

## Preventive Pragmatics in Jordanian Arabic: Regulating Fear, Belief, and the Unseen

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This article examines how speakers of Jordanian Arabic pragmatically regulate discourse about supernatural entities known as *jinn*, treating such discourse as a socially consequential domain where fear, normativity, and belief intersect. Drawing on ethnographically grounded interactional data, the study identifies a structured repertoire of preventive pragmatic acts, including apotropaic invocations, Qur'anic supplications, metapragmatic prohibitions on naming, affect-regulating moves, and sceptical or humorous stances. These practices function not merely as expressions of belief, but as interactional technologies for governing emotional escalation, allocating epistemic and deontic authority, and managing moral accountability in situations construed as risky. The analysis develops a sociopragmatic account of how linguistic ideologies that construe speech as causally efficacious shape what can be said, when, and by whom. By theorising *jinn*-related talk as a site of preventive pragmatics and semiotic world-making, the article contributes a transferable analytical framework for the study of normativity, stance-taking, and the interface between language, affect, and cosmology in everyday interaction.

**Key words:** affect regulation, metapragmatics, semiotic ideologies, sociopragmatics, stance-taking

### 1. Introduction

The relationship between language, normativity and culturally situated models of the unseen has long occupied an important, though often peripheral, place in sociopragmatic research (Haugh & Kádár, 2017). While classical pragmatic theory tended to focus on speaker meaning, inference and cooperative principles (e.g., Levinson, 1983), recent work has shifted towards an understanding of language as a medium through which communities sustain moral orders, negotiate vulnerability and construct shared orientations to risk (e.g., Sifianou, 2024). Within this broader sociopragmatic reorientation, scholars have foregrounded the cultural embeddedness of interactional practices, showing how linguistic choices are inseparable from the social expectations, affective economies, and moral ecologies that shape speakers' conduct (Locher & Watts, 2008).

Yet within pragmatics proper, ritualised protective expressions and their role in managing encounters with the supernatural have received limited sustained attention, despite the fact that adjacent fields such as linguistic anthropology, folklore studies, ritual studies, and philology have long examined how speech practices participate in superstition, naming taboos, blessing, cursing, protection, and supernatural risk. The present article therefore does not claim that ritualised speech about the supernatural is unstudied; rather, it argues that its specifically sociopragmatic organisation remains insufficiently theorised. Tomlinson's (2014) account of ritual textuality is especially useful here because it treats ritual efficacy as emerging through patterned verbal and semiotic movement rather than through isolated utterances alone. This perspective helps frame Jordanian Arabic protective expressions not merely as individual formulas, but as repeatable and socially recognisable forms that move interaction from danger to protection, from escalation to containment, and from uncertainty to morally ordered stance-taking.

This article examines a set of culturally salient Jordanian Arabic expressions that are used to ward off or prevent the presence of supernatural entities known as *jinn*, understood in Islamic cosmology as nonhuman beings created from smokeless fire. For readers unfamiliar with the term, *jinn* occupy an intermediate ontological position: they are neither human nor divine, but are widely understood in Islamic and popular cosmological traditions as beings capable of agency, moral action, and interaction with humans. In everyday Jordanian discourse, references to *jinn* are not merely descriptive; they often activate norms of caution, fear management, protective invocation, and avoidance. The present study does not adjudicate the ontological status of *jinn*,

but examines how talk about them becomes interactionally consequential in ordinary social life. These expressions, common in Jordan and across the Levant, form part of a larger repertoire of everyday apotropaic practices that structure how speakers navigate perceived danger, fear, and uncertainty. Although the existence of *jinn* is doctrinally grounded in the Qur'an, references to them in quotidian contexts are governed by intricate social norms that instruct speakers when to invoke protective formulas, when to avoid mentioning them, and how to manage the emotional and moral climate of interaction when the topic arises. In this respect, the phenomenon offers a unique window into the interplay between discourse, cultural ideologies of the unseen, and practices of social regulation.

The central premise of this study is that these expressions are not merely religious invocations but constitute a distinctive class of *preventive pragmatic acts*. They function to preclude harm, regulate collective fear and reaffirm shared beliefs about spiritual risk. Unlike classical speech act categories, which describe actions such as requesting, apologising or promising (Searle, 1969), the expressions analysed here exhibit what might be termed a prophylactic illocutionary force. They do not seek to modify the material world directly but instead construct a discursive barrier against potential danger and reaffirm a moral alignment with divine protection. This aligns with anthropological studies that demonstrate how ritual language forms part of a system of pragmatic reasoning about causality, agency and the permeability of the human world to unseen forces (Duranti, 2009; Keane, 2018).

The study also builds on emerging work in the pragmatics of emotion and moral ordering. Recent scholarship shows that pragmatic practices are central to how communities manage affect and produce culturally recognisable stances towards fear, danger and the unknown (Wilutzky, 2015). Expressions such as *la: tidzi:bu: si:rithum bil-le:l* 'Do not mention them at night' or *si:rithum bdzi:bhum* 'Mentioning them brings them' do not simply prohibit a topic but articulate a culturally shared metapragmatic theory of language.<sup>1</sup> They encode the belief that naming has consequences, that improper talk can expose individuals to harm and that speakers have a moral responsibility to regulate discourse in the interest of collective safety. Such expressions therefore operate simultaneously at the level of interaction, affect regulation and moral accountability.

The topic also speaks to recent discussions on stance and belief in sociopragmatics. Studies of stance emphasise how speakers position themselves affectively, epistemically and morally in relation to topics and interlocutors (Du Bois, 2007). In the dataset examined here, protective expressions coexist with sceptical or humorous reactions that contest or downplay the threat associated with *jinn*. Utterances such as *killo xura:fa:t* 'It is all superstition' or *biddkum ma na:m il-le:l?* 'Do you not want us to sleep tonight?' negotiate competing orientations to belief and risk, demonstrating that discourse about *jinn* is not monolithic but dialogically constructed and socially stratified. This multiplicity of stances invites an account of cultural pragmatics, one that captures internal diversity and the shifting alignment of speakers as they manage the emotional intensity of the topic.

From a broader perspective, the article contributes to the growing interest in culturally situated pragmatics within Arabic-speaking communities. While there is an established literature on politeness, verbal art and ritual formulas in Arabic (Daoud, 2017), little attention has been given to the pragmatic organisation of protective speech in relation to supernatural beings. By documenting and analysing an understudied repertoire of everyday expressions, this study fills an empirical and conceptual gap. It demonstrates how ordinary talk about *jinn* reveals the embeddedness of pragmatic practice in religious cosmologies, communal norms and culturally specific understandings of agency and danger.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical background, focusing on sociopragmatics, ritual language, stance-taking, affect regulation, and semiotic

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<sup>1</sup> By *folk metapragmatic theory*, we mean speakers' culturally shared beliefs about how language use itself operates in social life, including beliefs about what kinds of speech are appropriate, risky, protective, or consequential in particular contexts. This use follows Silverstein's account of metapragmatics as reflexive awareness of language use and its social effects (Silverstein, 1993).

ideologies of speech. Section 3 outlines the ethnographically informed methodology used to collect and analyse naturally occurring Jordanian Arabic expressions related to *jinn*. Section 4 presents the analysis through a six-part taxonomy of preventive pragmatic acts. Section 5 discusses the broader implications of the findings for sociopragmatics, language and religion, moral accountability, and the pragmatic management of fear. Section 6 concludes by summarising the study's contribution and proposing preventive pragmatics as a transferable framework for analysing how communities regulate risk, belief, and uncertainty through everyday discourse.

## 2. Theoretical background

As mentioned in the introduction, our study builds on the sociopragmatic turn towards moral norms, affective stance, linguistic ideology, and culturally specific ontologies of agency and causation (Ahearn, 2021; Haugh et al., 2022; Verschueren, 2012). These perspectives are essential for understanding protective expressions directed towards *jinn*, since such expressions cannot be interpreted independently of the cosmology and moral economy from which they arise.

One of the central questions for the present study is how speakers use discourse preventively to manage vulnerability, risk, and perceived exposure to unseen forces. Classic pragmatic theories gave limited attention to fear, supernatural threat, and ritual protection; however, closely related fields have generated important insights into these phenomena. Work in linguistic anthropology, folklore studies, ritual studies, and language-specific philology has shown that blessings, curses, naming avoidances, protective invocations, and tabooed references are not marginal residues of superstition, but patterned speech practices through which communities regulate danger, causality, and moral responsibility (Duranti, 2009; Hall, 1944; Tambiah 1985; Tomlinson, 2014). Hall's early discussion of language and superstition is important here because it treats beliefs about words, names, and verbal avoidance as socially meaningful phenomena rather than as irrelevant irrational survivals. For the present study, this insight is crucial: Jordanian Arabic warnings such as *si:rithum bdzi:bhum* 'Mentioning them brings them' similarly presuppose that reference is not neutral, but may alter the relation between speakers and unseen agents.

Tomlinson's (2014) account of ritual textuality further helps situate the present analysis within ritual language scholarship. For Tomlinson, ritual should not be treated simply as a bounded object, but as a practical tendency of *entextualisation*: discourse becomes detachable, repeatable, and socially consequential through patterned movement across contexts. His analysis of sequence, conjunction, contrast, and substitution is especially relevant because it shows how ritual force emerges through the ordered articulation of signs rather than through single utterances alone. This perspective is directly relevant to the Jordanian data, where protective expressions are not random reactions to fear but recurrent and socially authorised forms. Formulae such as *bismilla:h hawa:le:na wala sale:na* 'In the name of God, around us and not upon us' and *ʔaʕu:ðu billahi min f-fajta:n ir-radzi:m* 'I seek refuge in God from the accursed devil' derive part of their pragmatic force from repeatability, recognisable placement, and their capacity to move interaction from danger to protection. In this respect, Arabic protective expressions used to avert the presence of supernatural entities known as *jinn* form part of a broader cross-cultural repertoire of apotropaic discourse, while also requiring analysis in terms of stance, affect regulation, metapragmatic prohibition, and interactional accountability.

The sociopragmatics of religion has become a vibrant subfield in its own right as scholars explore how religious belief, authority and ritual intersect with everyday communication. Research in this area ranges from the pragmatics of prayer and supplication (Khazaleh et al., 2023) to the study of religious identity in digital media and the discursive construction of piety (Hirschkind, 2006). These studies show that religious discourse cannot be reduced to doctrinal content but must be understood as a set of socially regulated practices that position speakers within moral and devotional landscapes. However, while blessings, formulaic expressions and Qur'anic recitation have received attention (Nazzal, 2005; Stewart, 2007), far less research has

addressed how speakers pragmatically navigate the presence of *jinn* and the linguistic norms governing their mention.

This gap is significant because, in Islamic cosmology, *jinn* occupy an ambiguous moral and ontological space. They are neither divine nor human, yet they possess agency, intelligence and the ability to interact with people. Their unpredictable nature produces a culturally specific sense of risk that shapes discourse in subtle but powerful ways. Contributors to Middle Eastern anthropology, such as Laughlin (2015), have emphasised that beliefs about *jinn* inform emotional life, domestic practices and conceptions of vulnerability. This scholarship provides the cultural backdrop for understanding why protective expressions and prohibitions on mentioning *jinn* are pragmatically potent. These expressions enact a linguistic ideology in which words are treated as permeable to the unseen. They index a moral obligation to avoid linguistic behaviour that could expose oneself or others to harm.

In recent sociopragmatic debates, the notion of *stance* has become a crucial analytic tool for examining how speakers position themselves in relation to belief, knowledge and affect (Du Bois, 2007). Stance is particularly relevant for the phenomenon under investigation because speakers frequently respond to *jinn*-related narratives with expressions of fear, scepticism, humour or resignation. These reactions reveal not only the emotional intensity of the topic but also the social diversity of orientations towards the supernatural. The coexistence of sceptical utterances such as *killo xura:fa:t* 'It is all superstition' alongside highly ritualised protective formulae indicates a heteroglossic field in which multiple stance positions coexist and compete. This aligns with research that emphasises the dialogic and contested nature of belief within communities (Luhmann, 2018). Pragmatically, these divergent stances shape the trajectory of interaction, either amplifying fear, minimising it or reasserting shared norms that govern the topic.

Another salient line of research concerns linguistic ideologies of performativity. Studies across cultures show that people hold culturally specific beliefs about what words can do, including the belief that speech can attract spirits, invoke divine protection or cause misfortune (Silverstein, 1993). Such ideologies inform metapragmatic norms that regulate how, when and to whom supernatural beings may be referenced. In Arabic-speaking contexts, the admonition not to mention *jinn* at night reflects a powerful metapragmatic theory of reference: namely, that naming them may draw their attention or increase the risk of harm. Similar concerns about dangerous or powerful supernatural beings are documented in ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and early Christian apotropaic and exorcistic traditions (Kitz, 2016; Morris, 2024). What distinguishes the Arabic case is the everydayness of the practice and the tight integration of protective formulas into routine interaction.

The pragmatics of fear and affect has also gained importance in recent work that views emotion not as an internal state but as a publicly managed and socially circulated stance (Innocenti, 2011). Fear of *jinn* is rarely expressed directly; instead, speakers manage it through jokes, hedges, shifts in footing and the strategic use of protective invocations. These practices regulate emotional climate and align participants around shared understandings of vulnerability. This resonates with research that demonstrates how discourse organises collective affect in contexts of danger, illness or misfortune (Goodwin et al., 2012). The expressions analysed in this study can therefore be seen as part of a culturally specific affective repertoire that coordinates communal responses to anxiety.

Although Arabic linguistics has produced a rich body of work on formulaic expressions, politeness, honorifics and address terms (Badarneh, 2020), less attention has been paid to religiously grounded preventive speech. The few studies that touch on related phenomena often focus on general blessings or Qur'anic recitation rather than the pragmatic management of supernatural threat. This article contributes to filling that gap by situating protective expressions within the broader literature on ritual language, stance, moral normativity and linguistic ideology. It argues that these expressions constitute a coherent and analytically significant category within Arabic pragmatics, one that exemplifies the interface between language and religion in everyday life.

Analytically, the present study draws on interactional pragmatics and linguistic anthropology. It adopts an interactional perspective that examines how pragmatic meaning is accomplished sequentially through turn-taking, stance-taking, and participation frameworks. From this view, language is not treated as a static system for encoding meaning, but as a repertoire of interactional resources through which social actions are accomplished and locally inflected in language-specific ways (Sidnell & Enfield, 2012). This approach is particularly relevant because protective expressions often occur in response to specific triggers, such as sudden fear, mention of dangerous places or recounting of supernatural experiences. Studying their placement in sequence allows for the identification of their illocutionary force as preventive or regulatory acts. The analysis also draws on stance theory (Du Bois, 2007) to examine how speakers position themselves affectively and epistemically towards *jinn*-related talk. Many expressions in the corpus were explicitly metapragmatic, such as warnings not to mention *jinn* at night, which signal speakers' beliefs about the efficacy and danger of language itself.

Ritual language scholarship provides the third analytic lens. Protective formulas in Arabic function within a longstanding tradition of supplication, blessing and recitation. Their pragmatic significance depends on culturally anchored ideologies of divine agency, spiritual vulnerability, and the protective power of words, particularly where religious discourse becomes authoritative through entextualisation and claims to sacred truth (Keane 2016, pp. 211–214). By contextualising the data within this framework, the analysis identifies the discursive mechanisms through which speakers construct a protective boundary around themselves and others.

Finally, attention was paid to the emotional and moral dimensions of the interactions. Following recent work on the pragmatics of affect (Besnier, 1990), the analysis considered how expressions regulate fear, maintain social cohesion and negotiate collective vulnerability. The goal was not merely to classify expressions on *jinn*, but to understand how they shape the emotional and moral landscape of interaction.

### 3. Methodology

The data for this study were collected over the course of four months in 2025 through a combination of naturalistic observation, ethnographic field engagement and close documentation of spontaneous family and community interactions in Jordan. Given the culturally sensitive and situationally embedded nature of protective expressions related to *jinn*, a naturalistic and contextually grounded approach was essential. Recent work in pragmatics and linguistic anthropology has underscored the importance of studying language practices in the settings where they naturally occur, since the pragmatic force of an expression cannot be disentangled from the social, affective and ideological environment in which it is produced (Duranti, 1997). For this reason, the study relied on direct observation in households, family gatherings, extended kin networks and informal social encounters where discussions of fear, vulnerability and supernatural presence tended to arise.

The methodological design followed the principles of ethnographically informed pragmatics, which integrates fine-grained analysis of interaction with sustained participant observation (Enfield & Sidnell, 2017). This combined approach is recognised as necessary for capturing the social norms and metapragmatic understandings that shape culturally specific speech practices. In the context of this study, protective expressions concerning *jinn* were found to be deeply enmeshed in local beliefs, emotional orientations and shared moral expectations. As such, a purely elicited or experimental dataset would not have revealed the situational triggers, sequential environments or affective textures that give these expressions their pragmatic value. The extended period of field exposure allowed us to observe how speakers initiated protective formulas, how interlocutors responded to them and how topics involving *jinn* were collectively managed.

The data were documented through a combination of written fieldnotes and audio recordings, depending on the comfort and consent of participants. Since many of the interactions

occurred spontaneously in family settings, immediate audio recording was not always feasible. In such cases, detailed fieldnotes were taken immediately after the interaction, capturing the expressions used, the surrounding discourse, the participants present, their reactions and the situational context. Scholars of qualitative pragmatics have shown that fieldnote-based documentation remains a valid approach in settings where ethical, cultural or logistical constraints limit continuous recording (Emerson et al., 2011). When recordings were possible, they were made using a small unobtrusive device and later transcribed using IPA for all Arabic expressions, following established norms for phonetic transcription in pragmatics-oriented linguistic research.

The dataset comprises 72 distinct expressions and metapragmatic comments relating to *jinn*, collected from approximately 40 households across urban and peri-urban locations. The participants ranged in age from adolescents to elderly speakers and included both men and women. While not designed as a sociolinguistically stratified sample, the diversity of participants ensured a broad representation of stances, beliefs and discursive styles. The goal of the sampling strategy was not statistical generalisability, but analytical depth and ecological validity. This perspective resonates with contemporary qualitative pragmatics, which similarly foregrounds meaning as an emergent, practice-based accomplishment grounded in participants' lived social worlds, while remaining analytically attentive to how inferential processes become visible through interactional practices (Deppermann, 2018).

In addition to observation, we engaged in informal conversations with family members and acquaintances who had used these expressions. These conversations were not structured interviews but open-ended exchanges that sought clarification on the perceived meaning, appropriate contexts of use and social implications of specific formulas. Such conversations provided insight into speakers' metapragmatic awareness, allowing the study to distinguish between expressions that were viewed as ritual obligations, those associated with particular emotional states and those considered humorous or distancing. Ethnographic pragmatics has shown that speakers' explanations, while themselves shaped by cultural ideologies, provide essential information about the underlying norms that govern language use (Schieffelin et al., 1998).

The study did not involve experimental intervention and was based on low-risk ethnographic observation of naturally occurring family and community interactions. Formal review by an ethics board was therefore exempted according to the institutional policy of the University of Jordan. All identifiable personal information was anonymised, and pseudonyms were used in fieldnotes and transcripts. Ethical considerations were central because of the intimate nature of the interactions and the cultural sensitivity surrounding discussions of supernatural entities known as *jinn*. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and consent for audio recording was obtained whenever recording was used. The study followed established ethical guidelines for ethnographic and linguistic research, including respect for participants' beliefs, privacy, and emotional comfort (American Anthropological Association, 2012).<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Analysis

The analysis presented in this section organises the corpus into a six-part taxonomy that reflects the sociopragmatic dynamics underpinning protective expressions related to *jinn*, as shown in Table 1. The first two categories represent the most institutionally recognisable layer of the repertoire, drawing on divine names, Qur'anic wording and canonical supplications. Their authority rests in shared Islamic ideologies regarding the protective power of specific forms of speech. The remaining categories extend into metapragmatic regulation, stance-taking and affective management.

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<sup>2</sup> Because spontaneous family interactions could not always be recorded, some tokens come from immediate post-event fieldnotes. In ethnographic pragmatics, such notes are treated as contextualised records of practice. All Arabic expressions are given in IPA to enable scrutiny.

**Table 1.** Six-part taxonomy of preventive pragmatic acts in Jordanian Arabic *jinn*-related discourse, with representative examples from the corpus.

#	Category name	Example
1	Core apotropaic invocations	<i>bismilla:h      ĥawa:le:na      wala      ũale:na</i> ‘In the name of God, around us and not upon us’
2	Qur’anic and canonical supplications	<i>ʔaũu:ðu bikalima:ti ʔalla:hi t-ta:mma:t min farri ma: xalaqa</i> ‘I seek refuge in the perfect words of God from the evil of what He created’
3	Angelic, divine protection, and boundary-making metaphors	<i>ʔalla:humma idʔũal ĥawa:le:na mala:ʔike tiħrasna</i> ‘O God, place angels around us to guard us’
4	Metapragmatic prohibitions and folk theories of naming	<i>la: tidʒi:bu: si:rithum</i> ‘Do not mention them’
5	Affective regulation and fear-management expressions	<i>xalas<sup>s</sup> rawwiʔu:na biddna nma:m</i> ‘Enough, calm us down; we want to sleep’
6	Sceptical, humorous, or secularising stance expressions	<i>killo xura:fa:t</i> ‘All of this is superstition’

These expressions form a coherent repertoire whose pragmatic force cannot be reduced to denotational meaning alone. Instead, they operate within a culturally anchored normative system that regulates how speakers navigate spiritual risk, affective intensity and moral accountability. Contemporary sociopragmatics emphasises that pragmatic meaning emerges through the interaction of linguistic form with socially distributed norms and expectations, including those that shape perceptions of danger, propriety and the unseen (Haugh & Kádár, 2017).

Within this framework, the expressions documented here exemplify what may be described as preventive and ritual pragmatics. Their force lies not in altering the propositional content of a discourse but in restructuring its moral and affective trajectory. They protect, calm, recalibrate, and reposition participants in relation to a culturally salient threat.

#### 4.1. Core apotropaic invocations

The first category consists of invocations that call upon God using formulaic expressions whose protective force is socially presupposed. Their pragmatic function is immediate and situational: they are produced at moments where references to *jinn* evoke fear, uncertainty or moral vulnerability. These invocations rely on a linguistic ideology in which certain divine names or attributes possess intrinsic protective power. Drawing on Keane’s (2016, 2018) account of ethical life as socially embedded evaluation and accountability, and on his account of semiotic ideology, such practices construe speech not as neutral representation but as a socially consequential form of action through which speakers orient themselves to values, agency, and accountability.

- (1) *bismilla:h                      ĥawa:le:na      wala                      ũale:na*  
In the name of God,      around.us      and.not                      upon.us  
‘In the name of God, around us and not upon us!’

- (2) *bismilla:h                      ʔallaði: la:      jad<sup>s</sup>urru                      maũa      smihi      fajʔ*  
In the name of God,      whom nothing cause.harm      with      His.name anything  
‘In the name of God, by whose name nothing causes harm!’

- (3) *ja:                      lat<sup>i</sup>:f                      ʔilt<sup>s</sup>uf                      fi:na*  
O      Gentle.One,      be.gentle                      with.us  
‘O Gentle One, be gentle with us!’

- (4) *ja: sa:tir ʔustur ʕale:na*  
 O Concealer, protect us  
 ‘O Concealer, protect us!’

Core invocations such as (1-4) exhibit a shared semiotic architecture. They typically begin with an appeal to the divine, as in *bismilla:h* ‘In the name of God’ or *ja: laʔi:f* ‘O Gentle One’, followed by metaphors of shielding, distance, or concealment, as in *ħawa:le:na wala ʕale:na* ‘around us and not upon us’ or *ʔustur ʕale:na* ‘protect/conceal us’. Pragmatically, these forms enact enregistered ritual stances: recognisable linguistic practices whose social value is stabilised through metapragmatic stereotypes and indexical associations with moral alignment, piety and social competence (Agha, 2007). Their illocutionary point is fundamentally preventive. They do not request information, negotiate action or comment on the discourse. Instead, they construct a protective frame around participants in anticipation of harm. This aligns with sociocultural approaches that view pragmatic action as shaped by culturally shared expectations of danger and responsibility (Duranti, 1997).

Moreover, by uttering these invocations aloud, speakers perform relational work: they reassure co-present participants, reduce collective anxiety and reaffirm a shared normative stance that divine protection is both necessary and expected. Silence in such contexts may be interpreted as a failure to uphold communal norms of care and caution. Thus, these expressions simultaneously address supernatural risk and social accountability.

#### 4.2. Qur’anic and canonical supplications

The second category consists of expressions derived directly from Qur’anic text or well-established prophetic supplications. These formulas hold elevated authority within Islamic linguistic culture because citing sacred text is widely believed to activate divine protection. Their use in discourse about *jinn* therefore reconfigures the interactional environment by invoking a doctrinal frame that supersedes uncertainty, fear or speculation. Such forms are grounded in a linguistic ideology that treats Qur’anic language as inherently efficacious, morally authoritative and is locally understood as capable of altering the metaphysical conditions of a situation. Within a sociopragmatic perspective, these expressions serve as ritualised stance acts that publicly position speakers as devout, cautious and aligned with a transcendent moral order, as in examples (5-8).

- (5) *ʔaʕu:ðu bikalima:ti ʔalla:hi t-ta:mma:t min ʕarri ma: xalaqa*  
 I.seek.refuge with.words God the-perfect from evil what He.created  
 ‘I seek refuge in the perfect words of God from the evil of what He created!’
- (6) *ʔaʕu:ðu bikalima:ti ʔalla:hi t-ta:mma:t min kulli ʕajʔa:n wa ha:mma*  
 I.seek.refuge with.words God the-perfect from every devil and harmful.creature  
 ‘I seek refuge in the perfect words of God from every devil and harmful creature!’
- (7) *ʔaʕu:ðu billa:hi min aʕ-ʕajʔa:n ir-radzi:m*  
 I.seek.refuge I n.God from the-devil the-accursed  
 ‘I seek refuge in God from the accursed devil!’
- (8) *sala:mun qawlan min rabbin rahi:m*  
 peace a.word from a-Lord Merciful  
 ‘Peace, a word from a Merciful Lord!’

These Qur’anic and canonical supplications represent a powerful form of ritualised preventive action. By citing sacred words, speakers shift the participation framework of the interaction in a way that Goffman (1981) describes as a move from individual authorship to a footing in which

the speaker animates words authored elsewhere, thereby redistributing epistemic and moral authority. The speaker is no longer presenting a personal reaction but channelling an authoritative scriptural voice. This shift transforms the interactional footing and elevates the utterance into a moral and ritual register.

The repeated use of the verb *ʔaʕu:ðu* ‘I seek refuge’ encodes a stance of vulnerability, dependence and humility before divine power. From a stance-theoretic perspective (Du Bois, 2007), these expressions accomplish three things simultaneously: (i) they index the speaker’s epistemic orientation towards the reality of unseen forces, (ii) they articulate an affective stance of caution or fear, and (iii) they morally align the participant with God rather than with any supernatural entity. This triadic stance configuration is central to the social functioning of these formulas.

The ideological potency of these forms also reflects broader anthropological insights into Islamic conceptions of language. Qur’anic words are treated not simply as semantic content but as carriers of divine force. Such practices reflect semiotic ideologies that construe religious formulas not as neutral expressions, but as signs whose efficacy depends on culturally specific assumptions about language, agency, and the relation between words and the world (Keane, 2016; 2018.). In this context, saying *ʔaʕu:ðu bikalima:ti ʔalla:hi t-ta:mma:t* ‘I seek refuge in the perfect words of God’, as in (5) and (6), is locally understood not as a merely linguistic act, but as an invocation of divine protection that establishes a boundary between the speaker and unseen harm. From a pragmatic standpoint, the Qur’anic and canonical supplications in examples (5-8) implement discourse reorientation. When conversation drifts towards fear-inducing stories, conjectures about *jinn* or emotionally escalating narratives, the insertion of a Qur’anic citation arrests the drift and reinstates doctrinal certainty. The utterance acts as a stabilising move, reasserting divine order where conversational affect appears to be intensifying. Such moves align with Duranti’s (1997) argument that ritual language functions to reframe social action and to reshape participants’ interpretive orientations towards events.

### 4.3. Angelic, divine protection, and boundary-making metaphors

Our analysis also revealed a coherent group of expressions that invoke angels, divine guardianship or metaphysical barriers to shield speakers from harm. These formulas differ from the Qur’anic citations discussed earlier in that they rely not on direct scriptural wording but on culturally entrenched metaphors of enclosure, illumination and intermediated protection. Their pragmatic force rests on the belief that divine agents such as angels can be summoned to occupy the immediate environment of the speaker, forming a protective perimeter. Such expressions demonstrate how speakers conceptualise the relationship between human vulnerability and divine agency through spatial and material metaphors, a process consistent with what Enfield (2009) describes as the semiotic grounding of social action.

- (9) *ʔalla:humma idʕʕal ʕawa:le:na mala:ʔike tihrasna*  
 O.God make around.us angels guard.us  
 ‘O God, place angels around us to guard us!’
- (10) *idʕʕal bajna: wabe:n f-farr ʕidza:ban*  
 make between and between the-evil veil  
 ‘Place a veil between us and evil.’
- (11) *rabbi ʔihna: taht ʕima:tak*  
 my.Lord we under your.protection  
 ‘My Lord, we are under Your protection!’

- (12) *ja:*        *ʔalla:h*            *ʔinfur nu:rak*            *ħawa:le:na*  
 Oh        exalted.One        spread the.light        around.us  
 ‘Exalted One, spread Your light around us!’

These expressions instantiate a particular form of preventive pragmatics in which protection is conceptualised as the construction of metaphysical space. Example (10) mobilises tangible spatial imagery to delineate the boundary between danger and safety. This reflects a broader anthropological observation that spatial metaphors encode deeper cultural understandings of agency, threat and moral positioning (Duranti, 1997; Ochs, 1992). The veil ‘*ħidza:b*’ is not metaphorical in the sense of abstraction; rather, it is treated as a material-semiotic barrier whose invocation reorganises the interactional landscape by imagining danger as external and containable.

Invocations that request the presence of angels further expand the participation structure of the interaction. In (9), the utterance implicitly introduces angelic agents into the conversational scene. Goffman’s (1981) notion of footing helps illuminate this shift. By invoking angels, speakers align themselves with a cosmological order in which these beings become unratified yet interactionally relevant co-participants, whose presumed protective presence reorganises the moral field of the interaction. Culturally conceptualised as active guardians, angels are addressed through utterances that function as directives oriented towards divine authority rather than towards human interlocutors, thereby reshaping the epistemic and affective climate of the discourse.

Light imagery plays a similarly important role in articulating divine protection. The expression in (12) draws on a semiotic repertoire in which light is associated with purity, divine knowledge, and safety. Within Qur’anic and broader Islamic cosmology, light displaces darkness, which is culturally associated with the ambiguous, the unseen and the potentially harmful. In stance-theoretic terms (Du Bois, 2007), invoking divine light positions the speaker morally and epistemically within a domain of clarity and righteousness, marking an evaluative orientation that distances the speaker from fear and risk.

Expressions such as (11) encode an explicitly relational posture of humility and dependence. Keane’s (2016) discussion of religious morality and pious self-fashioning offers insight here: speakers constitute themselves as morally responsible agents by linking everyday vulnerability to theological authority, self-monitoring, and socially recognisable forms of piety (pp. 203–208). Pragmatically, the utterance manages the affective trajectory of the discourse, transforming unease into reassurance through the public invocation of divine guardianship.

These protective metaphors perform affective, interpersonal, and accountability work at once. They often appear when *jinn*-related stories become emotionally charged, functioning as stabilising moves that redirect attention away from fear-inducing imagery and towards a shared normative framework in which divine power governs the situation. By invoking angels, veils, or divine light, speakers recalibrate the interaction, demonstrate care for co-present participants, and enact a culturally expected responsibility to seek collective protection. This is consistent with Duranti’s (1997) argument that ritualised forms of speech can re-establish coherence and provide authoritative interpretive frames in moments of heightened affect. In this sense, the expressions are both spiritually and socially consequential: they safeguard the self while helping maintain communal cohesion.

#### 4.4. Metapragmatic prohibitions and folk theories of naming

A further set of expressions in the corpus consisted of explicit prohibitions against mentioning *jinn*. These formulas articulate the culturally embedded belief that naming or discussing *jinn* can attract their presence. In sociolinguistic terms, these utterances are overtly metapragmatic: they comment on the conditions under which speech is socially and cosmologically appropriate. They exemplify what Silverstein (1976) terms as folk metapragmatic theories, in which communities develop structured understandings of how language operates in the world. When speakers warn

others through expressions, such as that in (13), they presuppose a causal relationship between linguistic reference and supernatural attention, creating a regulatory mechanism that shapes both discourse trajectory and emotional climate.

(13) *la: tidzi:bu: si:rithum*  
*not bring their.name*  
'Do not mention them!'

(14) *is-si:ra bitdzi:bhum*  
*the-talk brings.them*  
'Talking about them brings them!'

(15) *la: tihku: b-hal-ʔafja: bil-le:l*  
*not talk anything at-night*  
'Do not talk about such things at night!'

(16) *bala:f min is-si:ra hallaʔ*  
*stop from the-topic now*  
'Let us stop talking about this now.'

Prohibitions such as (13) and (15) do not operate as neutral instructions but enact moral and affective regulation. In telling someone not to mention *jinn*, the speaker performs a stance move that indexes vigilance and responsibility. As Agha (2007) argues, metapragmatic acts publicly display alignment with communal norms of linguistic appropriateness, which is here tied not to etiquette but to an ontological belief about how language engages the unseen.

Expressions such as (14) encode an indexical ideology in which naming is treated as exerting causal force. The utterance functions not simply as a warning but as a boundary-setting device that constrains what counts as legitimate discourse. Duranti's (1997) notion of culturally situated theories of action is useful here: within such frameworks, words are treated as actionally efficacious, capable of redistributing danger as it is culturally understood.

The utterance in (15) reveals how temporal norms intersect with cosmological expectations. Nighttime is construed as a period of heightened permeability between human and non-human realms; thus, certain topics become morally and cosmologically inappropriate. Ochs (1992) shows that temporal markers often encode emotional and social expectations; here, time regulates the very conditions of speakability. On the other hand, (16) performs active closure, halting an escalating narrative and repositioning the group within a safer interactional frame. Goffman's (1981) concept of *footing* clarifies this shift: the speaker rekeys the interaction from an affectively charged register to one that is more controlled.

These prohibitions also collectivise vulnerability by framing careless talk as a shared risk. Classic accounts of moral panic show how speakers present themselves as custodians of group safety and moral order (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2010). Observing such norms signals maturity and care, thereby positioning speakers as ethically responsible participants whose conduct becomes open to social evaluation and whose character is read through publicly recognisable signs of accountability (Keane, 2016). Pragmatically, these prohibitions regulate affect by dampening emotional escalation, thereby safeguarding social cohesion.

#### 4.5. Affective regulation and fear management expressions

Another group of expressions in the corpus was found to consist of utterances whose primary function is to modulate affect, calm listeners, and reorient the emotional trajectory of the discourse. These formulas neither invoke divine protection nor explicitly prohibit *jinn*-related talk; rather, they operate in an interactional middle ground where speakers negotiate the intensity of fear, concern, or anxiety circulating in conversation. Their pragmatic force lies in their capacity

to reframe the affective climate and restore interpersonal balance. As Besnier (1990) notes, affect is a socially distributed phenomenon co-produced through stance, language, and embodied participation. From this perspective, fear-management expressions play a crucial role in how communities handle potentially distressing narratives about *jinn*.

- (17) *xalas<sup>ʕ</sup>*    *rawwiʔu:na*    *biddna*    *nna:m*  
 enough    calm.down.us    want.we    sleep  
 ‘Enough, calm us down; we want to sleep!’
- (18) *la:*    *tihawwlu:*    *il-mawd<sup>ʕ</sup>u:ʕ*  
 not    intensify    the-topic  
 ‘Do not escalate the topic!’
- (19) *ʕa:di*    *walla:hi*    *ma:fi:*    *ʕi*  
 normal    by.God not    there.is    anything  
 ‘It is fine; by God, there is nothing there!’
- (20) *mawd<sup>ʕ</sup>u:ʕ*    *la:zim*    *nʕaddi:*    *minno*  
 topic    must    we.pass    from.it  
 ‘This is a topic we must move past!’

These utterances illustrate how speakers engage in affective calibration, adjusting the emotional intensity of the group to avoid escalation. The utterance in (17) exemplifies a direct intervention that signals collective unease and seeks to restore equilibrium. Ochs and Schieffelin (1989) emphasise that affect is socially organised through language; such formulas therefore participate in the social organisation of emotional meaning in interaction. (18) functions as a form of metadiscursive regulation rather than outright prohibition. Through this move, the speaker asserts authority over the emotional pacing of the narrative, delimiting how far and how intensely the topic may be pursued. This aligns with Heritage’s (2012) account of epistemic rights and responsibilities in interaction, whereby participants claim the right to manage not only what is talked about, but also how knowledge and affect are distributed and calibrated across the interaction. The aim, therefore, is not to silence *jinn*-talk altogether, but to modulate its intensity in order to preserve interactional equilibrium.

Expressions such as (19) counteract fear by offering normalisation and reassurance. From a stance perspective (Du Bois, 2007), the speaker evaluates the situation as harmless, positions themselves as confident and knowledgeable, and aligns with listeners by offering emotional relief. The example utterance in (20) performs a controlled closure, shifting the frame not on metaphysical grounds but on the social cost of continuing emotionally charged discourse. Goffman’s (1981) notion of footing helps explain this move: the speaker redefines the situation to protect group harmony and move interaction into a calmer key.

All of these expressions show how speakers manage not only narrative content but also the affective economy surrounding it. As Goodwin (2020) demonstrates in his work on cooperative action, participants jointly construct the emotional texture of interaction through shared attention, embodied participation, and evaluative stance-taking. In this context, affect-regulating utterances function to keep the discourse within tolerable emotional limits, thereby sustaining collaborative action.

#### 4.6. Sceptical, humorous, or secularising stance expressions

A final group of expressions in the corpus consists of utterances through which speakers take sceptical, humorous, or secularising stances towards *jinn*-related discourse. These expressions neither seek protection nor regulate fear; instead, they challenge the premise that *jinn* stories warrant epistemic commitment. They reframe the ongoing narrative by introducing alternative

orientations in which supernatural accounts appear exaggerated, irrational, or socially inappropriate. Following Du Bois's (2007) stance model, these utterances simultaneously evaluate *jinn*-talk as implausible, position the speaker as rational or detached, and invite others to shift their footing.

(21) *killo xura:fa:t*  
 all-it superstitions  
 'All of this is superstition!'

(22) *ma: fi: dʒinn, killo ʔawha:m*  
 not exist *jinn* all-it illusions  
 'There is no *jinn*; it is all imagination!'

(23) *biddkum ma nna:m il-le:l*  
 want.you not we-sleep tonight  
 'Do you want us not to sleep tonight?'

(24) *ʔihku:-lo ʒan ʔifi muʃi:d, bala:f hal-ħaki*  
 talk.to.him about something useful stop this-talk  
 'Tell him something useful; stop this kind of talk.'

These expressions represent the highest degree of epistemic resistance in the dataset. (21) explicitly re-categorises the narrative frame as illegitimate. It evaluates *jinn*-talk as unworthy of belief, implicitly positioning the speaker as aligned with rationalist or modernist ideologies. Silverstein's (2003) work on metapragmatics clarifies how such stances model both a worldview and a moral self: by dismissing *jinn* discourse, speakers signal the type of epistemic regime they inhabit. Example (22) escalates this stance by adopting an authoritative epistemic position. Within Heritage's (2012) framework, this constitutes a so-called "K+ epistemic move", asserting superior access to knowledge and invalidating competing claims. At the same time, the utterance performs affective work by reframing fear as cognitive error rather than supernatural threat.

Humorous stance-taking, as seen in the expression in (23), further complicates the picture. Humour softens the face-threatening dimension of scepticism, providing an indirect way to signal that the narrative is becoming excessive or socially disruptive. By shifting the affective frame, the speaker reorients interaction away from fear and towards playful mutual monitoring. Drawing on Besnier's (1990) account of affect as socially organised, humour can be understood as an interactional resource for re-keying affect, enabling participants to negotiate emotionally charged content without overt confrontation.

Finally, (24) introduces a relevance-based stance rather than disbelief. The objection here draws on a utilitarian ideology of communication, framing *jinn*-talk as misaligned with valued purposes. This reflects Agha's (2007) account of how relevance itself becomes subject to moral and social regulation, such that topics are evaluated and managed in terms of their perceived appropriateness and interactional utility.

Across all these examples, stance-taking is relational as much as epistemic. Using Goffman's (1981) concept of footing, these utterances rekey the frame from one in which *jinn* are treated as real dangers to one in which they are folklore, exaggeration, or childish fear. This shift provides participants with a socially acceptable exit from escalating affect. More broadly, the coexistence of sceptical, humorous, and believing stances reflects ideological tensions within contemporary Jordanian society. Keane's (2016) account of ethical typification and self-characterisation helps explain how speakers publicly display affiliations with competing cosmologies through recognisable stances, figures of personhood, and forms of accountability. Through epistemic challenge, humour, and relevance management, these expressions regulate interactional trajectories, offering alternative means of defusing fear and sustaining social order.

## 5. Discussion

The analysis presented in the previous section shows that everyday Jordanian expressions used in relation to *jinn* constitute a dense semiotic field in which linguistic form, affective stance, moral accountability, and cosmological reasoning intersect. What emerges most clearly is not simply that speakers talk about danger, but that they use language to recalibrate the conditions under which danger becomes socially thinkable and interactionally manageable. In this sense, the expressions operate as a practical technology of world-maintenance: they delimit what counts as a legitimate account, who has the right to shape it, and what affective consequences are allowable in public interaction. This strengthens recent directions in sociopragmatics that foreground normativity and interactional accountability rather than treating pragmatics as predominantly, if not only, the inferential coordination of intentions (Agha, 2007; Enfield, 2009; Haugh et al., 2021). From this perspective, the Jordanian data is theoretically valuable because it makes visible, through a culturally salient domain, the general sociopragmatic point that meaning is routinely inseparable from moral consequence and participation control.

Tomlinson's (2014) concept of *ritual textuality* helps sharpen this point. The Jordanian Arabic expressions analysed here are not only formulaic items in a lexical repertoire; they are patterned semiotic movements that reorganise interaction. In Tomlinson's terms, their efficacy depends on how signs are put into motion through recognisable sequences, contrasts, substitutions, and participation frameworks. A *jinn*-related narrative may move from mention to prohibition, from fear to invocation, from uncertainty to Qur'anic citation, or from seriousness to humorous deflation. These movements are not incidental; they are the very mechanism through which preventive pragmatics operates. The formula *bismilla:h hawa:le:na wala sale:na* 'In the name of God, around us and not upon us' in (1), for example, does not simply express belief in protection; it redirects the interactional path from exposure to containment. Similarly, prohibitions such as *la: dzi:bu: si:rithum* 'Do not mention them', in example (13), substitute silence or closure for risky reference. The data therefore extend Tomlinson's insight into a specifically sociopragmatic domain: ritual textuality here is not confined to formal ritual performance but appears in ordinary conversation as patterned, repeatable, and morally accountable management of supernatural risk.

A key point emerging across repertoires is the centrality of normativity: speakers are not merely expressing private belief but displaying competence in a locally ratified moral ecology. Expressions invoking God or angels index adherence to a moral universe in which human vulnerability and divine protection are treated as axiomatic, thereby casting the speaker as ethically prudent and socially responsible. Thus, prohibitions such as (13) are not reducible to superstition or fear; they instantiate a folk metapragmatic theory in which reference itself is treated as risky. This aligns with Silverstein's (1976, 2003) and Agha's (2007) accounts of culturally sedimented beliefs about how speech acts operate across social and ontological domains. The present data further specify what is being managed in such moments: not only the topic itself, but also the distribution of accountability for what might happen next. When someone halts another's narrative, the action tacitly attributes responsibility for potential escalation (affective, social, or cosmological) to the current speaker. This is especially well captured by Heritage's (2012) discussion concerning negotiating epistemic and deontic rights. In the present corpus, however, these rights are not abstract interactional entitlements; they are exercised as real-time mechanisms for regulating risk, fear, and accountability. Recent interactional work on deontics usefully sharpens this point by showing how participants maintain identities and authority through deontic positioning (e.g., who can tell whom what to do, and with what entitlement) (Stevanovic, 2021). These prohibitions are thus analysable as *deontic interventions* that enforce an interactional ceiling on dangerous talk and simultaneously position the intervener as guardian of communal safety.

The data and its analysis also illuminate why affect should not be treated as secondary to epistemics. Classic scholarship shows that affect is co-constructed through interaction and is

inseparable from moral and social organisation (Besnier, 1990; Goodwin et al., 2012; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1989). Our research extends this by showing how affective regulation can be routinised into compact formulas that do not merely express feeling but *govern* it. Fear-management expressions such as *rawwi?u:na* ‘Calm us down’ in example (17) and *la: tihawwlu: il-mawdu:f* ‘Do not escalate the topic’ in (18) function as interactional governors: they regulate the public permissibility of fear and convert open-ended anxiety into a socially bounded affective trajectory. This aligns closely with the recent move towards a sociopragmatics of emotion that treats emotion as immanent to evaluation, relationships, and morality rather than as an interior psychological state (Alba-Juez & Haugh, 2025). According to our findings, regulation is achieved through at least three converging mechanisms:

- (i) reframing (fear becomes a narrative problem, not an external threat)
- (ii) re-allocating epistemic responsibility (participants are repositioned as jointly responsible for *what we are making real* by talking), and
- (iii) deontic containment (a right is claimed to slow, stop, or redirect the trajectory).

Recent work on morality–emotion–epistemics in interaction, even outside religious domains, supports precisely this linkage: moral orders are reproduced through local interactional practices in which epistemics and emotion are intertwined (Niemi & Katila, 2022).

Moreover, examples invoking angels, veils, or divine light illustrate how ethical and cosmological orientations are mediated through publicly recognisable signs. Here Tomlinson’s (2014) emphasis on *addressivity* is particularly useful: ritual patterns do not work automatically, but depend on who is being addressed, who is authorised to participate, and how the limits of participation are interactionally organised (Tomlinson, 2014). In our Jordanian data, protective expressions are addressed simultaneously to co-present listeners and to a wider cosmological order in which divine protection, angels, and unseen harm become interactionally relevant. The pragmatic upshot is a transformation of the participation framework (Goffman, 1981): the speaker’s stance is no longer only towards an interlocutor but towards a distributed moral field in which divine intermediaries are treated as consequential, even when unspoken. This provides a concrete interactional pathway for how cosmology enters discourse: not as abstract doctrine, but as a realignment of who can be addressed, who can be accountable, and what counts as an appropriate next action. Research bringing together language and religion across discourse contexts supports the importance of analysing these mundane, non-ritualised settings, where religious language leaks into everyday interactional governance rather than remaining confined to formal registers (Pihlaja & Ringrow, 2023).

The secularising and humorous stances in the data (see Section 4.6) foreground another major implication: the coexistence of multiple epistemic regimes within the same community, and the role of stance in navigating them without fracturing social relations. Drawing on Mahmood (2012), the argument can be sharpened by treating sceptical dismissals as acts of *epistemic regime-selection*, moves that reframe the object of fear as cognitive error and re-assign legitimate authority to modernist or rationalist repertoires. Humour then becomes a particularly powerful tool for managing the face-risks of that selection: it allows epistemic disagreement to be voiced while preserving affiliation and preventing direct confrontation. What is analytically interesting is that humour does not simply soften disagreement; it can *re-key* the moral seriousness of the topic, permitting participants to remain socially aligned even when ontological commitments diverge. In short, scepticism and humour are not peripheral to the religious story: they are interactional resources for ideological coexistence, and they help explain how communities remain socially coherent while cosmologies compete.

Perhaps most significantly, our study shows that *jinn*-related expressions serve as a site of social calibration where speakers negotiate fear, belonging, responsibility, and moral standing. The language used to manage *jinn*-talk becomes a vehicle for performing identity and relationality through a locally structured indexical field (Agha, 2007). But the stronger sociopragmatic payoff is that the field is not only about belief vs disbelief; it is about *virtues* and *social personhood*:

piety (invocation), prudence (prohibition), composure (calming), and rational self-presentation (dismissal). Each stance is linked to forms that work as recognisable badges of competence, and this is precisely where indexical order (Silverstein, 2003) becomes empirically visible in the data: micro-choices in formulas produce macro-readable identities and moral alignments. Recent work on language ontologies further underscores how applied and theoretical linguistics can benefit from taking such ontological commitments seriously as part of language practice, not as detachable belief content (Demuro & Gurney, 2025). The present corpus provides a high-resolution case of worlding-in-action: utterances do not merely report an unseen domain; they actively make it socially consequential or socially irrelevant.

The study also contributes to current debates on pragmatics and religion, a growing interdisciplinary area examining how religious cosmologies shape linguistic action. Work by Bialecki (2011), Mahmood (2012), and Keane (2016) already motivates this move by showing how religious cosmologies shape subjectivity, language ideology, and everyday forms of ethical orientation. The findings can therefore be situated within the broader consolidation of language and religion as a cross-disciplinary research domain, one that encourages analyses connecting semiotic ideology, identity, institutional discourse, and everyday interaction (Pihlaja & Ringrow, 2023). Importantly, the data show that religiously inflected pragmatics is not limited to ritual or formal registers, but suffuses ordinary interaction. Even humorous dismissals presuppose the salience of the supernatural domain they reject, which suggests that the secular stance can be parasitic on the very domain it denies, an insight that opens an analytically attractive path: dismissal is itself a mode of engagement, not absence of engagement.

## 6. Conclusions

This study has shown that everyday discourse about *jinn* in Jordanian Arabic constitutes a systematic site of sociopragmatic labour rather than a residual domain of belief or folklore. By tracing how speakers invoke, restrain, neutralise, or dismiss *jinn*-related talk, the analysis demonstrates that language functions as a practical technology for regulating uncertainty, affect, and moral responsibility in interaction. *Jinn*-related discourse thus emerges as a domain in which speakers actively shape the conditions under which danger, fear, and the unseen become socially consequential.

The findings further show that these practices are grounded in locally shared semiotic ideologies that treat speech as causally efficacious. Prohibitions, invocations, and calming formulas operate not merely as expressions of belief but as metapragmatic interventions that manage participation, accountability, and perceived risk. In doing so, the data extend classic accounts of indexicality and enregisterment (Agha, 2007; Silverstein, 1976, 2003) by illustrating how indexical fields are mobilised in moments of heightened affect to stabilise moral and interactional order.

Our study also advances work on the pragmatics of emotion by showing that fear is collaboratively governed through discourse. Affect-regulating moves function as interactional technologies that recalibrate emotional trajectories, redistribute epistemic and deontic authority, and sustain social cohesion. Fear, in this account, is neither a purely internal state nor an irrational residue of belief, but a socially organised, normatively constrained, and pragmatically managed phenomenon.

At the same time, the co-presence of religious, sceptical, and humorous stances reveals a heteroglossic epistemic landscape in which competing cosmologies are negotiated without necessarily producing interactional rupture. Through stance-taking and shifts in footing, speakers navigate plural moral regimes while maintaining relational alignment and interactional continuity.

More broadly, the case of Jordanian Arabic *jinn*-related language illustrates how discourse about the unseen operates as a microcosm of the sociocultural processes through which language mediates vulnerability, belief, and social order. By conceptualising *jinn*-talk as a form of preventive pragmatics, this study contributes a transferable analytical framework to debates in

sociopragmatics, linguistic anthropology, and language and religion, showing how everyday interaction functions as a key site for managing uncertainty and sustaining moral life across cultural contexts.

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