His wife is sitting in the living room watching the news.

الزوج: مساء الخير

Husband: Masa: ʔelxair

Good evening

The wife replies, with a smile, also offering to help with the bags:

مساء الورد، الله يعطيك العافية شكلك تعبان كتير اليوم

Wife: masaːʔ lward, ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfje, ʃaklak taʕbaːn

Wife: Good evening, my dear. May Allah grant you health, you look tired.

Pragmatic function 2: Expressing Anger

[Context] A mother asked her daughter to keep an eye on the food while it cooks.

انتبهي عليه لغاية ما أصلّي
Mother: ʔintibhi: ʕalaih laɣaːjet ma ʔasˁalliː
Mother: Please keep an eye on the food while I pray.
Daughter: حاضر
ħa;dˁer
OK
After 10 minutes
الابنة: ماما أنا آسفة، الرز انحرق
Mama. ʔirroz ʔinħaraʔ
Daughter: Mom, I'm sorry, I burnt the food.
الأم: الله يعطيك العافية، ما قلت لك انتبهي عليه؟
ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfje. Ma ʔoltellik tentibhi: ʕaleih
Mother: may Allah grant you health, Have I not specifically asked you to pay attention?

Appendix B

Appendix B details the comprehensive range of scenarios designed to illustrate the nine pragmatic functions of the religious marker /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə /. These scenarios, crafted as dialogues, systematically vary in physical settings, interpersonal relationships, and levels of formality, thereby encapsulating distinct communicative stances. Grounded in a preliminary elicitation study where participants shared real-life experiences of the marker's use, and subsequently refined through a pilot study with linguistic experts and native SJA speakers, these scenarios authentically represent the diverse face-related contexts in which the marker operates. Presented initially in Arabic script to preserve ecological validity, the detailed scenarios in this appendix provide a transparent and robust illustration of the pragmatic functions identified in this study.

Appendix B. The pragmatic functions of /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə / in SJA

N	Contextual factors	Scenario	Pragmatic function
1	Sports Facility Setting Physical Setting: Sports center/gym Relationship Dynamic: Professional (trainer-trainee) Level of Formality: Semi-formal	Ahmad at the sports center, training with his personal trainer: Trainer: Come on, Ahmad, what's wrong with you? We want to win the championship this year Ahmad: That's it, I can't continue training more than this, I'm tired, I've been training since morning! Trainer: Okay, may Allah give you strength (Allah ya'teek al-afiya), let's take a 10-minute break and then continue.	Understanding and support
2	Educational/Social Setting Physical Setting: Study space Relationship Dynamic: Friends/Peers (student-student) Level of Formality: Informal	Leila asked her friend Huda to explain the lesson on integral calculus. After Huda finished, Huda asked: "Is everything clear now?" Leila replied: "Yes, everything is clear. I understand it well, and your explanation is clear, 'Allah ya'teek al-afiya.' You truly fulfilled your duty."	Appreciation and gratitude
3	Government Office Setting	Ali entered the Civil Status Department to renew his passport, unsure of where	Initiating conversation and getting attention

	Physical Setting: Civil Status Department Relationship Dynamic: Citizen-employee interaction Level of Formality: Formal	to begin. He finds the reception employee: Ali: "Ya'teek al-afiya (May Allah give you strength), I want to renew my passport, but I don't know where to start" Employee: "No worries, take a number from here, and when it's your turn, the responsible employee will call your number.	
4	Public Space Setting Physical Setting: Traffic light/street Relationship Dynamic: Stranger-to-stranger (customer-vendor) Level of Formality: Semi-formal	At the traffic light, a newspaper vendor walks wearily among the cars to sell copies of the newspaper. The weather is hot, the sun is blazing, and the temperature reaches up to 30°C. Aliya, who is standing by her car waiting for the signal to turn green, notices him. She opens her bag, takes out some money, and calls out to the vendor while extending her hand with the sum: Aliya: Good morning, sir. Allah ya'teek al-afiya. Vendor: Thank you, dear. May God reward you with goodness.	Feeling of sympathy
5	Home/Family Setting (Achievement) Physical Setting: Home Relationship Dynamic: Parent-child (mother-son) Level of Formality: Informal	Osama returns from school, and his mother receives him. He has his science exam paper with him. Osama: Mom, I got a full mark! I studied well for it. Mother: Bravo, my champion! Allah ya'teek al-afiya (May Allah give you strength). I'll make you the most delicious chocolate cake.	Motivation and encouragement
6	Home/Family Setting (Complaint)	Also, Osama, coming home from school while waving the golden medal	Resentment

	Physical Setting: Home Relationship Dynamic: Parent-child (mother-son) Level of Formality: Informal	hanging around his neck, is greeted by his mother who notices that his once-white clothes are no longer white and his hair is dusty. He says to her: Osama: "Mama! We won the championship today, and I didn't let a single goal come against us—I was like Yassin Bouno." The mother, while recalling the pile of laundry waiting for her, said, "Bouno? Allah ya'teek al-afiya."	
7	Educational Setting Physical Setting: School/University Relationship Dynamic: Peer-to-peer (classmates) Level of Formality: Informal	After taking the exam: Muath: "How did you do?" Mohammad: "Don't even ask! I really messed up. I was confused during the exam even though it was very easy. What can I do? I only studied for it yesterday evening." Muath: "Allah ya'teek al-afiya" (May Allah give you strength)	Sarcasm and mockery
8	Academic Setting Physical Setting: University/classroom Relationship Dynamic: Professor-students Level of Formality: Semi-formal	The professor speaks to his students after the end of the semester: Professor: "And with that, we have completed the course and wrapped up a challenging semester. I would like to thank you for the tremendous effort you have put into this subject, and I wish you success in your final exams." Students: "Allah ya'teek al-afiya, Doctor."	Accomplishment
9	Home/Family Setting (Discipline) Physical Setting: Home during family meal	Today is Friday, and the family has gathered for the meal prepared by the mother. Rashid offered to flip the maqluba, but	Anger and reprimand

Relationship Dynamic: Parent-children Level of Formality: Informal	instead of landing it on the serving tray, he flipped it onto the floor. The father rushed over at the sound and saw the food on the floor. Rashid: "I swear, it wasn’t my fault. Khalid moved the tray because he wanted to flip the maqluba, and I didn’t let him." Khalid: "No, Dad, Rashid is lying; I didn't do that." Father: "Allah ya'teek al-afiya—you both! Moreover, on top of that, you lie! Shame on you from your mother."

Appendix C

Appendix C presents the full cross-tabulation table detailing the distribution of face orientation across different levels of perceived threat in the dataset. This table provides a comprehensive overview of how Positive Face, Dual Face, and Negative Face orientations are employed by speakers in low and moderate-threat contexts. By displaying the frequency of each facework orientation within each threat level, the table offers valuable insight into the ways speakers adjust their pragmatic choices according to the social risk present in each scenario.

Cross-Tabulation of Face Orientation by Threat Level

Face Orientation	Low Threat (LT)	Moderate Threat (MT)	High Threat (HT)	Total
Positive Face (PF)	45	0	0	45
Dual Face (DF)	0	32	0	32
Negative Face (NF)	59	118	0	177
Total	104	150	0	254

Appendix D

Appendix D provides the complete output of the mixed-effects linear regression model used in this study. While the main findings are summarized in the results section for clarity and accessibility, the full model output is included here to ensure transparency and allow interested readers to review the detailed statistical results. This model examines how face orientation and threat level influence the acceptability ratings of the expression /ʔallah jaʕtiːk ilʕaːfjɪə/, while accounting for individual differences among respondents. The table below displays the estimated coefficients, standard errors, significance values, and

confidence intervals for each predictor, offering a comprehensive view of the statistical analysis underlying the main conclusions.

Mixed-model output

Mixed Linear Model Regression Results					
Model:	MixedLM	Dependent Variable:	rating		
No. Observations:	531	Method:	REML		
No. Groups:	59	Scale:	0.9874		
Min. group size:	9	Log-Likelihood:	-821.3136		
Max. group size:	9	Converged:	Yes		
Mean group size:	9.0				
	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P>|z|	[0.025 0.975]
Intercept	3.432	0.243	14.119	0.000	2.956 3.909
face_type[T.NF]	0.585	0.158	3.691	0.000	0.274 0.895
face_type[T.PF]	0.371	0.213	1.746	0.081	-0.045 0.788
threat_level[T.MT]	-0.263	0.158	-1.658	0.097	-0.573 0.048
Group Var	1.018	0.223			

[i] A community of practice is a group of people who come together through regular interaction, shared value systems, and "practices" and not by predetermined demographic boundaries (such as age, gender, or nationality). Within these groups, linguistic norms and social meanings are negotiated and reinforced through participation in joint activities, leading to the emergence of distinctive patterns of language use and identity.

[ii] From a statistical analysis perspective, such perfect associations between predictors can result in multicollinearity issues in regression models or empty cells in factorial ANOVA designs, potentially compromising the validity of parameter estimates and statistical tests.

[iii] The results for Positive Face (PF) and Moderate Threat (MT) are not statistically significant at the conventional threshold of $p < 0.05$. This means that, while there is a trend suggesting PF is rated more acceptable than Dual Face (DF) and MT is rated less acceptable than Low Threat (LT), these differences could be due to random variation in the data rather than a reliable effect.

[iv] In the statistical analysis, "dual face with moderate threat" was selected as the reference category. This combination represents a pragmatic strategy that attempts to balance positive and negative face needs in socially sensitive situations. By using this group as the baseline, the model allows for a clear interpretation of how other face orientations and threat levels differ in their effect on acceptability judgments. All reported effect sizes in Table (3) indicate how much more or less acceptable each function is, compared to this central reference point.