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Religiosity in academic discourse: A religio-pragmatic analysis of university students' speech acts

Muhammad Saleh[1], Sultan[2], Muhammad Bahly Basri[3], and Dedi Gunawan Saputra[4]
[1,2,3]*Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia*
[4]*Makassarese Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Universitas Negeri Makassar, Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia*

ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the relative neglect of religious expression in students' academic discourse. Prior research has largely focused on religious expression in ritual contexts. Addressing this gap, the present study identifies the forms, speech-act types, and communicative strategies of religious expression in university students' academic discourse. A qualitative approach was employed using a religio-pragmatic analytical framework adapted from Searle's (1976) speech act theory and Saleh's (2024) religio-linguistic perspective. Data were obtained through audio recordings and transcriptions of student utterances during academic interactions in the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature at a public university in Indonesia, where the participating students were predominantly Muslim. Selected utterances were analyzed using speech act and politeness theories. The findings reveal five principal forms of religious expression: gratitude, greetings, openings, closings, and hopes, realized through assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts and using direct, positive politeness strategies. Religious expression functions as a pragmatic resource to legitimize epistemic claims, mobilize collective action, manage affective expressions, mitigate face threats, and strengthen social solidarity. The study concludes that religious expression in academic discourse serves as a strategic communicative instrument linking spiritual dimensions to communicative action. Theoretically, the study extends speech-act and politeness theory by foregrounding the religious dimension within academic interaction. Practically, it underscores the importance of religio-cultural sensitivity in developing academic communication and pedagogy in higher education.

Keywords: Academic discourse; pragmatics; religio-linguistics; religious expression; speech acts

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INTRODUCTION

Religious expression is a linguistic practice that conveys speakers' spiritual beliefs and values (Alsaawi, 2022; Bouchara & Qorchi, 2016). Studying this expression is essential to understanding speakers' speech act strategies, especially in academic contexts. Investigating religiosity in academic discourse may offer new perspectives on speech act strategies in discursive spaces often framed as rational. Here we can see a religious expression that arises implicitly as we engage in communicative strategies in which theistic values are invoked when offering viewpoints.

*Corresponding author
Email: m.saleh7506@unm.ac.id

They can pragmatically signal politeness, humility, or belief in academic dialogue (al-Rojaie, 2021). Given the importance of religious entities and references in scholarly communication, it is important to examine how religiosity operates in students' speech acts.

Research on language and religion has a long history, particularly regarding how language is used in religious communities, ritual practices, and the social components of religion in everyday life (Nofal, 2023). Baranski et al. (2024) and Elewa (2025) explore notions of religiosity in relation to friendliness, happiness, and justice, respectively. Other research explores the relationship between religion and language use in multilingual contexts (Aung et al., 2025; Boswell, 2019; Kulkarni-Joshi, 2015) and the impact of language and religion on conflict (Balraj et al., 2020). Despite this work, scholars have seldom examined language and religion as a single unit. Thus, research that specifically links language and religion in academic contexts, with an explicit language/religion relationship, remains a key gap. Such a study is warranted to contribute to the general understanding of the religion-language interface as a context and topic of academic language use.

Pragmatics has yet to explore the speech-act strategies students use to convey religiosity in academic interaction. Recent pragmatic studies in academic contexts tend to focus on politeness (Hodeib, 2025), expressive speech during interaction (Gkouma et al., 2023), variation in the speech act (House et al., 2021), and specific speech-act functions (Yuan & Lyu, 2022). The relatively limited research on religiosity in academic discourses indicates the necessity for a new pragmatic paradigm that frames religiosity as a key component of communicative strategy.

As scholarship on language and religion has grown, research in the Indonesian context has focused on speech acts, politeness, and pragmatic strategies in sacred texts, notably the Qur'an, as well as broader discussions of religious discourse. For instance, Mustaka (2022) analyzed directive speech acts in Qur'anic verses, and Arifianto et al. (2023) studied politeness principles and strategies in the prophets' prayers. More recently, Saleh et al. (2025; 2026) studied the concept of divine politeness in Qur'anic imperative and prohibitive discourse from a religio-pragmatic perspective. However, these studies have mostly focused on identifying speech act types, politeness strategies, or the interrelationship between divine authority and human interlocutors, while showing that religious texts manifest these complex communicative strategies. Research on religious expression in academic communication more broadly, and on how religious references are incorporated into speech acts during argument construction in academic dialogue, remains limited. Academic discourse is a unique communicative space where learners must negotiate scholarly expectations with their social identities and value systems. As such, a substantial research gap remains in investigating the role of religiosity in students' academic speech acts. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how students express religiosity in academic speech acts. In this sense, it shifts religio-pragmatic inquiry from religious texts to academic communicative practice, offering insights into the role of religiosity, language use, and argumentation in higher education contexts beyond religious texts and into the realm of language and ideology.

An interdisciplinary approach to pragmatics and religious expression can show how these communicative processes interact in academic discourse. This research adds both theoretical and empirical contributions to pragmatics by introducing an innovative frame called religio-pragmatics. Religio-pragmatics is a theoretical framework that links language use and religious expression. This approach seeks to explain the speech-act strategies that mediate how religious expression is incorporated into academic communication, particularly among university students. In this context, religiosity is treated primarily as a pragmatic factor that conditions speakers' intentions, strategy choices, and the meanings of their utterances (Razzaq, 2023). This mirrors the view that the meaning of utterances is conditioned by social, cultural, and ideological environments into which they find themselves emerging.

This study's novelty lies in its focus on the role of religious language in academic settings through the lens of religio-pragmatics. The present research addresses an urgent need to open up entirely new areas of investigation in pragmatics by placing religious expression firmly at the center of academic talk. It specifically aims to identify speaker-chosen speech acts that include religious expressions across five kinds (assertive, directive, declarative, commissive, expressive). This is the specific way by which religious expressions are analyzed within the politeness strategies of language students. In doing so, the study contributes to an inclusive analytical framework that systematically integrates religious dimensions into the analysis of academic communication.

Speech Acts in Academic Discourse

Recent research on speech acts in academic discussion and practice has become of vital interest to linguists. Chejnová (2021) investigated students' politeness in email correspondence with instructors and found that, as they developed a more positive self-image, students

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mainly used a direct tactic. Eslami et al. (2022) examined pragmatic competence, identifying several speech acts in Iranian learners' apology strategies by language proficiency level. Witek et al. (2022) investigated the significance of information for certain dialogue speech acts and found that, for the most part, speakers produced cues that facilitated accurate interpretation. Li and Mao (2025) examined speech acts in peer feedback interactions and found that meaningful utterances predominated, flexibly and dynamically molded to the communicative context. Speakers' language use in scholarly discourse is significantly shaped by the audience's pragmatic position (Kashiha, 2022). Consistent with prior studies, the idea that the academic field is a site of productive speech-act inquiry is confirmed.

Religio-Pragmatics as an Interdisciplinary Approach

Cross-disciplinary work on language and religion has gained unprecedented traction, as current research shows. Similarly, Saleh (2024) defines the basic connection between language and religion in religiolinguistic study, while Stevens et al. (2023) link religiosity to mental health and cognitive functioning in adults. Laliotis et al. (2025) found that religiosity intersects with attitudes toward science and public health in Finland, and Ding & Goh (2020) show how religiosity affects language maintenance and shift in religious communities in Malaysia. Together, these results illustrate the inextricable interrelation of language, religion, and social order, laying the foundation for a religio-pragmatic perspective.

Another work tackles religious linguistics more directly. As Vestrucci (2022) demonstrates, religion uses linguistic and nonlinguistic meaning codes to communicate content and contextualize interpretation. Pandharipande (2023) argues that the "language of religion" has more specific linguistic structures that shape how reality is understood. Baranski et al. (2024) found a correlation between religiosity and linguistic friendliness, which is linked to academic achievement. Concurrently, Nurhamidah et al. (2025) link Qur'anic linguistic features to a range of societal attitudes. Collectively, this line of research reveals a strong connection between religion, language, and pragmatics, leaving room for religious pragmatics as an interdisciplinary approach to viewing religious expression in university students' lives.

METHOD

This study adopted a pragmatics-based analysis of three main dimensions: utterance forms, speech acts, and discursive strategies that shape religious enactment. Religious expressions were defined as choosing language that reflects speakers' beliefs or using religious terms. In the current study, "religious "is used to mean expressions in an Islamic framework

The data were obtained from academic interactions among students and student-to-lecturer interactions in the Department of Indonesian Language and Literature, Faculty of Languages and Literature, at a public university in Makassar, Indonesia. These included academic presentations, classroom discussions, and research seminars related to undergraduate theses. Since the majority, over 90%, of students included are Muslim, most of the religious expressions observed are Islamic expressions. Data were collected from March to May 2025. This included observing and recording academic presentations, classroom discussions, and undergraduate research seminars for analysis.

Any utterance containing religious expression was treated as a data point, and transactions of speech interactions were transcribed and written from the audio into text through the Transcribe program. Transcripts were double-checked for completeness and accuracy against the original audio; any omissions by the software were extracted manually. The final transcripts were read iteratively, where every utterance form, speech act, and discursive strategy was identified through an iterative process. The religious expressions in sentences or paragraphs were grouped into categories, namely forms of speech, speech acts, and discursive strategies, based on commonalities. The selected data were translated into English using an interlingual translation process such that the entire text was translated into English as the target language.

The data were originally prepared in Indonesian, the study's language. Since the article is written in English, all selected excerpts of the religious expressions were translated from Indonesian to English. Through a meaning-based translation, the pragmatic and religious aspects of the original expressions were preserved. The researchers first translated the excerpts and then reviewed the findings with two bilingual experts in pragmatics and translation studies. For translation reliability, they examined the English forms in parallel with the Indonesian utterances and compared them for semantic equivalence, pragmatic force, and context-based significance. The authors discussed and resolved discrepancies by consensus. Particular attention was paid to the culturally sensitive Islamic expressions in literature such as *Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim and Assalamualaikum*, which were retained because no English equivalent can capture their core religious and sociocultural features. Table 1 depicts the steps and procedures for each phase of thematic analysis.

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Analysis of utterance forms, speech-act types, and religio-pragmatic strategies followed thematic analysis procedures. The analysis proceeded through six phases: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) coding, (3) identifying themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) writing (Azizan et al., 2020; Nor & Zulcafli, 2020).

Table 1.
The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis of Religious Expression

No	Phase	Description	Thematic Analysis Procedures
1	Familiarizing with the data	Researchers immerse themselves in the corpus by reading and re-reading transcripts (and repeatedly listening to the audio), while jotting initial analytic memos.	Carefully review every recording segment that contains religious expression
2	Coding	Conduct semantic and conceptual readings; assign codes to each relevant data item and collate codes with their supporting extracts.	Identify salient markers and keywords, such as *Assalamualaikum, Alhamdulillah*.
3	Identifying themes	Organize related codes into provisional themes by clustering similarities to identify themes.	Group coded data that share features
4	Reviewing themes	Check whether themes "work " in relation to the coded extracts and the full data set. This stage implies the possible need to combine two themes into one, split one theme into two or more, or discard irrelevant themes altogether and restart the theme development process.	Re-examine themes against the corpus, compare across cases. At the same time, consider existing themes and anticipate the emergence of new themes.
5	Defining and naming themes	Write an in-depth analysis of each theme; clarify its scope and focus; name the theme. Guiding questions include "What religious expression does this theme capture? " and "How does it fit the data's overall narrative? "	Identify final themes as religious expression
6	Writing	Integrate the analytic narrative with illustrative data extracts to produce a coherent report and contextualize the data within the relevant literature.	Compile the report/ working paper detailing forms of religious expression, speech acts, and religio-pragmatic strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Religious Expression

The data revealed several forms of religious expression represented in students' academic discourse: (1) expressions of gratitude, (2) greetings, (3) openings, (4) closings, and (5) aspirations (hopes).

Expressions of Gratitude

The findings showed that praise and gratitude to God Almighty (*Allah SWT* in Islam) are consistently articulated as an integral part of academic paper openings. Such expressions not only mark completion *"by His grace and mercy,"* but also reflect a belief that divine guidance plays a significant role in achieving success and overcoming challenges.

(1) We offer our praise and gratitude to God Almighty; by His abundant grace, the authors were able to complete this paper on time without significant obstacles and in line with expectations. (MAK/PBSD/ESy/003)

(2) Praise and gratitude, *Alhamdulillah*, the author offers to Allah SWT, who has bestowed His mercy, guidance, and aid so that the author could complete this paper on time. Blessings and peace (*Shalawat*) are likewise offered to the Great Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, and his companions. (MAK/PBSD/ESy/004)

In excerpt (1), the student explicitly expresses gratitude by positioning God as the source of academic success. The phrase *"We offer our praise and gratitude to God Almighty"* signals an internalized religious conviction and affirms a spiritual connection between academic achievement and divine will. The pronoun "*we*" adds a collective dimension to the gratitude, fostering a sense of shared spiritual solidarity among the paper's authors. The utterance also presupposes that success "*without significant obstacles*" was achieved through divine favor, reinforcing a narrative in which religiosity is integrated into academic activity.

In excerpt (2), the student explicitly expresses gratitude by naming God and using the typical Islamic expression of gratitude, *"Alhamdulillah."* This reflects deep spiritual awareness of the divine role in academic accomplishment. The inclusion of *Shalawat* for Prophet Muhammad SAW broadens religiosity from theistic gratitude to prophetic veneration, implying that academic endeavor is part of religious practice. The rhetorical style also cultivates emotional and spiritual resonance with audiences who share similar values, strengthening a sense of common identity. Thus, the expression not only acknowledges divine assistance but also reinforces religious identity within academic discourse.

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Expressions of Greeting

In academic interactions, the religiously inflected greeting "*Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh*" functions as a salient communicative act. It is often accompanied by additional salutations and honorifics, underscoring its importance in academic communication.

(3) *Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.* (MAK/PBSD/ESap/001)

(4) Alright, let's begin. *Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.* (00.10.57–00.11.05) (VRP/PBSI/ ESap/002)

(5) *Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuhu* and good morning. (WA/PPs/ESap/005)

(6) Eeeee… *Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.* Good morning, peace and blessings. The esteemed Professor Dr. Akmal Hamsa, M.Pd., as first supervisor; the respected Dr. Sakaria, S.S., S.Pd., M.Pd., as second supervisor; the respected Dr. H. Muhammad Saleh, S.Pd., M.Pd., as first examiner; and the respected Dr. Abdul Haliq, S.Pd., M.Pd., as my second examiner. (00.00.22-00.00.59) (VSP/PBSI/ ESap/003)

Excerpts (3)−(6) demonstrate that *"Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh"* is an idiomatic expression of Islam. The greeting is a prayerful entreaty for peace, mercy, and blessings for the recipient. In scholarly conversation, it serves as a polite opening and creates social and spiritual connections with an audience for whom faith is assumed to be an ideological value. Making the greeting explicit indexes students' religious identity and validates decorum norms grounded in religious principles. Thus, the salutation carries deeper meaning; it not only checks some boxes but also serves as a utilitarian enactment of religiosity, integrating religious ethos into academic communication. It synthesizes the social and spiritual aspects of politeness and signals an attempt to harmonize the academic context with native, inclusive religious norms. The greeting therefore not only introduces the speaker but also creates a respectful communicative setting that signals the speaker's religious identity.

Expressions of Conversation Opening

In opening remarks, religiosity often appears as a preface. Phrases like *"Alhamdulillah"* (all praise be to Allah) and *"Bismillahirrahmanirrahim"* (in the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) express gratitude and begin with a blessing. These expressions do more than convey a point and relay information; they affirm an acknowledgment of the divine blessing that they have been given to come together, continue their studies, hope to have a good trial, and to have good success, illustrating how the language of faith is a deeply embedded part of the academic discourse. These results suggest that religiosity is embedded in students' articulation of wishes and prayers in academic interactions.

(7) *Alhamdulillah*, friends, we have been given the opportunity to meet for today's class, even though it's online. We will, of course, discuss a topic related to Indonesian language teaching methods, especially the communicative approach. As we know, there are several methods for implementing instruction, so just as in today's topic, our group (Group 3) will provide further explanation of the communicative approach. (00.11.06–00.11.48) (VRP/PBSI/EpemP/001)

(8) EEEEE… *Bismillahirrahmanirrahim alhamdulillahirabbil alamin*. (00.00.01 - 00.00.05) (VSP/PBSI/ EpemP/002)

Excerpts (7) and (8) exemplify expressive speech acts that foreground gratitude and situational awareness. The use of *Alhamdulillah* indexes Islamic religious values and acknowledges a divine role in sustaining academic activities. These expressions also show competence in religious and polite academic communication. Together, these expressions integrate faith and scholarly discourse: students show spiritual politeness while fostering emotional connection and shared values with an audience presumed to share a similar religious background.

Expressions of Conversation Closing

In this study, closings are not limited to academic summaries; they often include gratitude or supplication. Expressions such as *"Amin ya Robbal Alamin"* (Amen, Lord of the worlds) and *"Wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh"* (peace be upon you, and the mercy of Allah, and His blessings) commonly mark closure. Their use signals hope that the discussion will be beneficial, aspirations for future improvement, and a respectful, blessing-inflected farewell. These expressions show how religious dimensions are tightly interwoven with the way speakers end an interaction or presentation.

(9) We acknowledge that this paper is still far from perfect. Therefore, we sincerely welcome critiques and suggestions for future improvement. *Amin ya robbal alamin*. (MAK/PBSD/EPenP/002)

(10) In implementing the communicative approach, teachers can use methods such as simulations,

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experiential review, STAD, and TGT; this approach is also applied in Indonesian language instruction to enhance students' communication. So, that is our conclusion, friends. Thank you for your attention from the beginning of class to the end. I now take my leave *wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.* (01.01.20-01.01.58) (VRP/PBSI/ EPenP/007)

Excerpt (9) contains an ethical–relational and religious-permissive expression to close an interaction. The student explicitly shows humility by acknowledging the imperfection of the work he has compiled with the statement, *"this paper is still far from perfect."* This expression signals academic politeness and an awareness that learning is a process. The invitation to critique, *"we sincerely welcome critiques and suggestions for future improvement,"* underscores openness to evaluation and signals a dialogic orientation in academic communication. This expression reinforces the speaker's ethos as receptive and improvement-oriented. The supplicatory *"Amin ya Robbal Alamin"* adds a spiritual cadence that softens the ending and forges affective ties with an audience presumed to share similar religious values. Overall, these expressions utilize a rhetorical approach that is inclusive, reflective, and collaborative. Concluding the exchange politely while strengthening interpersonal and spiritual rapport. The closing of academic interactions politely ends the conversation while strengthening the interpersonal and spiritual relationship between the speaker and the listener. The closing phrase *"wassalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh"* in Excerpt (10) emphasizes the religious dimension while adding a nuance of formality appropriate to academic culture in a religious environment.

Expressions of Hope

Expressions of hope grounded in religiosity often serve as closings or accompany requests in academic discourse. The data show frequent use of the expression involving the word "*may/hopefully*", followed by a prayer or petition to God. Such expressions are used to wish that the work would be beneficial and illuminating, to invite critique and suggestions for improvement, or to pray for others' health and protection. These findings indicate that religiosity is integrated into how students articulate wishes and prayers in academic interactions.

(11) We realize that this paper still has many shortcomings due to our limitations as humble servants of Allah. Therefore, the authors earnestly welcome critiques and suggestions to perfect this paper. May what we have written be beneficial to all who need. (MAK/PBSD/EH/002)

(12) Thank you in advance, Professor. May you always be in good health and under His divine protection, Amen. (WA/PPs/EH/004)

Excerpt (11) evokes humility and self-awareness, acknowledging the authors' human limitations, the shortcomings of human nature in the material, and their imperfections in their academic work. Calling themselves *"servants of Allah,"* the writers weave in spiritual values and *tawadu* (humility), establishing an emotional and religious connection with the audience. Excerpt (12) pairs sincere gratitude with a benevolent wish for the professor's well-being and divine protection. The phrases *"under His divine protection"* and the closing *"Amen"* reinforce the message's spiritual register. Overall, these utterances foreground the spiritual dimension of students' hopes while simultaneously expressing courtesy and respect within academic interactions.

Religious Expressions in Speech Acts

Below, we present the study's findings on religious expressions as realized across three speech-act types: (1) assertive, (2) directive, and (3) expressive.

Assertive Speech Acts

This study shows that religiosity is realized through assertive speech acts that state beliefs or understandings of religious teachings. The data indicate that religion is not only personally experienced but also actively communicated and affirmed as truth or guiding principle within academic talk and discussion. The use of assertive speech acts is illustrated below.

(13) The Qur'anic paradigm is a worldview grounded in the values of the Qur'an for addressing various problems. As a guide to life, the Qur'an teaches universal values such as justice, compassion, and equality. With a Qur'anic paradigm, Muslims can face modern challenges without losing their identity. (MAK/PBSD/TTA/001).

(14) Let us explore the concepts of *iman, Islam, ihsan,* and *insan kamil*. You surely have conceptions or perceptions of these terms. Thus, a person may be called a believer if they believe in the existence of Allah, in His angels, in His revealed scriptures, in His messengers, in the Last Day, and in destiny, both good and bad. (MAK/PBSD/TTA/002).

Excerpt (13) boldly asserts a conviction and knowledge of the Qur'anic paradigm as a model for seeing and acting. In this view, the Qur'an carries universal values, justice, compassion, and equality, all rooted in it and serving as a guiding point. The statement invites its audience to understand and, in

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turn, adopt these values to meet current challenges, and by referring to a Qur'anic model, it offers Muslims ways to maintain religious recognition while preserving their own existence. The tone is convincing yet inclusive and noncoercive, allowing mutual understanding and contemplation of the Qur'an's connection to the world around us. In Excerpt (14), it also demonstrates an assertive act that highlights evidence and the generally accepted understanding of *iman* (faith) in Islam and illustrates the six pillars of faith: belief in Allah, angels, scriptures, messengers, the Last Day, and destiny. It seeks to build consensus while challenging readers to actively contemplate the significance and boundaries of cardinal religious ideas in educational settings.

Directive Speech Acts

In academic communication, directive speech acts infused with religiosity appear as recommendations or requests grounded in religious values. The data show that these expressions often take the form of advice that encourages positive conduct, such as cultivating a critical stance toward information and upholding ethical norms.

(15) It is important for users to be critical of information they receive via social media, and for journalists to remain *istiqomah* (steadfast) in maintaining ethical standards in their reporting. (TI/PBSD/ TTD/001)

(16) My apologies, may I check first: can you hear me, Moderator?
Yes, we can hear you.
Alright. I will explain the essence of the communicative approach. According to [Pringga Widagda], citing Antoni, an approach is the level of assumptions or stance regarding language and language learning: one might say a philosophy of language teaching. An approach refers to theses, assumptions, prema… [inaudible]. (00.12.59-00.13.50) (VRP/PBSI/ TTD/002)

Excerpt (15) displays a directive speech act that invites the audience to adopt a critical orientation toward social-media information and urges journalists to maintain ethical reporting with *istiqomah* (steadfastness), a term with specific resonance in Islamic discourse. Beyond exhortation, the utterance seeks shared commitment between speaker and audience to ethical communicative practice. Excerpt (16) shows a directive speech act requesting confirmation through the expression "*My apologies, may I check first: can you hear me, Moderator?"* This expression serves to ensure smooth communication. This speech act represents politeness and the ethics of academic communication with religious overtones.

Expressive Speech Acts

In academic communication, expressive speech acts give students a venue to convey feelings or stances infused with religious values. The data includes profound gratitude to God for bringing about a successful project completion, admitting to failures in such projects, and looking forward to a project benefiting humanity

(17) We offer praise and gratitude to God Almighty for His mercy and grace, by which this paper entitled *'Aksara Lontarak Makassar'* could be completed on time. We prepared this paper as an effort to explore and understand one of Indonesia's cultural heritages, the Makassarese Lontarak script, which holds significant historical, literary, and cultural value. (TugKel/PBSD/ TTE/001)

(18) The author realizes that this paper is far from perfect. Therefore, the author welcomes constructive suggestions and critiques for improvement in future work. May this paper be beneficial and meet the expectations of many. *InsyaAllah* (God willing). (MAK/PBSD/TTE/002)

Excerpt (17) shows a very expressive act of gratitude to God Almighty, demonstrating sincerity and acknowledging divine agency in academic performance. In Excerpt (18), the author writes with humility and self-awareness about the paper's limitations. The author humbly admits this, openly acknowledges it, and asks for constructive criticism and suggestions to further strengthen the work in the field. The closing, "*Insyaallah* (God willing)," intensifies the prayerful dimension and communicates hope and trust, linking prayerful aspiration to a commitment to build on it. Together, these instances show how religiosity is integrated into expressions of humility, hope, and the attribution of success to a higher power within academic discourse.

Religious Expressions within Politeness Strategies

The following section explains research data regarding religious expressions which are described in various politeness strategies, namely (1) direct strategies and (2) positive politeness strategies

Direct Strategies

Religious expression is realized through direct politeness strategies. Students state religious utterances explicitly and without hedging. The data show that praise and gratitude to God Almighty for His mercy and guidance often serve as straightforward openings to mark success or completion. Likewise, closing utterances such as *"Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh"* function as direct salutations that convey prayers for peace, mercy, and

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blessings. These direct strategies show that religious values are openly integrated into academic communication as a form of politeness and acknowledgment of divine agency.

(19) Praise and gratitude be offered to God Almighty. By His mercy and guidance, the author was able to complete this Pragmatics paper on Deixis and Distance on time. (MAK/PBSI/SL/001)

In Excerpt (19), the author directly credits God's mercy and guidance with completing his paper on time. On record, the politeness strategy is bald, as the author expresses thanks literally, without mitigation, indicating openness and sincerity. The statement both recognizes the divine role in accomplishing an academic task and fosters a positive spiritual rapport within a formal academic register.

Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness is used to build rapport and signal appreciation or agreement. In this corpus, religious expression in positive politeness affirms and reinforces shared convictions, as shown below.

(20) Progress achieved through the development of science and technology will inevitably bring sweeping change. A cultural revolution has occurred because science and technology have led humanity to extraordinary advancement. Progress gives rise to modern life, and modernity is the hallmark of advanced societies today. For Muslims, however, modernity must be developed upon a Qur'anic paradigm. We advance with the Qur'an; there is no progress without the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not merely a source of inspiration; it is the foundation, guide, and paradigm that should direct modernity so that it promotes human well-being in this world and the hereafter. (MAK/PBSD/SKP/001)

Excerpt (20) asserts the speaker's belief and a view of the relationship between scientific–technological progress and the Qur'anic paradigm as an ethical–spiritual anchor. Strong affirmations, such as *"there is no progress without the Qur'an"* and *"we advance with the Qur'an,"* project an unequivocal stance while employing positive politeness to foster closeness and shared understanding with an audience presumed to hold similar religious commitments. Phrases such as *"we"* reflect inclusiveness, bringing audiences into the same ideological and spiritual group. These phrases also strengthen the collective identity of a community of believers, inseparable from the values of revelation as they face the challenges of the modern era. Rhetorically, the passage also uses a positive politeness strategy that integrates a narrative of modernity with religious values, positioning religion as both a filter and a compass for civilizational progress and articulating a normative orientation toward benefits *"in this world and the hereafter. "*

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that religious expression among academic students appears in various forms, speech-act types, and speech-act strategies. There were five forms: expressions of gratitude, greetings, opening remarks, closing remarks, and expressions of hope. This speech-act repertoire includes assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts, realized through direct (bald-on-record) and positive-politeness strategies. These expressions are usually framed in terms of Islamic belief since the speakers are overwhelmingly Muslim. Thus, these religious expressions also index speakers' religious identities. This result aligns with Avineri (2015) and Rosiak (2023), who argue that language preference is strongly shaped by religion.

Beyond indicating theological awareness, expressions of gratitude primarily create group solidarity among those involved. As Qub'a et al. (2025) demonstrate, Allah-related utterances in spoken Arabic serve pragmatic and practical purposes: politeness, emotional support, and the binding of collective values. Thus, religious expression in academic arenas can be interpreted as a social-communicative tool that draws together spiritual and interactional dimensions.

In academic discourse, religious greetings both open up speech and signal that the speaker's identity is being marked. The current findings show that these greetings create a formal yet familiar speech pattern that clearly links to Islamic identity (Dharta et al., 2025; Kirilenko, 2024). The paper argues that religious greetings in academic spaces structure scholarly communication around what speakers and interlocutors understand about their own religious identity.

The following findings show that religious greetings serve as both interaction openers and markers of speakers' religious identity. In the classroom, these greetings create a sense of formality and thus reaffirm the collective identity of the individuals in that class. This builds on previous work that highlights religious greetings not only as markers of social solidarity in everyday interaction (Hasjim et al., 2021) but also as features of students' academic etiquette (Nilsson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the current research argues that religious greetings in academic spaces, in contrast, serve as a framing device: they redirect the conversation towards normative academic language and form discourse based on a common religious identity that is based on shared belief systems. Religious greetings thus serve as a pragmatic medium for depicting normative

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discourse through participants' religious identity, functioning as both religious and social practices.

This research proposes that students use religious formulas as rhetorical devices to establish credibility (ethos) with an audience through opening expressions. These expressions state identity as a basis for a claim to legitimacy and also reinforce trust in the speaker. On the contrary, religiously inflected closings are used to minimize possible face threats, particularly if speakers confess their own limitations. (Rodríguez et al., 2022) demonstrate how religious expression may serve as a facework strategy, reconciling deference to the audience with self-assertion of identity. This aligns with Weld-Ali et al. (2023), who observe that Muslim societies have strong religious bonds, leading to widespread use of religious signs to frame interaction. Religious expressions also matter in performing speech acts, particularly for legitimacy and social acceptance (Alsohaibani, 2017; Mahmood & Kasim, 2019). In academic settings, opening and closing expressions do more than bookend talk: they build academic credibility while also signaling religious modesty.

Expressions of hope that emerge in academic language carry valuable, pragmatic functions. Students use such phrases as politeness strategies to acknowledge personal limitations and allow divine will to govern outcomes. Such usage mitigates personal claims, making them more acceptable to the audience. Previous pragmatic work highlights mitigation's role in preserving social harmony (Cheng et al., 2023; Vlasyan, 2018), while our study shows that religious mitigation can also bridge divides and foster collective solidarity in academic settings. Thus, this study further suggests that religiously inflected expressions of hope serve as communicative strategies that blend politeness and solidarity.

Collectively, the results show that religious expression in students' academic discourse functions as a multi-functional pragmatic device for managing social relations in academic spaces. Religious expressions help maintain politeness, reinforce solidarity, assert identity, build credibility, and mitigate face threats. These expressions are mobilized to shape academic interaction rather than simply embody personal belief. This interpretation aligns with al-Rojaie (2021), who found that religious expressions in Najdi Arabic serve different pragmatic purposes in everyday relations: mitigation, hedging, solidarity building (positive politeness), and burden reduction (negative politeness). In light of this, the present study focuses on religious expression as a strategic communication tool in academic contexts, following Alqahtani (2024), who examines politeness in religion-based real-time communication and finds that religious politeness is relevant and applicable in formal academic discourse.

The second set of findings shows how students articulate religious expression through speech-act types in academic discourse. Three types are salient, namely assertive, directive, and expressive, showing that religious expression is not merely symbolic but a pragmatic resource that frames communicative action with epistemic, persuasive, and emotional functions (Labinaz, 2018; Ogiermann & Bella, 2021). This study demonstrates that assertive religious expressions are used to legitimize academic claims by signaling the speaker's epistemic commitment. This aligns with studies (Al Salem et al., 2025; Marmorstein, 2023; Marmorstein & Reed, 2023) highlighting *wallahi* as a marker of strong conviction and authentic commitment to factual propositions. In this way, religious expressions strengthen an assertive function by adding a layer of religious legitimacy.

Directive speech acts show that religious expression generates collective action in academic settings. For example, words like "*Bismillah, let us begin …"* serve as cooperative instructions that bring us together in communal piety. Religious legitimacy has been noted to strengthen students' persuasive power in our data. This is in accordance with the results achieved by Mahmoud (2018), who revealed the use of religious expressions in requestives as strategies to soften instructions, maintain politeness, and help address face damage. This phenomenon supports the influence of religious messages on persuasive effectiveness (Mahmood & Kasim, 2021). Religious language thus has a unique directive function: integrating academic guidance with religious values.

Religiously inflected expressive speech acts play an emotional role in supporting solidarity and managing social relations. Words like *"Alhamdulillah,"* "praise be to God," and *"Insya Allah"* indicate speakers' psychological states. Building on Pratama (2017), we can consider *"Insya Allah"* an indicator of certainty or uncertainty, depending on the social situation, which matters in an academic context because students must adjust their level of commitment to maintain politeness. The findings also echo Razzaq (2023), who shows that religious expressions function as emotional appeals that convey emotion and foster emotional closeness with the audience.

In general, the religious dimension of speech acts enriches speech-act theory in academic spaces with religious backgrounds. Our results indicate that religiously marked speech acts serve specialized functions in academic discourse: they buttress epistemic claims (assertive), mobilize cooperative action (directive), and express affective stance

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(expressive). Here, we build on previous work that focused mainly on ritual activities or everyday communication (Kádár & House, 2020; Shiferaw, 2023). Thus, we argue that within academic contexts, religiously framed speech acts provide pragmatic means to interlink epistemology, action, and affective aspects.

The third set of findings deals with religious expressions as politeness-oriented communication strategies. Two principal strategies emerge: direct (bald-on-record) and positive politeness. Both are essential in maintaining peace in academic communication. Students express these religious expressions explicitly to communicate with intent without hedging. For instance, *"In the name of God, let us begin this presentation"* straightforwardly invites participation while also framing the presentation in spiritual terms. This religious expression softens the face threat in directives (Al-Azzam et al., 2022). In line with Jarrah and Alghazo (2023), religious expressions in requestives carry inferential force: although direct in form, the requestive is also rendered acceptable through its religious legitimacy. So, coupling direct strategies with religious expressions allows students to give firm directives diplomatically. This interpretation resonates with religio-pragmatic analyses of Qur'anic prohibitions and imperatives, which show how authoritative directives can incorporate mitigation, empathy, and solidarity to preserve the addressee's dignity (Saleh et al., 2025 & 2026).

Religious expressions build camaraderie and solidarity through positive-politeness strategies that help us feel closer, such as *"Thank God, we are all able to meet today …"*, or "*God willing, we can complete this task together."* Such stratagems recognize togetherness and build emotional proximity among students and between students and lecturers. As Badarneh et al. (2022) observe, these appeals to the divine in religious discourse function as emotional appeals that link communities through a sense of shared identity. In short, positive-politeness strategies through religious expressions consolidate academic solidarity, strengthen social cohesion, and affirm a common religious identity.

Overall, these findings indicate that religious speech-act strategies in academic discourse help instill instruction, use direct approaches, and, likewise, serve as a social-cohesion mechanism through positive politeness. Collectively, these strategies show how students use religious expressions as a pragmatic resource to mediate authority and solidarity (Jarrah et al., 2023). Another important implication about religion-based politeness in academic contexts is that they are employed as tools for communicating, managing social relations, maintaining harmony, and strengthening academic legitimacy.

The findings of this study should therefore be understood as evidence that religiosity may function as a pragmatic resource within a religiously homogeneous academic community, rather than as a universal characteristic of academic discourse. In more pluralistic settings, religious markers would likely occur less frequently and may be replaced by more general openings or religiously neutral politeness formulas. Speakers likely adjust the degree of religious explicitness in their communication based on the shared identities they perceive among their audiences (Avineri, 2015; Boswell, 2019). Consequently, comparative studies across institutions with varying levels of religious diversity are needed to determine whether comparable speech-act strategies emerge through other forms of identity marking.

It is also important to emphasize that the communicative functions identified in this study are not inherently exclusionary. Rather, they reflect normative communicative practices within a religiously homogeneous community, not deliberate strategies of intolerance. This interpretation is consistent with previous findings showing that greetings and religious expressions primarily index in-group solidarity rather than rejection of out-group members (Alsaawi, 2022; Hasjim et al., 2021). At the same time, the findings highlight the need for greater religio-cultural sensitivity in multi-religious academic environments. Educators may encourage flexible, context-sensitive use of religious expressions, while future research should directly examine how students from minority religious backgrounds perceive, negotiate, or are affected by religiously inflected academic discourse. Such questions remain beyond the scope of the present study because it is limited to a single context dominated by Muslim students.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that religious expressions function as a multifunctional pragmatic resource in students' academic discourse. Five main forms were identified: gratitude, greetings, openings, closings, and hopes. These forms are realized through assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts, using direct (bald-on-record) and positive-politeness strategies. Together, they help legitimize epistemic claims, mobilize collective action, express affective stances, mitigate face threats, and reinforce social solidarity.

These findings extend previous research emphasizing identity, politeness, and solidarity in everyday interaction by showing how religious expressions also frame academic communication, establish speaker credibility, and guide collective

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activities. Accounts centered on identity and solidarity therefore explain only part of their functions in academic discourse. Their use in direct utterances suggests that speakers can direct activities and maintain interpersonal relationships simultaneously within a shared religious framework. The study contributes to speech-act and politeness research by showing how religious expressions link epistemic, action-oriented, and affective functions to balance academic authority and interpersonal solidarity. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of recognizing students' religio-cultural repertoires in academic communication and pedagogical practice. They encourage educators to consider how religious expressions function within particular communities while remaining sensitive to audience diversity in multicultural and multireligious classrooms.

The study is limited to student discourse within a single institutional setting with predominantly Muslim participants. Therefore, transferring its findings to more religiously diverse academic environments requires further investigation. Future research should compare institutions and religious communities and examine how students from minority religious backgrounds perceive and negotiate religious expressions in academic interaction.

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During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to improve the manuscript's readability and language. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed, and they take full responsibility for the published article.

CONTRIBUTION OF THE AUTHORS

The first author conceptualized the study, developed the religio-pragmatic analytical framework, supervised the research process, contributed to the interpretation of the findings, and drafted the initial manuscript. The second author contributed to the research design, methodological refinement, and interpretation of the findings, and critically revised the manuscript for intellectual content. The third author contributed to data collection, transcription verification, and the coding and thematic analysis of religious expressions in academic interactions. The fourth author contributed to data collection, transcript preparation and organization, and the analysis of speech-act types and communicative strategies.

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