



## Conversational Analysis of Opening and Closing Sequences in Saudi Podcasts A Case Study of the *Waddah* Podcast

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### Abstract

This study examines how the openings and closings of talk are linguistically structured in Arabic-language podcasts in Saudi Arabia, namely in the *Waddah* podcast. Based on Conversation Analysis (CA) and cultural pragmatics, this study investigates how hosts open and close podcast episodes in line with Saudi Islamic culture, language practice, and social relations. Ten podcast episodes were translated and analysed in English and Arabic. The results evidence ritualised patterns of communication with religious terms, formal greetings, praise to guests, and group farewells. Terms that are in general usage, such as 'Bismillah', 'Marhaban alf' and 'Fi Aman Allah,' not only mark divisions of speech, but also express deeper cultural values such as spiritual purpose, host cordiality and community bonding. The study revealed that Saudi podcast openings and closings are not only concerned with turn-taking, but are also concerned with occupying moral positions, constructing audience identification, and promoting social bonding. The study adds to the paucity of research on Arabic digital communication and advances CA theory by its deployment in non-Western, culturally rich contexts.

**Keywords:** Conversation Analysis, Arabic Podcasts, Saudi Discourse, Openings and Closings, Pragmatics, Religious Language.

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## البناء اللغوي لإستراتيجيات الافتتاح والختام في برامج البودكاست السعودي: دراسة حالة لبودكاست وضّاح

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### الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي تُبنى بها إستراتيجيات الافتتاح والاختتام لغويًا في (البودكاستات) العربية بالملكة العربية السعودية، وتحديدًا في بودكاست وضّاح. وبالاستناد إلى منهج تحليل المحادثة (CA) والتداولية الثقافية، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية قيام مقدمي البودكاست بافتتاح الحلقات واختتامها بما يتماشى مع الثقافة الإسلامية السعودية، والممارسات اللغوية، والعلاقات الاجتماعية. وقد جرى تحليل عشر حلقات مترجمة إلى اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. وأظهرت النتائج أن أنماط التواصل تتسم بأنماط طقوسية تتجلى في استخدام الألفاظ الدينية، والتحيات الرسمية، والثناء على الضيوف، والتوديع الجماعي. كما أن العبارات الشائعة الاستخدام مثل *بسم الله*، و*مرحبًا ألف*، و*في أمان الله*، لا تُستخدم فقط كعلامات فاصلة في الكلام، بل تعبر أيضًا عن قيم ثقافية أعمق، كالبعد الديني التلطفي، وكرم المضيف، وتعزيز روح الجماعة. وتكشف الدراسة أن افتتاحيات وختاميات البودكاست السعودي لا تقتصر على إدارة تبادل الأدوار، بل تُعنى أيضًا باتخاذ مواقف أخلاقية، وبناء هوية المتلقي، وتعزيز الروابط الاجتماعية. وتُسهّم هذه الدراسة في سد النقص في الأبحاث المتعلقة بالتواصل الرقمي العربي، كما تُطوّر نظرية تحليل المحادثة من خلال تطبيقها في سياقات غير غربية غنية ثقافيًا.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** تحليل المحادثة، البودكاست العربي، الخطاب السعودي، الافتتاحيات والختاميات، التداولية، اللغة الدينية.

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© نُشر هذا البحث وفقًا لشروط الرخصة Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)، التي تسمح بنسخ البحث وتوزيعه ونقله بأي شكل من الأشكال، كما تسمح بتكييف البحث أو تحويله أو إضافته إليه لأي غرض كان، بما في ذلك الأغراض التجارية، شريطة نسبة العمل إلى صاحبه مع بيان أي تعديلات أجريت عليه.



## 1. Introduction

Podcasts have revolutionized digital media by offering conversations that are long, targeted, and timely. Unlike the conventional broadcasts that are heavily reliant on formal timing, scriptwriting, and editorial control, podcasts allow for more laid-back and spontaneous conversation. Flexibility gives podcast producers the freedom to craft conversations that are spontaneous and individual in tone, albeit when well prepared and edited (Frobenius, 2011). While several studies have investigated English-speaking environments' podcast structures (Ilie, 2001; Mustonen, 2017), fewer studies have been carried out on Arabic-language podcasts and/or settings with a Saudi Arabian cultural and religious context influence. In face-to-face interaction, the beginning and ending forms that interactions take, their openings and closings, is socially meaningful and delicate. Sacks et al.'s (1974) Conversation Analysis (CA) identifies that conversational openings and closings are needed to organize interactions, as they project who is involved, define roles, negotiate status and coordinate smooth entry into and exit out of interaction (Abbar, 2023; Agustianto et al., 2020; Aisyah, 2021).

In the Saudi Arabic-speaking culture, openings and closings of conversation are closely connected with religious belief, community values and norms such as honour (karamah), respectfulness (Ihtiraam or taqdeer) and religious responsibility (amana). For example, beginning a conversation with 'Bismillah' (in Allah's name) is not merely a politeness; it is a display of moral preference made on the basis of Islamic belief. Similarly, closing a conversation using 'Fi Aman Allah' (may God protect you) conveys love and safeguarding, both providing sufficient spiritual goodbyes and enhancing societal relationships. This article applies CA to examine the way the Waddah podcast, an illustrious Saudi podcast renowned for intellectual, cultural, and societal discussions, structures its opening and closing conversational turns. Through an analysis of 10 complete episodes, this study identifies the linguistic, structural, and pragmatic strategies that hosts and guests use to effectively conduct podcast conversations. The rationale for choosing Waddah as a focus lies in its status as a culturally prominent podcast that combines formalized discourse practice with the affordances of a digital, participatory platform. While CA research has extensively documented opening and closing sequences in English and other Western environments, there has been little empirical research on how such structures emerge in Arabic podcasting, where Islamic politeness, collectivist values, and oral tradition shape public life. In doing so, this study attempts to bridge the distinction between traditional CA, which predominantly caters to English-speaking situations, and Arabic media discourse, where CA is barely employed, especially on podcasts. This study yields several important implications, which can be summarized as follows: (i) Theoretical implications: The study enhances CA by integrating cultural pragmatics to demonstrate how universal structures of interaction are localised in ritual language. (ii) Methodological



implications: It provides a replicable framework for the analysis of Arabic-language podcast boundary talk. (iii) Applied implications: Implications can be applied to advise Arabic-language podcast producers, educators, and discourse analysts in bringing communication practice into alignment with cultural expectations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Conversational Openings and Closings: An Overview*

Opening and closing formulas have been at the core of CA for many years, especially via the work of Sacks et al. (1974), whose research demonstrated how mundane conversations are heavily structured, rule-bound, and jointly constructed by participants. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) also found conversationally specific items like 'pre-closings' and 'terminal exchange pairs', which serve to tidily close off interactions. They are not empty formalities; they play important roles in creating roles, managing transition, minimizing discomfiture, and reconciling the social positions of participants.

In podcasts, boundary management becomes especially significant because the form of the media is one of being produced for broad, asynchronous audiences but presented as intimate conversations. As such, both podcast opening and closing establish the host/host-guest and listener relation (Ilie, 2001). Frobenius (2011, 2014) observed the same trend in YouTube vlogs and discovered that monologues appeared as imitations of interpersonally conversational interactions, and openings in conversation tried to create interactivity and closeness.

Nevertheless, most of the work to date has been on English-language online media. But in other societies, such as Saudi Arabia, where religious practices constrain conversational practice, honour-based etiquette and shared social values, podcast beginnings and conclusions can differ quite significantly. So understanding Arabic podcasts requires attention not only to conversational structure, but also to their religious symbolism, social proprieties, and emotional resonance.

### 2.2 *Theoretical Underpinnings in Conversation Analysis*

CA maintains that openings typically begin with a summons–answer pair, then identification and greeting, topic negotiation, and an incremental move into the business of the encounter (Schegloff, 2007). Closings operate in the reverse direction, often using pre-closing markers like 'so ...' or 'alright then' to transition from topic to termination. These actions are embedded in adjacency pairs and organized by turn-taking systems (Sacks et al., 1974).

In Western settings, turn openings often rely on informal markers such as 'Hi' and 'How are you?', and discourse fillers such as 'so' or 'right'. Yet, research by Levinson and Torreira (2015) shows that timing, pacing, and the avoidance of overlap are culturally sensitive variables. Sidnell (2016) emphasises that CA, although

developed from English data, is not ethnocentric but rather ethnomethodologically flexible. As such, it is suitable for use across languages and cultures if one attends to context.

### ***2.3 Openings in Broadcast and Podcast Talk***

Openings in mediated discourse are likely to blend institutional and interpersonal roles. Ilie (2001) calls this 'semi-institutional discourse', especially in genres like political interviews or talk shows where hosts perform both organisational and interpersonal roles. Podcast openings welcome the listeners, announce the topic or episode, and frame what is to follow. This is typically accomplished through a routinised sequence of greeting, identification, and episode framing.

In podcasts, as illustrated by Frobenius (2014) and Mustonen (2017), hosts pretend to interact with a non-present audience by using utterances like 'Hey guys', 'Welcome back' or 'Today I want to talk to you about ...'. This is a pseudo-interactive format where the listener is made to feel directly addressed, though the medium is monologic in character.

The equivalent in Arabic podcasts is more likely to be 'Marhaban bikum' (welcome to you all) or 'Bismillah' (in the name of God), both of which do more than indicate a beginning. These greetings align the speaker with religious values and establish an open tone that finds resonance in collectivist cultural norms (data drawn from the Waddah podcast).

### ***2.4 Closings in Talk and Media Settings***

CA closings are sequentially organized and usually consist of pre-closings, appreciation, and a closing farewell (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Institutionally, they are also fulfilling genre expectations: in interviews, they will usually thank; in sermons, they will usually close on moral exhortation; and in podcasts, they will usually ask for comments or encourage subscription.

Martínez (2003) similarly compared news interview closings and talk show closings and determined that talk shows close with more emotional emphasis, with evaluative statements and praising. In Arabic media, Al-Saqqaf (2016) found that closings frequently include prayers, religious blessings, and group thanks. For example, 'La tahrimuna min ta'liqatikum' (don't deprive us of your comments), used in the Waddah podcast, is both a plea and an act of community building. The words above are both interactional and ideological closings, inscribing a moral closure that is compliant with Islamic values of respect, modesty, and return. Such endings cannot be adequately explained through Western CA frameworks per se; they require a culturally situated approach that acknowledges their performative religious aspects (Rabiah, 2018).

### ***2.5 Turn-Taking Strategies in Podcast Discourse***

Turn-taking devices in podcasts are more controlled than in ordinary conversation, in line with editing and monologic structure. Stenström (1994) categorized turn-taking into moves such as taking the turn



(starting up, taking over), holding the turn (pauses, fillers), and yielding the turn (appealing, promoting, or giving up). These take place in podcasts in various ways. Recently, (Saadah, Setyaningrum, & Daulay, 2024) examined turn-taking in a podcast in English and found 'taking over' to be the most frequent strategy. There were minimal incidences of overlapping, and filled pauses helped speakers to maintain the floor. Similarly, Fitriana and Setiawan (2022) observed that verbal fillers and repetition were primarily used to manage pacing and convey hesitation without relinquishing the turn.

Turn management in Arabic podcasts is more deferential. Interruptions are few, and speaker change is typically brought about by overt announcements such as 'al-mic ma'ak' (the mic is yours; data based on the Waddah podcast). This not only shows a preference for structured talk but also a cultural expectation of respect and avoidance of face-threatening acts.

### ***2.6 The Role of Religious and Cultural Identity***

Arabic language is not just a means of communication; it embodies tradition, religiosity, and social hierarchy. Arabic linguistic rituals, as described by Rabiah (2018), affirm and symbolize cultural identity. This is especially true in the public sphere, where religious expressions like 'Bismillah', 'Fi Aman Allah', and 'Alhamdulillah' (praise be to God) act as moral identifiers.

Blair (2017) wrote that in English, markers of hesitation such as 'um' or 'like' are used to create space. Arab speakers, however, prefer using invocations or set phrases more to create space. So rather than saying 'um', for instance, a radio host would recite a verse, quote a proverb, or read out a blessing. Bolden (2009) and Nordquist (2019) show that discourse markers are laden with culture; their replacement with religious and poetic vocabulary in Arabic conversation in podcasts reveals an embedded oral culture within a Qur'anic recitation and classical Arabic poetry frame. A good example is the Waddah podcast. It starts nearly every episode with 'Bismillah' and finishes with 'Fi Aman Allah', highlighting not only structure but a sense of divine timing (stats based on the Waddah podcast).

### ***2.7 Institutional and Personal Dimensions of Podcast Interaction***

Paltridge (2012) and Gardner (2004) advise against assuming that podcasts are impromptu. They are scripted or semi-scripted, especially in their starting and ending points. The scripting is not a constraint but a stylistic choice that allows podcasts to conform to genre rules while simulating conversation flow.

Bearis et al. (2023) and Tyas and Pratama (2022) support the observation that podcasters do reuse scripted beginnings, 'Welcome back', 'Thanks for joining', 'That's all for today', to manage listeners' expectations. In Arabic podcasts, the same applies but with different stuff: 'Ahlan wa sahlan, Barak Allah fik, La tansaw du'a'na' (Keep us in your prayers). This blending of institutional and individual voice is typical of



Arabic discourse, where the speaker can be narrator and moral authority, host and brother, specialist and believer.

### ***2.8 Summary and Research Gap***

This literature review has charted how CA, broadcast discourse analysis, and cultural pragmatics offer robust tools for conversational edge analysis. However, most studies remain Anglophone media-based. More and more, they need to be applied to Arabic digital media, especially in Saudi Arabia, where creative podcast forms blend Islamic conversation, cultural rituals, and digital storytelling.

While Al-Saqqaf (2016) has worked on Arabic media interviews, few have systematically applied CA to Arabic podcasts. This article seeks to bridge that gap by analyzing openings and closings in the Waddah podcast and showing how they index cultural values via discourse structure. The Waddah podcast is a good example as it begins nearly every episode with 'Bismillah' and closes with 'Fi Aman Allah', highlighting not only structure but also a sense of alignment with the divine.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in CA and draws on cultural pragmatics and Arabic sociolinguistics to derive meaningful insights into the culturally embedded features of podcast openings and closings.

### ***3.1 Conversation Analysis (CA)***

CA is a method for analyzing the structure and sequential organization of talk-in-interaction. It originated with Sacks et al. (1974) and was subsequently developed in the work of Schegloff (2007) and Sidnell (2016). At the center of CA is the realization that conversation is organized around systems of turn-taking, adjacency pairs, and repair mechanisms, all of which are locally managed by speakers.

Openings and closings are accomplished in CA as very structured and ordered organizations. Openings are typically accomplished by summons–answer sequences, greetings, identity statements, and preliminary topic projections. Closings are accomplished by pre-closing signals, thanks expressions, and leave-taking formulas (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). CA emphasizes that these sequences are not universally constructed but rather are culturally variable. This leaves space for examining how Arabic speakers, particularly in public or semi-institutional media genres, adapt these structures to religious, relational, and cultural expectations.

### ***3.2 Cultural Pragmatics and Arabic Discourse***

Whereas CA offers the analytical tools of structure, cultural pragmatics provides the tools to analyze the meanings and roles of certain expressions within their sociocultural framework. In Arabic, openings and closings are frequently couched in religious invocations, honorific vocabulary, and communal parlance (Al-



Saqqaf, 2016; Rabiah, 2018). These do not just open or close the conversations; they moralise, spiritualise, and locate the speaker within a network of collective values.

The invocation of 'Bismillah' (in God's name), for example, is a speech act that announces religious intent and authorizes the ensuing discourse. Equally, farewells such as 'Fi Aman Allah' (May God protect you) are goodbyes as much as words of benediction and religious concern. CA is used in this study to isolate interactional patterns and cultural pragmatics, describing them in terms of Saudi Islamic traditions of discourse.

#### 4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the linguistic features of conversational openings and closings in Arabic-language podcasts?
2. How do cultural and religious norms influence the design and function of opening and closing sequences in Arabic podcast discourse?

These questions allow for both descriptive and interpretive analysis to identify the patterns used by speakers and explain their cultural significance.

#### 5. Methodology

##### 5.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, descriptive case study approach informed by the principles of CA. In addition, limited quantitative interpretation and analysis were incorporated to achieve a more holistic and comprehensive grasp of the current dataset. It is not just to count features of talk, but to unpack how features of talk are made up in and out of Saudi sociocultural norms. CA provides a rigorous method for examining the sequential structure of talk, with close attention to how speakers begin, build on, and close off interaction.

The choice of *Waddah* as the case study subject was strategic. It is a Saudi Arabic-language podcast that has been providing a consistent format over the years, with styled one-to-one interviews that are focused on cultural, social, and intellectual issues. Its popularity and prestige in the Saudi media landscape, as well as its stylistic density in openings and closings, offer an ideal location for examining ritualised conversational routines. These interactional boundaries, the start and finish of talk, are where politeness, culture, and interpersonal coordination are most clearly in action.

Case study research allows for in-depth, contextually grounded analysis of naturally occurring conversation. Unlike large-scale quantitative studies, which sacrifice detail in favor of broad scope, this approach lends itself to a micro-analytic treatment, where very subtle pragmatic cues, culturally specific routines, and sequence organization can be teased out. Situating these within the broader communicative



landscape of Saudi Arabian online media enables the research to inform localized practice and potential conformity or divergence with global standards of podcasting.

Having outlined the general research design, the following subsection describes how data selection was conducted, that is, how the provided episodes were selected and why they are suitable for responding to the study's research questions.

## 5.2 Data Selection

The data were ten purposively selected episodes from the Waddah podcast. Three general considerations influenced the selection. First, any episode should have a uniform interactional form, one host interviewing a single guest, to allow for comparability across the data set. Second, episodes need to be available in their entirety and unedited so that the integrity of the conversational exchange is preserved, untainted by the distortion potential posed by post-production editing. Third, the episodes were chosen for their thematic and linguistic density, with a close look at the variety and depth of their opening and closing scenes.

All of the episodes were translated into English by the researcher, with special attention to pauses, overlaps, and other CA-relevant features. The transcripts were then back-translated into English using a culturally oriented translation method aimed at maintaining the pragmatic force of expressions, especially those that were religious, idiomatic, or culturally charged. Sustainment of these aspects in translation was necessary in order to avoid loss of cultural sensitivity in analytical readings.

This careful selection and preparation work resulted in a linguistically and contextually robust dataset on which to ground the subsequent analysis. Having established the dataset, the following section explains how the data were broken down into analytically functional units.

## 5.3 Data Segmentation

For the purposes of this analysis, each episode was divided into two analytically useful sections: the opening sequence and the closing sequence. The opening sequence was the portion of speech from where an episode begins through to the host's initial topic-related question. The closing sequence was the talk from the opening wrap-up signal, e.g., summary remarks, thank-yous, or reflective asides, through to the final sign-off or leave-taking.

The rationale for attention to these segments lies in their ritualised and highly patterned nature. Opens feature negotiation of participation frameworks, initial building of rapport, and alignment of the talk for the addressee. Closings, on the other hand, function to summarise, terminate engagement, and reaffirm social ties. In Saudi Arabic discourse, these phases are particularly charged with greetings, religious invocations, and manifestations of mutual respect, which contain large cultural and interpersonal meaning.



By separating them, the analysis could then focus on how interactional rituals were attained in a podcasting setting, allowing for comparisons with patterns described in both Arabic and international CA literature. The next section outlines the analytic methods used to examine these segments in detail.

#### 5.4 Analytical Procedures

The examination was carried out in two interconnected stages. In the first stage, the transcripts were coded in CA convention, with attention to turn types (e.g., opening moves, greetings, identification, transitions) and lexical routines (e.g., repetitive greetings, religious invocations, acknowledgments of the audience). The sequential organization of talk, e.g., the typical movement from greeting to praise to episode framing, was tracked for each segment. Where available, paralinguistic features such as tone, emphasis, and repetition were also transcribed, as these normally convey affective and interpersonal meanings complementary to the verbal message.

In stage two, qualitative thematic analysis was used to explain the communicative purposes of the sequences in Saudi cultural norms. This meant scrutinizing not just what was said, but also how and when it was said, and the degree to which these choices mirrored wider patterns of politeness, identity work, and audience construction. By combining CA's detailed sequential analysis on a micro-level with thematic interpretation, the study aimed to produce results that were both micro-analytically rigorous and culturally contextual. The next and final methodological component addresses ethical considerations, ensuring that the study's data use aligns with accepted research standards.

#### 5.5 Ethical Considerations

This study employed only publicly recorded Waddah podcast recordings. Because the conversation was publicly meant, there was no privacy violation, and participant informed consent was not required per standard ethical protocol for public media material. Most importantly, all individuals featured in the dataset are established public figures, and their identities are already publicly associated with the content.

Given that the analysis focused on discourse features, interactional structures, and speech patterns only, no sensitive or personal information over and above what was in the public record was up for examination. Thus, pseudonyms were unnecessary. The ethics of the study were assured by handling the data with respect, avoiding misrepresentation of the interpretations, and assigning credit to original content authors.

With such a methodological framework established, the findings of the analysis are reported in the second half of the paper in terms of the recurring patterns and communicative strategies of the opening and closing frames of the podcast.

## 6. Results

The study of the Waddah podcast corpus demonstrates that closings and openings in talk are not functional or by default. Rather, they are strategically formatted, culturally anchored, and interactionally planned points. This article argues that this series of talks are discursive framing devices that construct the tone, relational quality, and audience face of the talk before and after the meat of the conversation.

The findings verify that the interactional organization of the podcast draws on CA sequencing conventions (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Sidnell, 2016) but adds formulaic, ritualized elements of Arabic discourse conventions (Al-Saqqaf, 2016; Wierzbicka, 2003). By mixing the two systems, one interactional universal and one culture-specific convention, Waddah creates an opening–closing frame that is recognizable in form but specifically Saudi in enactment.

The analysis continues in two sections. Section 6.1 considers the composition and communicative labor of conversational openings, illustrating how they lay the groundwork for participation and identity work. Section 6.2 addresses conversational closings, illustrating how they symmetrically close and prolong the interpersonal and cultural work established in the openings.

### 6.1 Structure of Conversational Openings

The research discovered that, in more than 90% of the shows, the opening sequence had been arranged in a strongly patterned five-part order. The sequential ordering wasn't just a convention; it was the host's intentional employment of culturally appropriate routines in establishing rapport, establishing formality, and positioning the interaction for the guest and radio audience alike.

Table 1 provides an overview of these structural phases, their frequency of occurrence in the data set, and provides representative examples translated into English.

**Table 1:**

*Structural Stages in Opening Sequences (N = 10)*

Opening Component	Description	Frequency	Example Phrase (Eng)
Religious invocation	Invocation of God's name to begin	10/10	'In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious ...'
Formal greeting	Greeting addressed to the audience and guests	10/10	'A thousand welcomes to you all'
Host introduction	Self-identification of the host	10/10	'With me is your host, Abdul-Illah Mu'aid'



Opening Component	Description	Frequency	Example Phrase (Eng)
Guest introduction + praise	Naming the guest with honorifics and sometimes poetic epithets	9/10	'The official ambassador of calm ...'
Framing and engagement appeal	Episode goal and call for suggestions/comments	9/10	'Before we begin, don't deprive us of your support'

The appeal to religion is a culturally rich way to open, placing the conversation in the context of Islamic values and invoking divine favour (Al-Saqqaf, 2016). It is more than a polite opening, though; it is an act of moral framing which marks the speech as fitting to the social environment and religious frame (Wierzbicka, 2003). CA scholarship recognizes such ritual beginnings as contextualisation cues (Gumperz, cited in Paltridge, 2012), which signal to all involved the nature of the upcoming interaction.

The formal greeting is also a phatic communion and an audience-design procedure (Frobenius, 2014), greeting in-studio guests and remote listening audiences. This double address reflects the semi-institutional nature of podcasts (Ilie, 2001), as conversation is interpersonally immediate but publicly mediated. The host introduction anchors the animator and principal role to the host (Goffman, as quoted in Gardner, 2004), and guest introduction and acclaim are utilised as a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The vivid terms commonly used, sometimes metaphorical or poetic, construct the character of the guest, altruistically constructing cooperation and rapport in advance. This corresponds with findings in Arabic media interviews where *madh* (acclaim) acts as an opening normative act (Al-Saqqaf, 2016).

Finally, the framing and engagement appeal moves the audience away from passive reception to active participation by inviting a comment or share of the episode. This is supported by research findings in social media discourse studies (Mustonen, 2017) that shows that participatory invitations at the opening enhance audience loyalty. The transition also serves as a future closing (Button, 1987) because it creates a future site of re-engagement.

From the CA perspective, the stability of this five-part structure suggests that Waddah treats openings as pre-programmed interactional modules, slots to be filled in order to satisfy both interactional and cultural necessities. From a cultural pragmatics perspective, such modules are identity-construction resources, positioning the podcast within Saudi media heritage but also manifesting a contemporary, participatory stance.

### 6.2 Structure of Conversational Closings

If openings establish rapport, moral framing, and audience alignment, the closings work to reaffirm and reestablish these aspects before disengagement. The symmetrical congruence between openings and closings suggests that for the host, conversation is a bounded interactional event whose integrity depends on both a good beginning and a good ending.

All ten episodes exhibited a four-part closing sequence, depicted in Table 2.

**Table 2:**

*Structural Stages in Closing Sequences (N = 10)*

Closing Component	Description	Frequency	Example Phrase (Eng)
Transition to end	Host signals nearing conclusion	10/10	'We are at the end of this episode ...'
Gratitude and acknowledgment	Appreciation of the guest and audience	10/10	'You were a source of joy in this conversation'
Call to engage again	Request for comments or suggestions	10/10	'Don't deprive us of your comments'
Spiritual leave-taking	Religious farewell formula	10/10	'Fi Aman Allah' (may God keep you safe)

The shift to end is a pre-closing sequence in CA terminology (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), which offers participants a chance to bring up any outstanding business. In Waddah, the shift to end is formulaic and overt, avoiding what Levinson and Torreira (2015) refer to as "interactional drift," whereby the talk terminates abruptly without a clear closing.

The gratitude and recognition phase does more than signal politeness; it openly reaffirms relational connection, giving each interlocutor face gain (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and leaving a positive affective trace with guest and audience alike. In Arabic politeness norms, not closing without explicit appreciation would jeopardize relational cooling (Wierzbicka, 2003), so this aspect is socially obligatory.

The appeal to resume relies on the appeal of engagement in openings and thus gives the structural echo, which presents the conversation as a repetitive cycle rather than as an isolated event. This is a move following Frobenius's (2014) theory of "audience maintenance," in which closings afford opportunities for future interaction.

And finally, the religious farewell is not a farewell, but a ritual ending that circles the topic back into the divine bracket called up at the start. By using such phrases as *Fi Aman Allah*, the host is not only closing

the episode, but is, in effect, putting the players literally in the hands of God's protection, and thereby closing out the ethical trajectory of the encounter. This creates a discursive balance, beginning and ending with God's name, that is both beautiful and culturally meaningful.

From a CA perspective, they demonstrate the accommodation of universal turn-taking machinery (Sacks et al., 1974) and locally particular closing rituals (Song & Licoppe, 2023). From a cultural perspective, they demonstrate how Waddah uses closings to maintain a sense of continuity so that conversation termination is consistent with the values of its initiation.

### 6.3 Culturally Embedded Expressions and Their Functions

One emergent aspect of Waddah's discursive organization is the frequent recurrence of formulaic speech that systematically recurs in the openings and closings addressed in Sections 6.1 and 6.2. The speech is not peripheral fillers or ornamented greetings; instead, they are ritualized language acts with interactional, pragmatic, and cultural import far in excess of their literal meaning. As in most Arabic media, such expressions function to anchor the talk in shared religious values, reestablish social etiquette, and control relational positioning (Al-Saqqaf, 2016; Wierzbicka, 2003).

**Table 3:**

*Common Formulaic Expressions in Waddah Podcast Discourse*

Arabic expression	Translation	Function	Found in
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	In the name of God	Religious authorisation of discourse	Openings
مرحبا ألف وحياكم الله	A thousand welcomes	Formal greeting, social alignment	Openings
يعطيك العافية	May God grant you wellness	Expression of thanks and respect	Closings
لا تحرمونا من تعليقاتكم	Don't deprive us of your comments	Call to communal engagement	Closings
في أمان الله	In God's protection	Religious farewell and moral closure	Closings

In the openings, turns such as *بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم* ("In the name of God") and *مرحبا ألف وحياكم الله* ("A thousand welcomes") are moral and cultural entry points. Consistent with CA's theorizing of "pre-sequences" (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Gardner, 2004), they do more than signal that the talk is commencing, they establish a value-rich environment into which the following talk is to be interpreted. The invocation of God's name religiously authorizes speech (Rabiah, 2018), framing the discussion in accordance with Islamic morality and projecting it as morally acceptable. The salutation of form, on the other hand, carries out a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), placing the guest and audience in a shared social space

of respect and hospitality. In closings, farewells such as العافية يعطيك ("May God grant you wellness") and في الله أمان ("In God's protection") are ritualised leave-takings.

CA literature suggests that closings typically require "terminal exchanges" that both parties signal they are ready to end the talk (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). In Waddah, exchanges of this sort carry moral and religious import, closing not only the talk but reaffirming shared values. For instance, العافية يعطيك integrates gratitude with a benediction to turn an action of appreciation into a prayer for the welfare of the interlocutor (Al-Saqqaf, 2016). في الله أمان caps the discursive equilibrium established in the first invocation. At the same time, discourse begins in God's name, it ends under God's shelter, thereby producing what Wierzbicka (2003) calls "cultural coherence" in interaction. The sentence تعليقاتكم من تحرمونا لا ("Don't deprive us of your comments"), recurring also in closings, has an explicit reference to the appeals to engagement mentioned in the openings (Section 6.1).

In both roles, the utterance positions the audience not as remote consumers but as co-participants in a perpetual conversation (Frobenius, 2014; Mustonen, 2017). This double positioning consolidates the circularity of the podcast's interactional design: the start welcomes participation, the ending reinforces it, making the connection between host and listener remain beyond the episode. By positioning these formulaic sequences both at the start and end, Waddah is creating a settled and recognizable interactional identity.

These terms are indexical signs (Silverstein, quoted in Paltridge, 2012), pointing to the cultural placement of the podcast in Saudi Arabian media discourse. They also mediate between CA's sequential organisation functional aims and the symbolic labour of cultural reproduction, demonstrating that in Waddah, conversation boundaries are as much concerned with relational and moral alignment as they are with turn-taking mechanics.

#### 6.4 Summary of Phrase Frequency

Quantitative examination of the dataset confirms the qualitative observation in Sections 6.1–6.3: formulaic turns are not rare events but common, structurally embedded parts of Waddah's conversation opening and closing. As it is clear in table 1, the five most central turns, Bismillah, Marhaban alf, Ya'tik al-'afiyah, La tahrimuma, and Fi Aman Allah, were produced in nine or all ten episodes in question. (A bar graph with five bars labelled 'Bismillah', 'Marhaban alf', 'Ya'tik al-'afiyah', 'La tahrimuma', and 'Fi Aman Allah'. Each bar indicates near-total or full appearance across episodes, with most phrases appearing in 9-10 out of 10 episodes.)

From a CA point of view, high frequency here confirms that these expressions belong to the invariant sequential template of openings and closings (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). They are positioned in fixed locations in the structure of interaction, some expressions always have to do with

openings (Bismillah, Marhaban alf) and others always with closings (Ya'tik al-'afiyah, Fi Aman Allah). The patterning also confirms that audience participation appeals (La tahrimuna) tend to bridge openings and closings, supporting the participatory ethos set in Section 6.1 (Frobenius, 2014; Mustonen, 2017).

From a cultural pragmatics perspective, the mere number of the formulaic repetitions provides evidence for the thesis that they are pragmatically required in Saudi podcast talk (Al-Saqqaf, 2016; Wierzbicka, 2003). They are not politeness obligations but culturally obligatory interactional structuring, and as such, every show conforms to the moral, social, and relational maxims held dear in Saudi Arabic interaction.

### *6.5 Excerpts from the Corpus*

To illustrate the sequential positioning, functional layering, and formulaicity of these expressions, two representative excerpts are provided below. These extracts were drawn from the Waddah podcast corpus before being transliterated and translated to preserve both linguistic form and cultural nuance.

#### **Opening Example:**

Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim ... Marhaban alf wa hayyakum Allah fi halqah jadeedah min podcast Waddah ... (In the name of God ... A thousand welcomes to you all in a new episode of the Waddah podcast).

This example demonstrates the formalised integration of the religious invocation (Bismillah) and official greeting (Marhaban alf), as outlined in Table 1 (Section 6.1). The invocation is a religious sanctioning of the forthcoming talk (Rabiah, 2018), while the greeting is a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that positions both the guest and audience in a shared context of respect and hospitality. Their concurrent appearance at the episode's start is indicative of Saudi podcast openings' cultural and structural double-framing.

#### **Closing Example:**

*Shukran lak ya Shaykh... la tahrimuna min ta'liqatikum... Fi Aman Allah* (Thank you, Sheikh ... don't deprive us of your comments ... may God keep you safe)

Here, the formula of thanks (*Shukran lak ya Shaykh*) serves to introduce the interpersonal appreciation stage found in Section 6.2, and the appeal to engage (*La tahrimuna*) gives way to the audience-maintenance role discussed in Section 6.3 (Frobenius, 2014; Mustonen, 2017). The close is sealed with the religious leave-taking (*Fi Aman Allah*), which serves not only to bring the interaction to a close but also to resonate with the moral frame established in the opening invocation, creating discursive symmetry and cultural coherence (Wierzbicka, 2003).

## **7. Discussion**

This study set out to examine how openings and closings of talk are constituted and linguistically realized in Waddah, a Saudi Arabic podcast, and to determine the extent to which religious and cultural norms



drive the constitution of these openings and closings. Using access to ten complete episodes and the analytical tool of CA (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Sidnell, 2016) and cultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 2003; Al-Saqqaf, 2016), the research aimed to establish common patterns of interaction and their pragmatic and sociocultural purposes

The findings illustrate that both openings and closings in Waddah are highly ritualized, structurally regular, and formulaic, dense with religious, social, and moral indexing meanings. Following, the findings are articulated in the context of informing research questions and relevant literature, with particular emphasis placed on the interplay between universal CA principles and culturally particular communicative scripts.

### 7.1 Ritualised Openings as Moral and Relational Frameworks

The evidence demonstrates that Waddah's opening sequences are neither random nor merely stylistic. They follow a formulaic, ritualised structure: a religious invocation (Bismillah), hyperbolic greetings (Marhaban alf wa hayyakum Allah), host and guest introductions, and a framing statement inviting audience participation.

It would have, in CA terms, the minimal elements of summons—response, greeting, and topic projection (Schegloff, 2007; Sacks et al., 1974) but elaborates them with religious and poetic frameworks typical of Saudi discourse. The invocation Bismillah is not employed as a phatic token here but as what Blum-Kulka and Snow (1992) would characterize as a speech act of sanctification, morally legitimizing the forthcoming discourse.

Guest introductions usually include honorifics or poetic metaphors (e.g., "the official ambassador of calm"), positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), face-enhancing the guest while modeling respect for the audience. This ceremonial framing is an enactment of *ikram al-daif* (honouring the guest), a deeply rooted communicative norm in Islamic cultures (Al-Saqqaf, 2016). This is parallel to Ilie's (2001) description of "semi-institutional discourse" on talk shows, where ceremonial and interpersonal elements are blended, though in the Saudi instance, ceremonial framing is not merely decorative but ideologically grounded.

### 7.2 Closings as Moral Closure and Communal Solidarity

The Waddah closings mirror the openings in structural predictability: a transition signal, gratitude to the guest, invitation for communal interaction, and a religious farewell (Fi Aman Allah). These parallel CA's pre-closing and terminal exchange model (Schegloff, 2007; Sacks et al., 1974) with culturally embedded layers.

Where Western podcasts conclude with commercial calls to action ("subscribe on iTunes"), Waddah concludes with *la tahrimuna min ta'liqatikum* ("don't deprive us of your comments"), a collectivist appeal that



frames audience feedback as a moral contribution (Rabiah, 2018). The valediction *Fi Aman Allah* is a spiritual handover, entrusting the audience to divine care, thereby framing the conclusion of the conversation as a moral act. This pattern echoes Al-Saqqaf's (2016) finding in Arabic TV interviews, where religious leave-taking reiterates the religious frame established at the onset. Together, these instances validate the original claim that Waddah's openings and closings during conversation are ritualised, formulaic, and culturally embedded. They also indicate how the structuring of such a sequence is interactionally strategic, and in concordance with CA's understanding of openings and closings as sites for managing participation, identity, and relational work (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Al-Saqqaf, 2016).

### 7.3 Formulaic Expressions as Pragmatic Anchors

Recurrent phrases such as *Bismillah*, *Marhaban alf*, *Ya'tik al-'afiyah*, and *Fi Aman Allah* are pragmatic anchors that structure discourse, index identity, and maintain relational alignment. They also mitigate potential face threats across transitions, acting as culturally acceptable "turn boundary markers" (Stenström, 1994).

In monologic genres like podcasts, Frobenius (2011, 2014) and Mustonen (2017) show how speakers simulate conversational presence through the use of direct address and rapport-building mechanisms. In the Saudi context, Waddah achieves this not through casual small talk but through ritual speech acts that reinforce social bonds. Such formulae are thus both sequentially functional (framing start/end) and culturally indexical (embedding the event in Islamic etiquette).

### 7.4 Cross-Cultural Perspective

A remarkable upshot of this study is the comparison between Saudi and Western podcasting conventions. In English-language podcasts, starts can highlight spontaneity, comedy, or sponsorship interludes, and finales can be devoted to advertising or lighthearted closings (Ilie, 2001; Mustonen, 2017). In Waddah, the interactional framework is scripted, predictable, and replete with religious, poetic, and communal lexicon.

This difference speaks to more profound sociopragmatic tendencies:

- Western forms favor individualism and colloquial authenticity.
- Saudi Arabic discourse values highly structure, collectivity, and moral congruence (Morson, 2006).

## 8. Conclusion

This study has found that openings and closings in the Waddah podcast are highly formalized, culturally rich, and pragmatically crucial. Ten complete episodes were examined, adhering to CA and cultural pragmatics, and the deployment of religious invocation, hyperbolic greeting, honorific guest introduction, and spiritually based farewells was consistently found.



Whereas previous CA models describe openings and closings as systems of turn-taking, pre-sequences, and adjacency pairs (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007), the Saudi context redraws these borders in terms of moralised, collectivist talk. *Bismillah*, *Marhaban alf*, and *Fi Aman Allah* are not adornings, they are ritualized performances that constitute speaker ethos, offer cues to cultural identity, and solicit audience alignment. Religious pragmatics as discourse structure: Invocations, blessings, and farewells within *Waddah* form part of the sequential organization, not decorative periphery.

These results enhance digital discourse scholarship in that they show Arabic-language podcasting is not an Arab regional clone of a worldwide genre but a specific discursive space in which Islamic politeness, face-work, and oral poetics converge. This research applies CA to a hitherto culturally under-researched field and raises the question of how worldwide media genres become indigenized in high-context, religiously framed societies.

### 9. Implications for CA and Arabic Discourse Analysis

These findings have several theoretical implications:

1. Generalizing CA to other cultures outside Western cultures: CA, per se, is universally usable but requires adaptation to consider local norms of communication (Sidnell, 2016).
2. Openings and closings as cultural scripts: Following Wierzbicka's (2003) line, the Waddah data supports the understanding of such sequences as culture-specific scripts carrying moral and religious expectations.
3. Reconceptualising turn boundaries: Arabic media talk turn boundaries are often blessed or otherwise poetically hedged, such that they are as much to do with marking identity and value as with functional shift.

**10. Limitations and future research:** The data were limited to ten episodes of a single male-hosted podcast. Comparative analysis by region, gender, and genre, and research that engages with audience reception, would enrich our understanding of Arabic podcast discourse. Future studies could also examine multimodal aspects in video podcasts or explore how younger hosts arrange these ritual forms in hybridised or international forms.

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