
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Invocations in Everyday Saudi Arabic: A Pragmatic Analysis

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the pragmatic functions and meanings of invocations as used in everyday Taif Spoken Arabic (TSA). Despite the considerable amount of research on invocations in Arabic, Saudi Arabic has received little attention. A qualitative Discourse Completion Test was used for analysis which comprised 15 scenarios based on everyday contexts. A total of 36 participants of TSA native speakers took part in the study and generated 79 examples of invocations. The collected data was then categorized into themes based on their context and pragmatics and included five recurrent themes: invocations of reward and blessing, honour and reputation, prosperity and well-being, solidarity and reciprocity, and culture-specific idiomatic invocations. The results revealed that invocations perform functions that extend beyond conventional religious meaning. Invocations are employed to express gratitude and appreciation, wish the addressee health and prosperity, reinforce positive social identity, establish solidarity, and acknowledge reciprocal social obligations. The results also revealed that several invocations are culturally and idiomatically embedded, making their pragmatic interpretation based on shared sociocultural knowledge. The study concludes that invocations constitute an important pragmatic resource in everyday TSA and that their interpretation requires attention to both linguistic context and Saudi cultural norms. The findings contribute to research on Arabic pragmatics by providing a systematic account of the multifunctional nature of invocations in everyday Saudi Arabic.

| KEYWORDS

Religious expressions, invocations, Saudi Arabic, pragmatic analysis, politeness

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the best means of communication through which relationships among individuals are established and maintained. It is a powerful communicative instrument for conveying messages and influencing minds (Abbadi et al., 2024), and for signalling and preserving cultural identity (Rababah et al., 2023). It serves as a vehicle for expressing individuals' emotions, thoughts, and intentions, using both literal and non-literal meanings. The interpretation of a word or a phrase is often based on the context where it occurs, underlining the dynamic nature of language (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018).

Arabic is a Semitic language; it belongs to the Afro-Asiatic language family (Albirini, 2016). It is one of the world major languages. It is usually categorized into three forms: Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and Colloquial Arabic (CA) (Al-Saidat and Al-Momani, 2010). Both Classical Arabic and MSA are standard varieties with slight differences. Throughout the present study, the term MSA will be used to cover these two varieties; it is employed in formal situations including education, newspapers, religious sermons and formal speeches (Ismail, 2012 in Alfadda, 2019). On the other hand, CA is an umbrella term used to cover all the varieties used during informal situations throughout the Arab world. It includes various national and regional varieties that constitutes daily spoken language (Al-Saidat and Al-Momani, 2010), Saudi Arabia is no exception.

1.1 Arabic in Saudi Arabia

Being the birthplace of Islam and the home of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina, Saudi Arabia occupies a unique position in the Islamic world (Alfadda, 2019). Thus, religion is one of the most distinguishing features of the Saudi culture

(Obeidat et al., 2012). Accordingly, Islam plays a major role in the Saudi culture aspects where social life and traditions are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings (Alkahtani et al., 2013). This influences most of Saudis' acts including verbal behaviours, as reflected in the widespread use of expressions invoking God's will in daily communications such as *inshaallah* 'God willing', implying that "God is the ultimate causality independent from empirical assessment of cause and effect" (Long, 2005, p. 25).

1.2 Religious Expressions and Invocations

Language and religion are closely interrelated, which is considered a key cultural aspect (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). Religion partially indicates the identity and social values; it may also shape the individuals' culture within social groups; it is a powerful source of truth and goodness that shapes the daily activities of religious people through their social relationships (Güngör et al., 2011).

In the Arabic context, one of the most significant features that distinguishes Arabic from other languages is that it is the language of the Qur'an, the holy book of Muslims (Al-Ageel, 2016). Accordingly, religious expressions, in which an explicit or implicit reference to Allah (lit.: 'the God') is included, are common, recurrent and widespread in everyday Arabic speech (Morrow, 2006; Piamenta, 1979, 1983; Welji, 2012). religious expressions emphasize the validity and authority of speech, reinforcing the influence of a speaker's message and interpersonal interactions (al-Rojaie, 2021); they are multidimensional and multifunctional in Arabic discourse (al-Rojaie, 2021). In this regard, Morrow (2006, p. 45) states:

the Arabic language is saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly and ... the name Allah permeates both spoken and written Arabic to the point where we can speak of the omnipresence of Allah in the Arabic language. As a result, an Arabic speaker could scarcely conceive of a conversation where the name of God would not appear.

Arabic speakers employ religious expressions regardless of their religious affiliation (Clift & Helani, 2010) in everyday private and public communications in diverse forms and contexts such as greetings, farewell and gratitude expressions, wishes, congratulations and other forms (al-Rojaie, 2021). Many religious expressions have lost their original meanings as invocations and become more or less idiomatic in use implying astonishment or seeking protection and guidance (Piamenta, 1979; Jaradat, 2014).

The phenomenon of religious expressions has attracted the attention of researchers long back. Piamenta (1979, 1983) and Ferguson (1983) are possibly the earliest studies that investigated religious expressions in Arabic. Piamenta (1979, 1983) documented a wide range of God-phrases and explored the religious and cultural assumptions embedded in their use across Classical and Colloquial Arabic, showing that these expressions are not limited to formal or ritual contexts but are central to greetings, farewells, expressions of appreciation, pledges, and everyday remarks. Ferguson (1983) investigated religious expressions related to God-wishes in Syrian Arabic and analysed patterns of their contextual meanings. Many researchers studied the pragmatics of specific religious expressions like *inshaallah* (lit.: God willing) (e.g., Farghal, 1995; Nazzal, 2005; Mehawesh & Jaradat, 2015; Al-Hawi, 2018; Alghazali, 2020), *adzalakom'allah* (lit.: May God elevate you) (e.g., Al-Ghoweri, 2016), *mashaallah* 'what God has willed' (e.g., Migdadi et al., 2010), and *wallahi* 'I swear' (Al-Khawaldeh, 2018).

The results of Farghal's (1995) showed that the expression *inshallah* has various pragmatic functions in Jordanian Arabic that can be interpreted according to the context rather having a single meaning. It functions as directive, commissive, or expressive, according to communicative situations. Mehawesh and Jaradat (2015) also investigated the uses of *inshallah* in Jordanian Arabic. The results revealed that in addition to its literal meaning, the term is employed for various pragmatic functions, such as irony, threat, surprise, agreement, and wishes. Similar results of the use of *inshallah* were reported by Alghazali (2020) and Nazzal (2005). Researchers also investigated other religious expressions such as *mashallah* (lit.: God willing) whose pragmatic functions were explored by Migdadi et al. (2010). The study showed that the expression has various functions besides its conventional function as a protective invocation against the evil eye, such as praise, expression of gladness, modesty, and mockery. Furthermore, Al-Ghoweri (2016) examined the usage and pragmatic functions of *adzalakom allah* (lit.: May God elevate you). Focusing on when and why Jordanians use the expression, the study showed that *adzalakom allah* is used when referring to taboo topics including dirty places, animals, and reprehensible situations. The results also showed that the expression is used as an indirect politeness strategy to address socially sensitive topics, alleviating face-threatening acts.

Drawing on data from three Arabic films, Welji (2012) investigated the functions of religious expression involving the word 'God' in Levantine Arabic. The results revealed that these expressions are used for various functions, including establishing a connection and a bond of community with people, adding validity and authority to the speech, and enhancing the power and control of the speaker. She attributed the frequent use of religious expressions involving the name of God to peoples' beliefs about invoking the power of the name of God. Allah-based phrases also were explored by Abu Qub'a et al. (2025). The study examined the pragmatic functions of Allah-based phrases in Jordanian Arabic. The results of the study showed that Allah-based phrases have various communicative functions; they are used to express respect, praise, wonder, politeness, and emotional

support. The author concluded that Allah-based phrases are idiomatic and cultural-bound, sustaining social coherence and expressing common beliefs.

Invocation as a speech act is realized through numerous expressions which are considerably frequent in Arabic in general and Taif Spoken Arabic (TSA, henceforth) in particular to the extent that they are expected in any interaction. They are employed in verbal exchanges in greetings, weddings, funerals, and religious ceremonies; they are tools for establishing and strengthening relationships between interlocutors (Tannen & Öztekin, 1981). Amer et al. (2020) state that invocations are used as polite verbal rewards for efforts made by the hearer such as *ʔalla yaʃt:kɪl ʃa:fyɪh* 'May God grant you health', *ba:rak ʔalla fɪ:k* 'May God bless you', and *dʒa:ka ʔalla xer* 'May God reward you well'. They are strongly connected to the social and cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors (Amer et al., 2020) and therefore becoming social and cultural norms influencing speakers' linguistic choice (Al-Momani, 2009). Flouting such norms could be considered as a violation of the values that are part of the traditional Arabic-Islamic heritage (Migdadi, 2003).

Invocations can be situated within the framework of speech act theories. According to Searle's (1979) classifications of speech acts, invocations can be expressive as they reflect the speaker's feelings and emotions towards a state of affair. They can also be classified under expressive illocutionary acts, maintaining harmony between interlocutors (Leech, 1983). Furthermore, invocations can be considered as requestive performatives because they express supplications directed to God, irrespective whether the requested action has been fulfilled at the time of speaking (Al-Jarim & Amin, 1999). They are used primarily to satisfy the hearer's positive face wants. of the hearer. According to Bach and Harnish (1979), invocations can also be classified as acknowledgements. Whether genuine or formulaic, an invocation expresses the speaker's positive feelings towards the listener while fulfilling socially expected norms of politeness.

1.3 Significance of the Study

In most of the Saudi cities, including Taif, a lot of foreigners live and work. For them communication with native speakers of Saudi Arabic is inevitable, so being unaware of how religious expression such as invocations are employed in Saudi Arabic within the Saudi social and cultural norms may pose a considerable challenge for them. Similarly, learners of Arabic as a foreign language studying abroad in Saudi Arabia engage in communication with native speakers in the outside-institute environments where they encounter a lot of religious expressions in daily interactions. Lacking the correct interpretation and the knowledge of employing these religious expressions may hinder their communication and ultimately affect their acquisition of Arabic. Hence, the importance of conducting the present study surfaces. In the Saudi context in general and TSA in particular religious expression remain underexplored in the literature, let alone invocations. This study aims to bridge this gap in the literature.

The present study aims to categorise the pragmatic functions and meanings of invocations employed in TSA using Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory. In light of these objectives, the study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What expressions are commonly used as invocations in TSA?

RQ2: What are the pragmatic functions and meanings of these expressions in TSA?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Speech Act Theory and Politeness in Linguistic Behavior

Language, society and politeness are closely interconnected, as politeness serves as the link between linguistic behaviour and social interaction (Trudgill, 1974). According to Searle (1969), speaking a language involves performing speech acts that are governed by a set of constitutive and regulative rules. Building on this viewpoint, Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) contend that politeness strategies are used to mitigate face-threatening acts, and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Speech act theory politeness theory examine the ways a language is employed to fulfil communicative purposes in social interaction. These theories are considered two primary frameworks in pragmatics. Speech act theory highlights that language is a form of social action governed by cultural conventions that normalize verbal communication (Searle, 1979). Supplementing this viewpoint, politeness theory examines how interlocutors adjust their language to social norms and preserve appropriate social relationships across various linguistic and cultural settings (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Building on Austin's (1962) pioneering work, Searle (1979) further developed speech act theory by emphasizing the concept of illocutionary force, which refers to the communicative intention underlying an utterance. The intended meaning is understood not only by relying on the linguistic form of the utterance but also the contextual and interactional cues existing to the hearer. Accordingly, the realization of speech acts is shaped by the linguistic conventions, i.e., by selecting appropriate lexical items and grammatical structures in accordance with the conventions of a particular speech community, and sociocultural norms, where the suitability of speech acts in relation to contextual variables are determined.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework is considered the most widespread model of politeness. They depend on the concept of 'face' in analysing types of discourse in communicative situations. In this model, 'face' is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). The authors emphasized the distinction between positive face which refers to "the positive and consistent image people have of themselves, and their desire for approval", and negative face which refers to "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non-distraction" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). In this perspective, politeness theory focuses on the conversers' feelings, wants, and desires, serving as a tool to help them feel contented. Moreover, politeness theory classifies speech acts according to two broad strategies: direct and indirect. While the direct strategy refers to the situations in which the speaker means to convey the literal meaning of the utterance, an indirect strategy is used to describe the speaker's intention to convey a meaning different from the literal meaning of an utterance, for which the addressee has to rely on their inference to interpret the intended meaning in accordance with the participants' mutual shared background knowledge. For Leech (2014), indirect strategies are more polite than the direct ones as they increase the addressee's choices and reduce the level of imposition.

2.2 Previous Studies

Speech acts in the Saudi context have attracted the attention of researchers. For example, Almathkuri (2021) explored the performance of request in Saudi Arabic and whether social power or social distance have any impact on the request strategies employed by 34 native speakers of Saudi Arabic. The results showed that participants prefer direct strategies over the indirect one, whereas the impact of social power and distance is measurable with reference to the type of the request and the relationships between the interlocutors. Religious expressions in the Saudi context, although not received enough attention by researchers, are common and affluence in Saudi Arabic. Among the few studies investigated these expressions, is a study conducted by al-Rojaie (2021), who explored the pragmatic functions of religious expressions that include the name Allah 'God' in Najdi Arabic, a Saudi Arabic variety. The study employed speech act theory and politeness theory. The results of the study showed that religious expressions are used for persuading, mitigating and hedging, indicating agreement and approval, concluding a discussion, reinforcing emphasis, and seeking protection from the evil eye. The author concluded that these expressions are used as politeness markers, enhancing speakers' positive politeness (for solidarity, claiming common grounds, and building rapport), and negative politeness to reduce imposition and emphasise personal autonomy. Farrag (2022) explored the politeness strategies in performing requests and apologies used by faculty members at King Abdulaziz University. The study showed that politeness strategies are shaped by the cultural and social factors and are used to maintain respectful and harmonious communication among Saudis. The results also showed that Saudis tended to employ certain religious softeners such as prayers of good wishes, including *اللّٰه يسعدك* 'May Allah grant you happiness' and *اللّٰه يجزاك خير* 'May Allah reward you', and offered praise in order to reduce the burden of the request.

In the Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA) context, Musmar et al. (2025) examined the pragmatic functions of the phrase *ʔalla:h yaʕti:k ʔilʕa:fje* 'May God grant you good health'. Gathering data through a questionnaire from 67 university students, the analysis showed that the use of the selected religious expression was governed by the physical setting, relationship dynamics, and formality level, indicating the role of the cultural and situational environment in understanding how the expression is employed and received. Furthermore, Amer et al. (2020) investigated the responding strategies to invocations during interactions between Jordanians and the employees of the call-centre-customer service. The results showed that the participants employed various invocations, including *ʔalla yaʕti:kil ʕa:fɣih* 'May God grant you health', *ba:rak ʔalla fɣ:k* 'May God bless you', and *dʒaza:k ʔalla: xerr* 'May God reward you well', and that the responses to these invocations were influenced by the Jordanian socioreligious norms where the response includes at least the same invocation.

From a socio-pragmatic perspective, Jawad (2019) explored the social and religious influences on Iraqi Arabic through the use of invocations in daily social situations. The study found that speakers of Iraqi Arabic are strongly influenced by Islamic beliefs, as evident by their adherence to Islamic teachings in their everyday linguistic practices. Focusing on religious terms in Yemeni Arabic, Al-Nahdi et al. (2022) explored the uses of the name of God in daily communication of Yemeni people. The results showed that the religious expressions are actively employed in greetings, expressions of gratitude, and everyday interactions rather than being limited to formal or ritual contexts. The results of the study revealed that religious expressions in Yemeni Arabic serve communicative and social functions, highlighting religious identity and cultural harmony within the community.

While these studies offer an overview of the significance of pragmatic competence in achieving successful communication across Arabic dialects, the relationship between invocations and politeness orientation of Saudi Arabic native speakers, particularly Taif Spoken Arabic, has not received sufficient attention. The present study seeks to bridge the gap by contributing to cross-cultural pragmatic research through the analysis of invocation strategies employed by Saudi Arabic native speakers, integrated with linguistic politeness.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two theoretical models: Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speech act theory is concerned with the ways utterances can be used to perform actions (speech acts). This theory helps to explain and analyse the speaker's meaning of religious expressions in everyday interactions and the addressee's interpretations of these expressions. Politeness Theory, on the other hand, examines the various strategies employed to mitigate imposition, reducing the impact of face-threatening acts. and to enhance social solidarity between interlocutors.

3. METHODS

This study aims to identify the pragmatic meanings and functions of invocations employed in TSA in everyday interactions. It aims also to analyse how these expressions are used to reflect politeness within the framework of pragmatic competence. Data collection was achieved through the use of Discourse Completion Task (DCT), consisting of 15 scenarios involving different communicative scenarios. The DCT, as a data collection tool, was introduced by Blum-Kulka (1982a, 1982b). The situations involved in DCTs, whether written or spoken, are designed with accordance with the objectives of target study. Participants are expected to respond to the DCT's situations in what they regard as appropriate in each designed situation.

The benefits of choosing the DCT is that it offers a structured and controlled environment that facilitates the comparison of responses across the different scenarios produced by a large number of participants (Kasper, 2000), allowing for consistency in data collection as all participants receive the same set of scenarios. The 15 scenarios were carefully designed by the researcher to reflect diverse authentic communicative situations commonly encountered in the Saudi environment, such as interactions with strangers, friends, relatives and neighbours to capture naturally-occurring invocations. To increase the validity of the DCT scenarios, the researcher sought verification from two experts in Arabic sociolinguistics. These experts, affiliated to Taif University, were requested to evaluate the clarity of the scenarios, assisted in the appropriateness of the scenarios for eliciting invocation speech acts and their appropriateness for linguistic and cultural context specific to Saudi society. Based on the experts' feedback, minor revisions were made to improve the readability and better represent the invocation scenarios.

Thirty-six Saudis participated in the study; they are male and female native speakers of TSA with no age restriction. Not focusing on a particular age or gender group was an attempt to collect diverse responses not restricted to any particular group. Prior to data collection process, the researcher introduced the aims of the study to participants and informed that their identities would be kept confidential and data would only be used for research purposes. Written informed consent was subsequently obtained from each participant for both participation in the study. The researcher asked the participants to fill in the DCT and emphasized that they have to place themselves in real situations and imagine that in each scenario they have to provide an answer or a comment, and then write it the space provided. The researcher also requested them to use their local variety of Arabic as much as possible.

The analysis of data is qualitative in nature. After collecting data, the researcher identified 79 expressions involving invocation across the 15 scenarios. Based on the context and the speech event in which each invocation occurred, invocations were categorised into five themes.

4. RESULTS

The analysis of the DCT responses across the 15 scenarios showed that Saudi Arabic speakers formulate expressions of gratitude, appreciation, and goodwill through reference to God, divine reward, health, prosperity, family, reputation, and reciprocal obligations. Although many expressions include an overt thanking component, their pragmatic meaning extends beyond conventional gratitude to encompass blessing the addressee, maintaining social relationships, and acknowledging the value of the action performed by the addressee. The analysis of the data revealed five recurrent themes in the use of invocations in everyday Saudi Arabic: invocations of reward and blessing, invocations of honour and reputation, invocations of prosperity and well-being, invocations expressing solidarity and reciprocity, and culture-specific idiomatic invocations.

4.1 Theme 1: Invocations of Reward and Blessing

The first theme comprises invocations in which speakers explicitly or implicitly ask God to reward, bless, or favour the person who has helped them. Such expressions were seen in scenarios emphasizing assistance, hospitality, support in academic issues, and generosity. In these situations, participants repeatedly transferred the responsibility for rewarding the benefactor to God, instead of simply saying 'thank you'. This pattern is confirmed by the use of diverse expressions, including *الله يجزاك خير* *?alla: jidzra:k xeyr* 'May God reward you with goodness', *الله كتب أجرك* *katab alla: ?adzrak* 'May God record your reward', and *الله يكتب أجرك* *?alla: juktub ?adzrak* 'May God write down your reward'.

In Scenario 3, for example, the employee provided a quick help for the participant and offered a clear explanation about the procedures; the responses included expressions such as *الله يجزاك خير* *?alla: jidzra:k xeyr* 'May God reward you with goodness', *الله كتب أجرك* *katab alla: ?adzrak* 'May God record your reward', and *الله يسعدك* *?alla: jis?idk* 'May God make you happy'. Similar

expressions were found in situations involving personal assistance. In Scenario 8, a participant thanked a fellow student for permitting him to use his notes, he said, الله يجزاك خير ويكتب أجرك *ʔalla: jidʒza:k ʔeɪr uw juktub ʔadʒrak* 'May God reward you with goodness and record your reward'. Similarly, in Scenario 14, where a neighbour agreed to receive a package on behalf of the participant, the participant's response الله يجزاك خير *fukran lak walla: jidʒza:k ʔeɪr* 'Thank you, and may God reward you with goodness' includes both conventional gratitude and a divine blessing. These responses implied that the uses of the divine reward are culturally appropriate mechanism for expressing gratitude. Besides acknowledging the favour, the speaker wishes a positive outcome for the benefactor. Therefore, the invocation adds an interpersonal and moral dimension to the speech act of thanking.

4.2 Theme 2: Invocations of Honour and Reputation

This theme comprises expressions that invoke the addressee's honour, social standing, dignity, or reputation. The most prominent example is the recurring expression الله يبيض وجهك *ʔalla: jɓajjiz wadʒhak* 'May God brighten your face'. This invocation is found frequently in a number of scenarios. In Saudi Arabic, it seems that this invocation is not usually understood semantically, as suggested by the meaning of its individual words; instead, it is interpreted as a tool that conveys appreciation and wishes, serving to enhance the person's honour, reputation, and social standing. For example, الله يبيض وجهك *ʔalla: jɓajjiz wadʒhak* 'May God brighten your face' appeared in Scenario 1 in which a colleague assisted the participant during their first day at work. It also occurred in Scenario 4 involving a voluntary assistance provided a passenger who switched seats to help the participant sit beside their child. Similarly, it occurred in Scenario 5 when a café employee returned a participant's lost wallet and in Scenario 10 after a stranger helped with a broken-down vehicle. Other responses expressing appreciation through honour-related imagery include: أبيض وجهه *ʔɓjaʒ wadʒh* 'May your face be bright', الله يسعد ذا الوجه *ʔalla: jisʔid ʔal wadʒh* 'May God make this face happy', مشكور على وقفك وبيض الله وجهك *maʔku:r ʔala wagfatk ʔubajjiz ʔalla: wadʒhak* 'Thank you for standing by me, and may God brighten your face', and الله يسعدك ويبيض وجهك *ʔalla: jisʔidk wib bajjiz wadʒhak* 'May God make you happy and brighten your face'.

The frequent use of الله يبيض وجهك *ɓajjaʒ ʔalla: wadʒhak* 'May God brighten your face' is significant as it appeared frequently in different social contexts, which indicates that it can be used toward acquaintances, service providers, colleagues, friends, and strangers. This wide-ranging distribution suggests that invocations related to honour can be considered as an important conventional resource for expressing appreciation in Saudi Arabic. The results further show that the notion of the 'face' functions symbolically in these expressions. The 'whitening' of the face can be understood pragmatically as a wish for the addressee to maintain dignity, esteem, and a favourable reputation. Thus, the invocation simultaneously expresses gratitude and reinforces the positive social value of the addressee's behaviour.

4.3 Theme 3: Invocations of Prosperity and Well-being

The third theme includes invocations that wish the addressee health, happiness, safety, success, prosperity, or general well-being. These expressions were widespread across the situations and occurred in response to both significant and relatively minor acts of assistance. One of the most frequent expressions was الله يعطيك العافية *ʔalla: jaʔtɪ:k ɪl ʔa:fɪh* 'May God grant you health and well-being'. participants used it in Scenario 1 after receiving assistance from a colleague, in Scenario 3 after receiving help from a government employee, in Scenario 4 after a passenger gave up a seat, in Scenario 11 after being allowed to use a friend's phone, and in Scenario 12 after receiving financial assistance. Other examples include: الله يسعدك *ʔalla: jisʔidk* 'May God make you happy', الله يوفقك ويبسر أمورك *ʔalla: jiwafgak wɪ jassɪr ʔumu:rak* 'May God grant you success and make your affairs easy', الله يرزقك من *ʔalla: jidʒʔal lak fɪ: kul ʔuʔwa sala:ma* 'May God make safety in every step you take', واسع فضله *ʔalla: jirʔigak mɪn wa:sɪf faʔlɪh* 'May God provide you generously from His abundant bounty', and الله يسعدك دنيا وآخره *ʔalla: jisʔidk dunjaw ʔa:ʔrɪh* 'May God grant you happiness in this world and the Hereafter'.

These expressions demonstrate that gratitude is frequently articulated through wishes for the addressee's future well-being. For instance, in Scenario 9, where a shop employee helped the participant save money, the participant said "الله يرزقك من واسع فضله" 'May God provide you generously from His abundant bounty'. The response therefore goes beyond acknowledging the immediate favour and expresses a wish for future material prosperity. Similarly, "الله يوفقك ويبسر أمورك" 'May God grant you success and make your affairs easy' in Scenario 8 transforms gratitude for academic assistance into a broader blessing concerning the recipient's future access. The findings consequently indicate that health, happiness, success, safety, and material provision are recurrent domains through which appreciation is expressed in Saudi Arabic.

4.4 Theme 4: Invocations Expressing Solidarity and Reciprocity

This theme comprises invocations that establish or enhance interpersonal solidarity by acknowledging mutual affection, social obligation, support, or the expectation of reciprocal goodwill. Understanding and employing these expressions is significant since they present gratitude as part of an ongoing social relationship, rather than a mere individual reaction to the performed favour. For example, in Scenario 6, the participants' responses included: مشكور ونردها لك في الأفراح إن شاء الله *maʔku:r win rudha lak fɪl ʔafra:h ʔɪn ʔa:ʔ ʔalla:* 'Thank you, and we will return the favour on happy occasions, God willing', الله يجعلنا دايماً متحابين فيه

ʔalla: jɔɖʒʔalna daʒim mɪθa:bi:n fi: 'May God always keep us loving one another for His sake', and *ʃukran walla: jɔɖ:m il maħabba* 'Thank you, and may God preserve the affection between us'. These invocations implied continuity and reciprocity as the participants received a suitable gift from their relative. The expression *ʔnruḏha lak fɪl ʔafra:h* 'we will return it to you on happy occasions' frames the gift exchange as part of a reciprocal relationship rather than a non-directional act of generosity. The same orientation toward solidarity appeared in Scenario 7, in which a friend had repeatedly checked on the participant during illness. Responses included: *maʃku:r ʔala wagfatk ʔubajjaʒ alla:h wadʒhak* 'Thank you for standing by me, and may God brighten your face', and *walla: ʔinnak mɪħzam* literally 'By God, you are a support/belt', meaning 'You are truly someone I can rely on', and *ʔiffar ma: jɔɖ:r:k ħabi:bana ʔufukran lak* 'May no evil come to you, our dear one, and thank you'. The expression *ʔinnak mɪħzam* is particularly solidarity-oriented because it characterizes the addressee as dependable source of support. Similarly, in Scenario 1, *ʃa:kar lak ya ʃa:kar* 'Thank you, dear' and *kulluf fukur ħabi:bana* 'All thanks, dear' use terms of affection to reduce interpersonal distance. Thus, the findings show that invocations can perform a relational function: they acknowledge not only the favour itself but also the social bond between the participants and their interlocutors.

4.5 Theme 5: Culture-Specific Idiomatic Invocations

The fifth theme includes invocations that are deeply rooted in the Saudi culture and therefore cannot be simply understood from their literal meanings. These expressions often draw on concepts such as hospitality, family, honour, social obligation, and prosperity. Understanding the pragmatic meanings of such expressions requires shared cultural knowledge, without which, miscommunication may occur.

Several examples illustrate this pattern. In Scenario 2, following a generous dinner invitation, participants produced: *ʔalla: jɔɖʒʔalha mɪnkum ʃa:da ʔu mɪnna ʒara:wa* approximately, 'May God make generosity a habit of yours and make us accustomed to receiving it from you', expressing appreciation for the host's generosity., *ʔalla: jɔɖʒʔalha ħillth ʃa:mriħ* approximately, 'May God make it a prosperous and flourishing household', *bajtu bɪlʃa:fɪħ* a culturally marked expression associated with the host's home/overnight hospitality and well-being 'May you spend the night in comfort and well-being', and *ʔakramakum ulla: kara:matɪʃ ʃalɪħ:n* 'May God honour you with the honour bestowed upon the righteous'. Other culture-specific expressions occurred in situations involving support and generosity. For example: *ja: ma:l lɪlyana:t* an idiomatic expression associated with wishing or acknowledging richness/prosperity 'Wealth of richness', *mɪn ju:s ʔu saʃah* an idiomatic expression conveying appreciation for the person's generosity according to their means 'From ease and abundance', *ha:ða mɪn ɪ:b ʔaʃlak* literally 'This is from the goodness of your origin', pragmatically meaning 'This reflects your good character/upbringing', *ʔanʃim wa ʔakrɪm ja: dʒa:r* an emphatic expression of appreciation directed toward a neighbour 'May you be blessed and honored, neighbour', and *ʔabu:k laldʒanna* 'May your father be in Paradise', functioning as a strong culturally embedded expression of praise and gratitude toward the addressee. The response *ʔabu:k laldʒanna* in Scenario 10 is especially revealing. Rather than thanking the person directly, the speaker attributes the helpful behaviour to the addressee's good origin, character, and upbringing. Likewise, expressions referring to parents, such as *raħm alla: wa:lɔɖɔk* 'May God have mercy on your parents' and *ʔabu:k laldʒanna* 'May your father be in Paradise', extend appreciation beyond the individual to the family.

These expressions demonstrate that Saudi Arabic invocations are deeply embedded in culturally shared understandings of hospitality, family honour, reciprocity, generosity, and moral character. Their pragmatic meanings therefore cannot always be derived from their literal linguistic forms alone.

4.6 Overall Pattern of Results

The analysis of the participants responses across the different scenarios suggests that invocations are a valuable resource for expressing gratitude and enhancing interpersonal relationships in everyday Saudi Arabic. It was uncommon to find responses limited to simple forms such as *ʃukran* 'thank you'; instead thanking expressions were frequently accompanied by, or substituted with, invocations referring to divine reward, health, happiness, honour, prosperity, safety, or social solidarity. It is also noteworthy that the distribution of responses across the themes indicates an overlap in their functions. For example, *ʔalla: jɔɖʒʔalha wadʒhak* 'May God brighten your face' can simultaneously express gratitude and honour; *ʔalla: jɔɖʒʔalha ħillth* 'May God grant you health and well-being' can function both as an expression of appreciation and as a wish for well-being; and *maʃku:r ʔala wagfatk ʔubajjaʒ alla:h wadʒhak* 'Thank you for standing by me, and may God brighten your face' combines conventional gratitude, solidarity, and an invocation of honour. Consequently, the five themes should not be understood as mutually exclusive categories but as an analytically useful dimensions of a broader pragmatic system.

Overall, the findings indicate that Saudi Arabic invocations perform considerably more than a religious or formulaic function. They operate as pragmatic strategies for expressing gratitude, conferring goodwill, maintaining face, strengthening solidarity,

acknowledging reciprocity, and reinforcing culturally valued norms of generosity and social support. The frequent invocation of God further provides a culturally conventional means of intensifying positive interpersonal meaning while presenting the speaker's appreciation as a sincere wish for the addressee's continued well-being and success.

5. DISCUSSION

The above findings provide a clear role of invocations in TSA as being a pragmatic resource in everyday interactions. The 79 invocation expressions appeared in the 15 scenarios, could be grouped into five recurrent themes: reward and blessing, honour and reputation, prosperity and well-being, solidarity and reciprocity, and culture-specific idiomatic invocations. Although these themes are analytically distinguishable, considerable overlap was found among them. This indicates that invocations are not limited to a single fixed communicative purpose; they may serve multiple functions. This aligns with the findings of the previous studies, such as al-Rojaie (2021) and Abu Qub'a et al. (2025), who found that religious expressions in Arabic are multifunctional.

5.1 Invocations of Reward and Blessing

The results indicated that participants repeatedly employ invocations that involve moving the act of rewarding to God; the speaker does not make the reward himself, but pray to God to reward the benefactor. This first major finding is illustrated in expressions like *ʔalla: jɪdʒa:k xɛr* 'May God reward you with goodness' and *katab ʔalla: ʔadʒrak* 'May God record your reward'. These invocations appeared in situations involving assistance, generosity, hospitality, and academic support. These invocations not only acknowledge the favour but also imply the speaker's wish for a positive outcome for the benefactor.

Similarly, previous studies such as Amer et al. (2020) described the invocations: *ʔalla yaʕti:k iʕa:fye* 'May God grant you health', *ba:rak ʔalla:h fi:k* 'May God bless you', and *dʒa:ak ʔalla:h xɛr* 'May God reward you well' as polite verbal rewards for the addressee's efforts. This makes the present study finding align with Amer et al. (2020). The finding is also consistent with those of Farrag (2022) who found that Saudi Arabic speakers use religious good wishes as politeness devices in speech acts of requests and apologies. However, invocations in the present study are employed as responses to hearer's acts such as assistance and generosity. This suggests that divine reward is a valuable resource for expressing the speaker's gratitude.

Such invocations can be considered as positive-politeness strategies, in terms of Politeness Theory, as they imply approval and appreciation, highlighting the positive social value of the hearer's action. Additionally, they achieve what is expected according to Saudi social norms regarding gratitude.

5.2 Invocations of Honour and Reputation

The second finding concerns the frequent use of honour-related invocations, particularly *ʔalla: jbaʒiʒ wadʒhak* 'May God brighten your face'. The expression appeared in several situations involving assistance by colleagues, strangers, service providers, and other interlocutors. Its distribution across different relationships suggests that it functions a relatively general conventional resource for expressing appreciation rather than being restricted to a particular degree of social distance.

The pragmatic interpretation of 'brightening the face' is not normally literal. Rather, it invokes the culturally meaningful concepts of honour, dignity, esteem, and favourable reputation. This finding corresponds with the broader observation in al-Rojaie's (2021) study that religious expressions in Saudi Arabic can function as politeness marker that enhance positive politeness, build rapport, and establish common ground. It also agrees with Abu Qub'a et al. (2025), who found that Allah-based expressions in Jordanian Arabic can express respect, praise, politeness, and emotional support.

The present finding therefore suggests that honour-related invocations represent a culturally conventional way of acknowledging the social value of another person's behaviour. The use of *wadʒh* 'face' is particularly relevant to Politeness Theory because face represents an individual's socially valued public self-image. The invocation metaphorically wishes for the addressee's positive social image to remain intact or become enhanced. Thus, the expression simultaneously performs gratitude and reinforces the addressee's positive face.

5.3 Invocations of Prosperity and Well-being

The third theme comprises invocations wishing the addressee health, happiness, safety, success, prosperity, and general well-being. Expressions such as *ʔalla: jaʕti:k iʕa:fʒh* 'May God grant you health and well-being', *ʔalla: jɪsɪdk* 'May God make you happy', and *ʔalla: jwafgak wɪ jassɪr ʔumu:rak* 'May God grant you success and make your affairs easy' occurred in response to a range of relatively minor and more substantial favours.

This pattern supports Amer et al. (2020), who identified good wishes involving health, blessing, and reward among common responses to social interactions in Arabic. It is also consistent with Musmar et al. (2025), whose investigation of *ʔalla:h yaʕti:k iʕa:fje* in Jordanian Arabic demonstrated that the interpretation and use of the expression are influenced by the physical setting, interpersonal relationship, and level of formality. The present study similarly shows that such expressions are highly adaptable to different everyday situation.

However, the TSA data indicate that these wishes frequently operate as indirect expressions of gratitude. Rather than directly stating that the speaker appreciates the favour, the speaker wishes the addressee future health, happiness, success, safety, or material prosperity. This extends the interpersonal meaning of gratitude beyond the immediate interaction. In this respect, the findings support the view of Searle (1979) that the communicative force of an utterance cannot be determined solely from its linguistic form and must be interpreted in relation to context and interactional purposes.

5.4 Invocations Expressing Solidarity and Reciprocity

The fourth theme demonstrates that invocations can function to establish or reinforce interpersonal solidarity. Responses such as *maḥku:r wīn rudha lak fīl ṭaḥra:h ṭīn ja:ʔ ṭalla:* 'Thank you, and we will return the favour on happy occasions, God willing' and *ṭalla: jidzṣalna da:jīm mītha:b:n fī:* 'May God always keep us loving one another for His sake' explicitly present the relationship as continuing beyond the immediate act of giving or helping.

This finding aligns with the previous studies' findings such as Welji's (2012) who found that religious expressions can be employed to enhance interpersonal bonds and a sense of community. Furthermore, it is consistent with Amer et al.'s (2020) finding that responses to invocations among Jordanian Arabic speakers are shaped by socioreligious norms and commonly involve reciprocal invocation, and those of Jawad (2019), who found that linguistic practices in Iraqi Arabic are shaped by the Islamic beliefs.

The present findings add that reciprocity can be expressed not only through a direct reciprocal invocation but also through references to future occasions, affection, mutual support, and dependability. Expressions such as *mīḥzam* 'a support/belt' and terms of affection such as *ja: ya:l* 'dear' construct the addressee as a valued and dependable member of the speaker's social network. From the perspective of Politeness Theory, these expressions strengthen positive face by emphasizing shared affiliation, closeness, and mutual approval.

5.5 Culture-Specific Idiomatic Invocations

The fifth theme is particularly significant because several expressions could not be fully interpreted through their literal meanings. Examples include *ha:ḍa mīn ṭī:b ṭaṣlak* 'This is from the goodness of your origin', *ṭabu:k laldzanna* 'May your father be in Paradise', and *ṭanṣīm wa ṭakrīm ja: dza:r* 'May you be blessed and honoured, neighbour'. Their pragmatic meanings depend on culturally shared understandings of hospitality, generosity, family honour, moral character, and social obligation.

This finding is consistent with Pimenta's (1979, 1983) observation that religious expressions in Arabic occur in everyday contexts and are embedded in cultural assumptions. It also supports al-Rojaie's (2021) conclusion that religious expressions in Arabic can perform pragmatic functions beyond their literal religious meanings. Similarly, Abu Qub'a et al. (2025) found that Allah-based expressions in Jordanian Arabic are idiomatic and culturally bound and contribute to social coherence.

The present study provides further evidence from TSA that the interpretation of invocations requires knowledge of the sociocultural norms shared by members of the speech community. For example, attributing a person's kindness to *ṭī:b ṭaṣlak* 'the goodness of your origin' expresses appreciation by connecting the individual's behaviour to family background and moral upbringing. Likewise, references to parents extend appreciation from the individual to the family. These patterns demonstrate that invocation use reflects culturally valued concepts rather than merely religious beliefs.

5.6 Invocations as Multifunctional Pragmatic Resources

An important overall finding is the functional overlap among the five themes. For example, *ṭalla: jbaḥjīz wadzhak* 'May God brighten your face' can express both gratitude and honour, while *ṭalla: jaṣṭī:k īl ṣa:fīh* 'May God grant you health and well-being' can simultaneously express appreciation and a wish for well-being. Similarly, responses combining *maḥku:r* 'thank you' with an invocation can express gratitude, solidarity, and honour at the same time.

This multifunctionality is in line with al-Rojaie's (2021) finding that religious expressions in Saudi Arabic may perform functions such as persuasion, mitigation, hedging, agreement, emphasis, and protection from the evil eye. It also parallels the findings of Migdadi et al. (2010), who showed that *mashaallah* performs functions extending beyond its conventional protective meaning, and the findings of Farghal (1995) and Mehawesh and Jaradat (2015), who demonstrated that *inshallah* acquires different pragmatic functions according to context.

Taken together, the findings support the central assumptions of Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory. Invocations are not simply religious formulas; they are speech acts whose pragmatic force is determined by the communicative situation, the relationship between interlocutors, and shared cultural knowledge. Their frequent use as expressions of gratitude, goodwill, solidarity, and appreciation also supports the view that politeness is closely connected to culturally established norms of social interaction. This is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) account of positive face and with Leech's (1983) view of politeness as a means of maintaining interpersonal harmony.

Overall, the findings contribute to previous research by providing a systematic account of invocation use in TSA. While earlier studies have examined religious expressions generally or have focused on particular expressions such as *inshallah* and *mashaallah*, the present study identifies five broader pragmatic dimensions through which everyday invocations operate. The findings therefore reinforce the view that understanding Saudi Arabic requires attention not only to the literal meanings of expressions but also to their culturally and contextually determined pragmatic functions.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the pragmatic functions and meanings of invocations in everyday Taif Spoken Arabic using data from a Discourse Completion Task involving 15 communicative scenarios. The analysis identified 79 invocation expressions, which were grouped into five recurrent themes: reward and blessing, honour and reputation, prosperity and well-being, solidarity and reciprocity, and culture-specific idiomatic invocations.

The findings show that invocations serve functions that extend beyond religious expression. They are frequently used to express gratitude, appreciation, goodwill, social solidarity, and positive wishes for the addressee. Many expressions also carry meanings that cannot be understood solely from their literal forms and require knowledge of Saudi cultural norms concerning generosity, hospitality, family, honour, and reciprocity. The findings further show that the five categories overlap, with individual expressions sometimes performing several pragmatic functions simultaneously.

The study supports previous research on Arabic religious expressions by demonstrating their multifunctional nature and their role in maintaining interpersonal relationships. It also confirms the relevance of Speech Act Theory and Politeness Theory for understanding how invocations acquire communicative force in context. In particular, invocations can function as expressions of appreciation and positive politeness by reinforcing the addressee's positive face and strengthening social relationships.

The study has practical relevance for learners of Arabic as a foreign language, particularly those living or studying in Saudi Arabia. Awareness of the pragmatic meanings of common invocations may help learners interpret everyday interactions more appropriately and respond in culturally expected ways. However, because the study relied on DCT data and a sample of 36 Saudi participants, the findings should be viewed as an account of reported or elicited pragmatic behaviour rather than a complete description of naturally occurring speech. Future research could examine naturally occurring interactions and compare invocation use across different Saudi regions, age groups, and social contexts.

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