Inshallah: Religious invocations in Arabic topic transition

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A B S T R A C T

The phrase *inshallah* 'God willing' is well known, even to non-Arabic speakers, as a mitigator of any statement regarding the future, or hopes for the future. Here we use the methods of conversation analysis (CA) to examine a less salient but nonetheless pervasive and compelling interactional usage: in topic-transition sequences. We use a corpus of Levantine (predominantly Syrian) Arabic talk-in-interaction to pay detailed attention to the sequential contexts of *inshallah* and its cognates across a number of exemplars. It emerges that these invocations are used to secure possible sequence and topic closure, and that they may engender reciprocal invocations. Topical talk following invocations or their responses is subsequently shown to be suspended by both parties; this provides for a move to a new topic by either party. (Arabic, religious expressions, conversation, conversation analysis, topic)*

An American colonel in Iraq, writing to The Washington Post's Thomas E. Ricks, recently observed: "The phrase 'inshallah' or 'God willing', has permeated all ranks of the Army. When you talk to U.S. soldiers about the possible success of 'the surge', you'd be surprised how many responded with 'inshallah'." The phrase seems to have permeated all ranks of the diplomatic corps, too: Zalmay Khalilzad, when he was the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, once stated at a conference, "Inshallah, Iraq will succeed." (Murphy 2007)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

The iconic status of the phrase *inshallah*[1] for Arabic speakers, and its salience for non-Arabic speakers, is amply exemplified in the observations above. Its English

translation, 'God willing,' lends itself to ready adoption by English native speakers as an appendage to any statement regarding the future, or one's hopes for the future. Its usage in Arabic interaction generally, however, goes beyond this most salient of contexts;[2] the widespread use of religious expressions in ordinary Arabic conversation, irrespective of the religious affiliation (or otherwise) of the speaker, has long been noted (see e.g. Abboud 1988, Gilsenan 1983). As Morrow notes:

> the Arabic language is saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly and … the name Allah permeates both spoken and written Arabic to the point where we can speak of the omnipresence of Allah in the Arabic language. As a result, an Arabic speaker could scarcely conceive of a conversation where the name of God would not appear. (2006:45)[3]

The most comprehensive collection of so-called "Allah expressions" in English are in Piamenta 1979, 1983, who discusses the religious and cultural presuppositions drawn from them; Castleton 2006 surveys what she calls "the Allah lexicon," not only in speech but also in other forms of communication.[4] In a pioneering study on a specific Arabic dialect, Ferguson (1983) examined what he called "God-wishes" in Syrian Arabic—in a corpus of thirty-one religious invocations involving *inshallah* and its cognates—and explains the appropriate occasions for their use.[5]

It is evident, however, that such religious invocations are also embedded in Arabic interaction in contexts more fugitive than previously described, contexts that repay close investigation of recorded data. Such data allow us to attend to the sequential contexts in which the expressions occur, and to identify the interactional motivations for their use.[6] For example, in the following Levantine Arabic exchange, *inshallah* (line 6), prefacing *qareeban* 'soon' (line 8), follows a jokey tease and prompts a response—'thanks be to God' (line 9)—and then, in line 10, the *inshallah* speaker initiates talk on a new topic.[7]

(1) (Helani: Hana 2:36)

(Hana is questioning Ruba about her pregnancy.)[8]

1	Hana:	£Tel'etlek baten?£
		Appeared for you a belly
		£(Do) you have a belly?£

2	Ruba:	.hhhh £lá lessa£ ehhh [ya'ni]
		.hhhh no not yet ehhh PRT
		.hhhh £no not yet£ ehhh ya'ni[9]

3	Hana:	[↑eh]
		PRT
		↑ eh

4	Ruba:	£bawader£
		Symptoms
		£symptoms£

5	Hana:		Sho mestania? ehhh heh heh
			What are you waiting ehhh heh heh
			What are you waiting (for)? ehhh heh heh

6	Ruba:	→	**.hhh £Inshaalla£**
			.hhh God willing

7	Hana:		.HHHHH [Ya::h]

8	Ruba:		[£*qaree:ban*£]
			soon
			£*soo:n*£

9	Hana:		£yalla el ħamd ↑ la:£
			PRT the thanks to God
			£yalla thanks (be) to ↑Go:d£

10	Ruba:		Ew Huda sho axbara?
			And Huda what her news
			And Huda what (is) her news?

11	Hana:		Huda weldet.
			Huda delivered
			Huda delivered (her baby).

(talk continues concerning the delivery)

What is manifest here is that talk relating to Ruba's pregnancy is, in the course of this exchange, closed down, and discussion of another mutual friend, Huda, is subsequently initiated. In what follows, we use the methods of conversation analysis (CA) to focus on this particular deployment of *inshallah* and its cognates in the context displayed here: that of topic transition.[10]

Our corpus consists of twelve hours of naturally occurring Levantine Arabic telephone conversations, recorded both in Syria and in the UK,[11] and transcribed according to the conversation-analytic methods as developed by Gail Jefferson.

As we show, *inshallah*, as an invocation to God, occurs in a variety of forms. It is deployed not only as a preface, as in (1) (*inshaallah qareeban* '*inshallah* soon'), but it can also be used as a freestanding turn, as in (2), where it is produced with emphasis—*inshallah walla* (*walla* and *wallahi* are literally 'by God,' and thus emphatic)—or as in (3), where it is embedded in a more extended turn, consisting of a disclaimer and assessment (see arrows at 'a'). But whatever their local instantiations, the expressions serve a common interactional project. In both of the following extracts, as in (1), the next full turn after what is here generically called the invocation (which in our data is what we call the *INSHALLAH* TURN), serves to shift the topic (see arrows at 'b').[12]

(2) (Helani: AR3:26)

(Abdullah (Abd) is advising Mohammad (Moh) on the paperwork that he has to do at the Syrian embassy before he leaves London, where he has been studying on a scholarship.)

1	Moh:		[Ew bl nesbe] lal-ħajez em*:::* xalaš el isbo' el jay
			And concerning PREP the booking em okay the week the next
			And concerning the booking okay next week

2   biéz-   ya'ni hek mqarer
       with the prermission of- PRT like this I decided
       with the permission of-13 I decided

3   .hhh metel ma [eltelli beṭešel beb'at enu]
       .hhh as that you told me I'll call sending that
       .hhh as you told me I'll call (saying) that

4 Abd: [.hhh WALLAHI ANA RAÁYI:] enu eh
           .hhh PRT   I my opinion that yes
           .hhh WALLAHI I THINK that yes

5   Teó:l lel safara eħjezo:li,
       You tell the embassy book for me
       tell the embassy book for me

(23 lines of data omitted, wherein Abd details what Moh needs to do)

29 Abd: =ba'teáed .hhh iza jama'et hal   mawa:d hado:l mb*::*
        I think   If you compiled these materials those mb
       **= I think .hhh if you compile these materials mb*::* **

30   biħjezo:lak   bishola.
       they'll book you easily
       they'll book you (a ticket) easily.

31   (0.9)

32 Moh: a → **Inshaalla walla.**

33   (0.9)

34 Abd: b → .hhh mptlk ↑E:h 'abyħki ma'ak Ne'me >wella ma 'am £yeħki£ <
       .hhh mptlk PRT is speaking with you Ne'me or not is speaking
       hhh mptlk ↑E:h is Ne'me speaking with you >or not £speaking£ <

35 Moh: Mee:n
       Who
       Who:

36 Abd: Ne'mehheh

37 Moh: Akmal Ne'me?

38 Abd: £Ehhhh£
        Yes
       £Ye(hhhh)£

39 Moh: ↑La walla men ↑zama:n *uh:* ams
       No PRT from a long time uh last time
       ↑ No walla from a long time *uh:* last time

40   ba'etli   e-mail men fatra,
       he sent me email PREP some time ago
       he sent me an e-mail some time ago,

(Talk continues regarding the last time Ne'me was in contact)

(3) (Helani: HA2:36)

(Hana initiates talk about the engagement party of a mutual friend, Mai, which Ruba did not attend.)

1	Ruba:		ki:f *šaret xetbet Mai inshala enba[šatu]*
			how was engagement of Mai God willing you *(plural)* were happy
			how was Mai's engagement inshala you (*plural*) enjoyed it

2	Hana:		[.hhh] mashi el ↑ha:l [walla]
			.hhh fine PRT
			.hhh fine walla

3	Ruba:		[ehhh]

(22 lines of data omitted, concerning the party)

26	Hana:		>Ya'ni ħaket ma'ha< ana mara ba'd el xetba,
			PRT I spoke to her I once after the engagement
			> Ya'ni I spoke to her< once after the engagement,

27	Ruba:		Mm

28	Hana:		Ew = shefti hallá ya'ni ↑fa*ħe:š ew::* e'yaad ew hek.
			And you saw now PRT exam and celebrations and the like
			And you see now ya'ni (there are) ↑ exa:ms a::nd* celebrations and the like.

29	Ruba:		Mm

30	Hana:	a →	pt .hhh Ma ba'ref [ya'ni [inshalla xer.
			.pt .hhh Not I know PRT God willing good
			pt .hhh I don't know ya'ni inshalla good.

31	Ruba:		[Ew: : [:
			And
			A:::nd

32			(0.7)

33		b →	'ala Alla= ew entu esh šar fiko:n
			PREP God and you what happened with you
			It's all up to God=and what happened with you:

34	Hana:		.hhh Ana 'ala ħali lessa 'am baádem
			.hhh I PREP the same still am taking
			.hhh I'm the same still taking (exams)

35	Ruba:		Mm

36	Hana:		Ew:: u::h Sawsan tuqadem kamaan wa Nirmeen ehh [huhhh]
			And uh Sawsan taking also and Nirmeen ehh [huhhh]
			A::nd u::h Sawsan is taking (exams) too and Nirmeen ehh [huhhh]

(Talk continues regarding the recent news of Hana's other sisters)

Thus in each of these cases (1–3), the *inshallah* turn is associated with the termination of one topic and the move to another. We examine in some detail here this transitional sequence.

Work on English has greatly illuminated the management of topic transition (see, in particular, Button 1990, Jefferson 1984a, 1993, Maynard 1980). Drew and Holt (1995, 1998; see also Holt & Drew 2005), in their groundbreaking work on figurative expressions in topic transition, note the regular occurrence of

such expressions in a turn where a topic is summarized; such turns initiate the closing of the topic. Thus, *So he had a good innings, didn't he* serves as a figurative summary of the long life of a man whose death two speakers are discussing (Drew & Holt 1998:496), which provides for transition to a new topic. In our Levantine Arabic data, the invocation, as we see, FOLLOWS what is potentially the close of the sequence; upon its production, further topical talk is withheld and, in some cases, a response to the invocation is produced, and talk on a new topical line is subsequently taken up. In this article we examine the turns that could potentially close the sequence and show how the invocations are fitted to them, before showing how they occasion withdrawal from topical talk, and a subsequent move to another topic.

Underwriting sequence closure: Inshallah *after potential topic close*

In each of the three extracts we have seen so far, it is evident that the invocation follows potential topic closure. So in (1), Hana's enquiry about whether Ruba's pregnancy is now visible (line 1) is met with a negative response that is, hedged (lines 2, 4) in both its formulation (*lá lessa ... bawader* 'not yet … symptoms' and production, and is delivered with a smile voice. Hana's jokey response, *Sho mestania?* 'What are you waiting for?' is followed by chuckling laughter, recognizable as a potential sequence-closing device (Jefferson 1984b). It is at this point that Ruba produces the *inshallah* turn. In (2), following prompting from Mohamed in line 1, Abdullah has been detailing at length the procedure Mohamed needs to follow in order to arrange his flight home from the UK at the Syrian embassy. In lines 29–30 he produces an assessment as part of the upshot: *.hhh iza jama'et hal mawa:d hado:l biħjezo:lak bishola* 'I think if you compile these materials they'll book you (a ticket) easily.' As Goodwin and Goodwin (1987:21) note, "participants … attend to assessments as marking a move towards closure," and indeed what follows is nearly a second of silence, after which Mohamed responds with *Inshaalla walla*. In (3), Ruba's question regarding Mai's engagement party is answered at length by Hana. By line 26 Hana is moving beyond the issue of the party to the more general one of contact with Mai, and in line 28 reports what is happening "now" as an account for the lack of contact since: *Ew=shefti hallá ya'ni ↑fa*ħe:š ew::* e'yaad ew hek* 'And you see now … there are exams and celebrations and the like.' Thus Hana brings the topic of Mai to a possible close both in bringing the talk back to the present and the three-part list (Jefferson 1991), the completion of which facilitates transition to a next speaker. After a minimal, noncommittal response by Ruba, Hana produces a disclaimer and an assessment as part of an invocation: *Ma ba'ref ya'ni inshalla xer* 'I don't know *ya'ni inshalla* good.' In all three cases, then, the talk has moved to a potential close by various means: in (1) a recognizable joke and laughter, in (2) by an assessment, and in (3) by the three-part list—all potential closure-relevant devices. The *inshallah* turn—produced either by the same speaker or by the recipient—underwrites that closure.

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The inshallah *turn as a context sensitive invocation*

As we have noted, what we call the *inshallah* turn, or more generically, the invocation, clearly has a variety of different local instantiations, fitted to the sequential contexts in which they are produced. Both (1) and (2) show *inshallah* produced in environments similar to the one noted at the beginning, where it marks the expression of hope for a desired outcome. In (1), it is used as a response to the other's jokey chiding about her pregnancy being not yet visible, and it prefaces a descriptor, *qareeban* 'soon'; in (2), it is an emphatic response to the assessment of the other speaker, who has expressed confidence about the outcome of a particular bureaucratic procedure. In extract (3), the *inshallah* turn similarly follows a potential topic closure and its acknowledgment (lines 28–29) but one that, in contrast, does not concern the future, but the present. Here it is a multi-unit turn that consists first of a disclaimer, *Ma ba'ref* 'I don't know', the particle *ya'ni* (an upshot marker) and then, following *inshallah*, the assessment *xer* 'good.' Thus *inshallah* in this context is clearly not used in its familiar form as an expression regarding the future; across all three extracts, however, its use in topic transition as a device to underwrite topic closure is evident.

Furthermore, in (1) and (3) the *inshallah* turn elicits a response that is also an invocation. In (1), Ruba's invocation, *inshallah qareeban* '*inshallah* soon', an expression of hope with respect to her pregnancy, is followed by Hana's response, *yalla el hamdla* '*yalla* thanks be to God.' In (3) Hana's turn, launched with a disclaimer, *Ma ba'ref* 'I don't know,' is initially met by Ruba's potential continuation in line 31. But the stretched *Ew:::* 'And' already suggests her attentiveness to the possibility that she might have to abandon it, and indeed she does, as Hana continues hers, now in overlap. What transpires in Hana's continuation is the invocation, so Ruba deems it necessary to abandon what was originally launched with *Ew:::* in order to respond to that invocation with her own, *'ala Allah* 'it's all up to God.' Only then does she recycle what she started in line 31 (Schegloff 1987) and subsequently launch a new topic.

What extracts (1) and (3) show, then, is that an invocation may elicit reciprocity—the recipient of the initial invocation thereby exhibiting attention to the coparticipant's talk.[14] This reciprocity may simply work as an acknowledgement, whereupon the speaker continues with a rushed-through shift of topic as in (3), or it may serve to endorse the *inshallah* speaker's expression of hope (in this case, regarding the unproblematic progression of a pregnancy in (1)). Indeed, in some cases, where the topical focus is on a future outcome, the *inshallah* turn may be but the first in an extended sequence of multiple invocations; in the extracts below, expressing hope for a successful outcome becomes the business itself.

(4) (Helani: MH5:70)

    (Mohammad (Moh) and Ayham (Ay) are students. Moh asks Ay which subjects he has
    taken in his recent exams.)

1   Moh: Esh   adam[et.
                 What you took
                 What (exams) did you take.

2   Ay: [.hhh u:m Sharikaat   ew >m< Mašrifia =
                               .hhh PRT Companies and   b   Banking
                               .hhh u:m Companies and >b< Banking =

3   =↑ kelon   elon 'alaáa   bel Moħasabe
                  all of them have relation to Accountancy
                 = ↑all of them (are) related to Accountancy

4   >ma ba'ref iza 'andak   fekra 'annon   aw lá <
                 not I know if   you have an idea about them or not
                 > I don't know if you have an idea about them or not <

5   Moh: Walla ya'ni um:*::*

6   [asasy ↑ a:t ya'ni [°hnen°?
                  essentials PRT   they are
                 are they ↑core (subjects) ya'ni?

7   Ay: [Bas y-   [arjo= arjo-
                 But y-   I hope I hope-
                 [But y-   [I hope = I hope-

8   →   ↑Lá el ħamdella: insha:Alla: ya'ni
                  No the thanks to God God willing PRT
                 ↑ No thanks (be) to God insha:Alla: ya'ni

9   →   ↑ħata eláa:n arjo   eno insha:Allah mashi el ħal.
                  till now I hope that God willing fine
                 ↑ till now I hope that insha:Allah (it is) fine.

10   .mp [.hh

11   Moh: →   [Insha:Allah rab el 'alam[een.
                 God willing Lord the people
                 [Insha:Allah (the) Lord (of) p[eople.

12   Ay: →   [Ew = 'ala Allah
                                     And PREP God
                                     [And (it's all up) to God

13   heh heh huh .h[hh

14   Moh: →   [£Eh walla 'ala Alla[:£
                                      Yes PRT PREP God
                                     [£Yes walla (it's all up) to Go[:d£

15   Ay: [Esh d   ↑assálak
                                           What want I to ask you
                                           [What I wanted to ↑ask you,

16   Moh: Eh =
                 Yes
                 Yes =

17 Ay: =Fi   ħada   men refáatak   'ando camiret video?
             There is someone of your friends has   camera video
             = Does any one of your friends have a video camera?

18   (0.2)

19 Moh: Camriret video?
             Camera   video
             A video camera?

20 Ay: Lak hwwe bas aélak   el mawdo' shloon =
             PRT it is   just I tell you the subject   how
             Lak just (let me) tell you how the occasion (was)= [15]

21 Moh: =Eh
              Yes
             =Yes

(*Talk continues regarding why Ayham needs a video camera*)

(5) (Helani: AR6:29)

(Abdullah (Abd) and Ismaeel (Ism) are discussing the scholarship grants they receive from their university, and specifically the delay of the married students' supplement due to them.)

1   Abd: Bas e::hm £ya'(hh)ni neħne hu:n shayef ma' ma wešel   shi£
             But em   PRT   we   here you see not not received a thing
             But em £ya'ni we here you see have not received anything

2   Ism: Na'am na'am=
             Yes yes
             Yes yes

3   Abd: =Fa ma'nata ya'ni::< lessa'tun   'al tareé=
               So it means PRT   they are still on the way
             = So it means ya'ni::< they are still on the way=

4   =aw: mumken waáafo   laáno
               or possibly they stopped because
             = o:r possibly they (are) delayed because

5   ma fi   e'tima:d aw ila axirhi °ya'ni°.
             no there is credit   or to its end PRT
             there is no credit or the like °ya'ni°.

6   Ism: Bas saált   ya'ni = estankasht men [Ħalab]
             But you asked PRT   inquired   from Aleppo
             But (have) you asked ya'ni inquired from [Aleppo]

7   Abd: [Eh]
                                             Yes
                                             [Yes]

8   (0.5)

9   °Eh°.
              Yes
             °Yes°.

10	Ism:	→	Xer inshaalla.
			Good God willing
			(All will be) good inshaalla.

11	Abd:	→	Eh walla hek ↑hai hie yalla
			Yes PRT how that is it PRT
			Yes walla ↑that's how it is yalla

12			inshaalla tenħal ↓mai mshkila ya'ni.
			God willing it gets solved not problem PRT
			inshaalla it will be sorted out ↓no problem ya'ni.

13	Ism:	→	Xer inshaalla 'ala xer.
			Good God willing PREP good
			(All will be) good inshaalla ending well.

| 14 | | | (0.4) |

15			Esh fi 'andak axba:r tanye?
			What there is you have news other
			What other new:s (do) you have?

16	Abd:		Walla ma fi hai hiye [el ħamdulillah rab l'alameen]
			PRT nothing that's it thanks be to God the Lord of People
			Walla nothing thanks be to God the Lord of people

17	Ism:		[Barak Allah feek (ya sidi)]
			Bless God you PRT PRT
			[God bless you (ya sidi)]

18	Abd:		Shloon balasht el majester ba′den.
			How you started the masters after all
			So did you start the masters after all.

19	Ism:		Walla basharna bashrna= el haéiáa el majster ğer,
			PRT we started we started in fact the masters different
			Walla we started=in fact the masters is a different matter

(*Talk continues regarding Ismaeel's difficulties on the MA course*)

In (4), Ayham builds off his *lá* 'no' response to Mohammad's query—first a 'thanks-be-to-God' expression (see also extract (1), line 9), followed by an invocation (lines 8–9), to which Mohammad responds (line 11). Ayham in turn responds (lines 12–13) with the invocation *Ew=ʾala Allah* 'And it's all up to God' and postpositioned laughter. Mohammad agrees and underwrites that invocation by repeating it, in a smile voice that acknowledges the prior laughter. Ayham then moves to change the topic, in line 15. In (5), Abdullah produces a positive response in line 7 to Ismaeel's query, initially in overlap, and then, after a post-overlap resolution hitch, a soft repetition of it; Ismaeel responds with the invocation *Xer inshaalla* 'all will be good *inshaalla*' in line 10. Abdullah agrees and expands on this— first with an expression of resignation, *hek hai hie yalla* 'that's how it is *yalla*' and then with one of hope, *inshaalla tenħal mai mshkila ya'ni* '*inshallah* it will be sorted out no problem *ya'ni*'. Ismaeel, in turn, reiterates and expands on his prior invocation in line 13, endorsing Abdullah's prior turn.

These sequences show how invocations are not simply devices used for transitions from one topic to another, but may have sequential implications of their own, leading to collaborative, step-by-step disengagement from the prior topic. This is particularly evident in contexts where the initial invocation expresses hope (e.g. of sorting out a problem, of success in exams, or regarding a pregnancy) that the other speaker chooses to endorse.

This concurrence achieved in the wake of a figurative expression recalls many of the topic-transition sequences discussed by Drew and Holt (1998) for English. As they observe, with respect to the figurative expressions that in their data serve to summarize the preceding topic:

> Agreement, sympathy, or affiliation may describe the particular response by a recipient to the figurative summary in question; in any case, contiguity or alignment between the co-participants is expressed in some way … so as to foreclose further talk about that topic and enable the speakers to move on to a next topic. (1998:506)

The withholding of topical talk after the *inshallah* turn

The production of an invocation can thus make relevant reciprocity—either another invocation or an expression of thanks. But, as (2) also shows (repeated below), reciprocity is not always forthcoming; the invocation in line 32 (at arrow 'a') is followed not by a reciprocal response but instead by silence of nearly a second (at arrow 'b'), and then by a move by the recipient of the invocation to another topic in line 34 (at arrow 'c').

```
29   Abd:          =ba'teáed .hhh iza jama'et hal        mawa:d hado:l mb*::*
                    I think        If you compiled these materials those mb
                    =I think .hhh if you compile these materials mb*::*

30                 biħjezo:lak   bishola.
                    they'll book you easily
                    they'll book you (a ticket) easily.

31                 (0.9)

32   Moh:    a →   Inshaalla walla.

33           b →   (0.9)

34   Abd:    c →   .hhh mptlk ↑E:h 'abyħki    ma'ak   Ne'me >wella ma 'am £yeħki£ <
                    .hhh mptlk PRT is speaking with you Ne'me   or   not is   speaking
                    hhh mptlk ↑E:h is Ne'me speaking with you >or not £speaking£ <
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As we have seen, *inshaalla walla* here underwrites the possible close of the sequence. In the silence in line 33 that follows its production, both speakers decline the opportunity for further topical talk, or to initiate talk on a new matter at that juncture. And again in (5) (repeated below), we also see how, subsequent to the

production of, in this instance, an extended invocation sequence (see the arrows at 'a'), there is a period of silence (at arrow' b') in line 14, before the prior speaker starts up again with a shift of topic (at arrow 'c').

6	Ism:		Bas saált ya'ni = estankasht men [Ħalab]
			But you asked PRT inquired from Aleppo
			But (have) you asked ya'ni inquired from [Aleppo]

7	Abd:		[Eh]
			Yes
			[Yes]

| 8 | | | (0.5) |

9			°Eh°.
			Yes
			°Yes°.

10	Ism:	a →	Xer inshaalla.
			Good God willing
			(All will be) good inshaalla.

11	Abd:	a →	Eh walla hek ↑hai hie yalla
			Yes PRT how that is it PRT
			Yes walla ↑that's how it is yalla

12		a →	inshaalla tenħal ↓mai mshkila ya'ni.
			God willing it gets solved not problem PRT
			inshaalla it will be sorted out ↓no problem ya'ni.

13	Ism:	a →	Xer inshaalla 'ala xer.
			Good God willing PREP good
			(All will be) good inshaalla ending well.

| 14 | | b → | (0.4) |

15		c →	Esh fi 'andak axba:r tanye?
			What there is you have news other
			What other new:s (do) you have?

In (6), we also see a sequence come to a possible close, an invocation underwriting that closure, a reciprocal invocation, and then a withholding of further topical talk.

(6) (Helani: AR3:27)

(Abdullah (Abd) and Mohammad (Moh) are talking about a mutual friend and his doctoral research.)

1	Moh:		…hallá mesherfu Ħsen 'Abdel Hadi.
			now his supervisor Ħsen 'Abdel Hadi
			…now his supervisor (is) Ħsen 'Abdel Hadi.

2			hwwe ka:n bel shesmu=bel majeste::r,
			he was in PRT in the masters
			he wa:s in the u:m=in the maste::rs,

3		(0.3)

4   'an El <u>Bayaati</u>.
                     on El Bayaati
                     (working) on El <u>Bayaati</u>[16]

5		(0.7)

6   Abd: mptlk [Ha::]

7   Moh: [bas hallá] bel:=
                        but now in the
                        [but now] in the:=

8   =°hw<u>w</u>e sho ebel   <u>balla</u>:°
           he   what accepted PRT
           =°what was h<u>e</u> accepted (in) balla<u>:</u>°

9		(0.3)

10   Wallahi: ma ba'ref
           PRT   not I know
           Wallahi: I don't know

11   maho=hwwe ebel   'elem ↑<u>jamaal</u> láno.
           as   he   accepted aesthetics   because
           because = he was accepted (in) <u>aesthetics</u>.

12		(1.2)

13   bas mawdo'o   sho=
           but his subject what
           but what his subject (is)=

14   ='an   e:sh wallahi ma ba'ref.
           about what PRT   not I know
           = about wha:t wallahi I don't know.

15		(0.7)

16   >láno   hwwe <u>é</u>bel   bel mu'eedie   'elem jama:l <
           because he   accepted in   the contest aesthetics
           > because he (was) accepted as a teaching assistant in aesthetics < [17]

17		(0.5)

18   Abd: Aiwa=aiwa=aiwa.
           Yes   yes   yes
           Yes=yes=yes.

19		(0.7)

20   a →   .hhhhh okay yalla sidi   Alla ywafé.
           .hhhhh okay PRT PRT God help
           .hhhhh okay yalla sidi (may) God help

21   Moh: a →   Eheh °Alla(hh) yesla[mak]°
           Eheh   God   save you
           Eheh °(may) Go(hh)d sa[ve you]°

22   Abd: b →   [Mm]::

23		b →	(0.2)

| 24 | Moh: | | hh[h |

| 25 | Abd: | c → | [.pt .hhh oka:y ↑eh esh fi 'andak ↑axba:r |

           .pt .hhh okay PRT what there is you have news

[.pt .hhh oka:y ↑eh what news (do) you ↑ha:ve

26	Moh:	Walla ( ) ente sho axbarak?

           PRT   you what's your news

Walla ( ) what's your[18] news?

27	Abd:	Ana hada ana [šayer] e:

           I   that's me becoming

I'm the same [becoming] e:

28	Moh:	[Shlono-] shlono Faulkner ma(hh)'ak

            How is- how is Faulkner with you

[How is-] How is Faulkner with you(hh)[19]

29	Abd:	Hehhh £Wallahi: taraktu šarli mertaaħ meno£

           Hehhh   PRT   I left him I've been resting from him

Hehhh £Wallahi: I left him I've been resting from him

30		shi:: mptlk .hhh isbo'

           for mptlk .hhh a week

fo::r mptlk .hhh a week

(*Talk continues regarding AR's research*)

Mohammad's question in line 8 receives a negative response in lines 10–11, reiterated, after withholding from its recipient, in lines 13–16. After half a second's pause, Abdullah's repetition, *Aiwa aiwa aiwa* 'Yes yes yes,' "proposes that the [prior speaker's perseverating] course of action be halted" (Stivers 2004:269); thus, the sequence is twice brought to a possible close. After withholding from Mohammad, Abdullah produces both a potential move to new business with *okay* and then an invocation that underwrites the topic-close proposal: *Okay yalla sidi Alla ywafé* 'Okay *yalla sidi* (may) God help' (line 20). Following Mohammad's soft, and gently laugh-infiltrated, reciprocal invocation, Abdullah produces a minimal response in overlap (*Mm*), but nothing further. Once more we see withholding of further topical talk from both speakers following the production of an invocation, before one speaker, in this case Abdullah, moves to shift topic, again marked here specifically with *okay* as a preface.

These examples display how invocations underwrite sequence closure not only in their positioning, but in speakers' withholding of further on-topic talk. As (1) and (4) show, speakers may move immediately to shift topic, or, as (2), (5), and (6) show, speakers may simply withhold further immediate talk. In all cases, the topic-transition potential of the invocations are clearly attended to by the speakers, and the withholding of further on-topic talk after their production allows for either speaker to shift topic, with (as in (6)) or without an explicit marker to do so.

The move to a new topic after the inshallah *turn*

The suspension of further topical talk following an invocation thus allows for the shift to a new topic. As examples (2), (5), and (6) have shown, this shift may follow a pause, and we can see from the extracts below that there may be a direct shift to a new topic without any such hiatus. In the extract from (1) (repeated below), topic shift (at arrow 'b') is initiated immediately after the reciprocal invocation (at arrow 'a', line 9).

5	Hana:		Sho mestania? ehhh heh heh
			What are you waiting ehhh heh heh
			What are you waiting (for)? ehhh heh heh
6	Ruba:	a →	**.hhh £Inshaalla£**
			.hhh God willing
7	Hana:		.HHHHH [Ya::h]
8	Ruba:	a →	[£*qaree:ban*£]
			Soon
			£*soo:n*£
9	Hana:	a →	£yalla el ħamd ↑ la:£
			PRT the thanks to God
			£yalla thanks (be) to ↑Go:d£
10	Ruba:	b →	Ew Huda sho axbara?
			And Huda what her news
			And Huda what (is) her news?

In (3), it is rushed through by the producer of the reciprocal invocation; and in (4), in overlap with the end of the prior speaker's invocation:

From (3)

28	Hana:		Ew=shefti hallá ya'ni ↑fa*ħe:š ew::* e'yaad ew hek.
			And you saw now PRT exam and celebrations and the like
			And you see now ya'ni (there are) ↑ exa:ms a::nd* celebrations and the
			** like.**
29	Ruba:		Mm
30	Hana:	a →	.pt .hhh Ma ba'ref [ya'ni [inshalla xer.
			.pt .hhh Not I know PRT God willing good
			.pt .hhh I don't know ya'ni inshalla good.
31	Ruba:		[Ew: : [:
			And
			A:::nd
32			(0.7)
33		b →	'ala Alla= ew entu esh šar fiko:n
			PREP God and you what happened with you
			It's all up to God=and what happened with you:

From (4)

5	Moh:		Walla ya'ni um:*::*

6			[asasy ↑a:t ya'ni [°hnen°?
			essentials PRT they are
			are they ↑core (subjects) ya'ni?

7	Ay:		[Bas y- [arjo= arjo-
			But y- I hope I hope-
			[But y- [I hope = I hope-

8		a →	↑Lá el ḥamdella: insha:Alla: ya'ni
			No the thanks to God God willing PRT
			↑No thanks (be) to God insha:Alla: ya'ni

9		a →	↑ḥata eláa:n arjo eno insha:Allah mashi el ḥal.
			till now I hope that God willing fine
			↑till now I hope that insha:Allah (it is) fine.

10			.mp [.hh

11	Moh:	a →	[Insha:Allah rab el 'alam[een.
			God willing Lord the people
			[Insha:Allah (the) Lord (of) p[eople.

12	Ay:	a →	[Ew = 'ala Allah
			And PREP God
			[And (it's all up) to God

13			heh heh huh .h[hh

14	Moh:	a →	[£Eh walla 'ala Alla[:£
			Yes PRT PREP God
			[£Yes walla (it's all up) to Go[:d£

15	Ay:	b →	[Esh da ↑assálak
			What want I to ask you
			[What I wanted to ↑ask you,

The extracts above clearly show that topic shift is available as an option to both speakers. In (3) it is undertaken by the producer of the reciprocal invocation; in (1) and (4), by their recipients. In each case in the data presented here, the shift to a new topic is done by means of a question that opens a new sequence; in most of the cases in the current data, this question is a news inquiry, of the coparticipant (in (3), (5), and (6)) or of a specified other (in (1) and (2)). While the invocations provide for a shift of topic without, as it were, further ado—*Esh da assálak* 'What I wanted to ask you…' in (4) is a clear case in point—in some cases the topic shift is overtly marked. This is either with a marker (most obviously *okay* in (6)) or with some other lexical means of marking a move to new business. In the data here, this is achieved most commonly by treating the upcoming shift of topic as part of a larger activity within the talk, in this case, exchanging news. So in (5), the new sequence is launched by *Esh fi'andak axba:r tanye?* 'What other news do you have?,' and in (1) and (3) the shift of topic is marked by the prefacing of *Ew* 'And,'

indicating what Heritage and Sorjonen (1994), discussing institutional interaction in English, refer to as an "on-agenda" question:

> *And*-prefacing is primarily used by professionals to establish and maintain an orientation to the course-of-action character of their talk across sequences of question/answer adjacency pairs. Associated with this activity linkage, we argue, is the maintenance of an orientation by both parties to the questions as *agenda-based*, i.e. as members of a series that are in some way routine elements of an activity …, or as elements the questioner has anticipated or has 'in mind'— or commonly as externally motivated components of a bureaucratic task or other agenda which is being managed by the professional questioner as part of the 'official business' of the encounter. (1994:5–6)

In these instances, *Ew Huda sho axbara?* 'And Huda what is her news?' (from (1)) and *ew entu esh šar fiko:n* 'and what happened with you' (from (3)) launch new sequences within what are thereby proposed as the wider activity of news exchange in the talk. But, as extract (2) shows, an invocation can make possible a direct shift to a new topic without lexically marking it as either new or part of a wider ongoing activity; following a pause of nearly a second, *abyħki ma'ak Ne'me* … 'Is Ne'me speaking with you …' is prefaced by a relatively high-pitched ↑ *E:h* as the only indication of such a shift.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the sequential distribution of one type of religious expression in Levantine (predominantly Syrian) Arabic—an invocation to God, overwhelmingly expressed by what we call the *inshallah* turn (*inshallah* and its cognate forms). As we noted in the introduction, such forms are widely used in Arabic talk-in-interaction in a number of contexts. Here we have identified one specific contextual usage: in topic-transition sequences. Just as there are other uses to which religious expressions are put, there are clearly other means by which speakers shift topic. But this particular convergence of linguistic object and sequential context has emerged as a recurrent feature in our data of Levantine Arabic interaction. Across the data, we represent the transitional sequence schematically as shown in Table 1, with the optional turns enclosed in square brackets.

Given the production of a possible sequence- and topic-closing move in position 1, our examples clearly show that either speaker may produce an invocation in position 2. In examples (3), (4), and (6), the speaker who brings the topic to a possible close then underwrites that closure by means of the invocation; in (1), (2), and (5), it is the recipient who produces the invocation. Similarly, either the producer of the invocation (or a reciprocating expression), as in (3) and (5), or its recipient, as in (1), (2), (4), and (6), may then move to shift the topic. Thus an invocation is a resource for either speaker to move away from a prior topic, and, upon its production, for either speaker to move to a new one.

TABLE 1. *Transitional sequence of topic in Levantine Arabic.*

POSITION	TYPE OF TURN
1	**Possible sequence close**
	[Pause]
2	**Invocation**
	[Pause]
	[Reciprocity]
	[…]
	[…]
	[Pause]
3	**Topic shift**

As we have seen, an invocation is used in combination with other turn-constructional elements in response to a prior turn. This may simply be an emphatic form, such as *inshaalla walla* in (2), or a more complex turn that accomplishes more than just the invocation, such as in (4) where the invocation is tied to a negative response to the prior question: *Lá el ħamdella: insha:Alla: ya'ni*. In some cases, we see the familiar use of *inshallah* to mark the expression of hope for a desired outcome—an expression that may have sequential implications of its own, prompting in the first instance reciprocity and thus agreement. However, it is equally the case that (as in extracts (3) and (6)) they may simply be used to facilitate a transition from a prior topic. Following the production of an invocation, it is clear from the data here that no further topical talk is forthcoming; the witholding of talk to the prior topic provides for the shift to a new topic. We propose here that the essential disjunctiveness of invocations, however attentive they may be to the prior talk, is what provides for the transition to new topical matter; they constitute an initial disengagement from the prior turn even in attending to it. They are thus a resource for participants in their management of this basic interactional task of shifting topic.

In bringing conversation-analytic methods to bear on the data of interaction, we identify the systematic practices used in the accomplishment of particular actions. We thus hope to have extended the growing literature on topic shift. As we have noted, the pioneering work on this subject has been conducted on English; the work reported here therefore provides a useful comparison with existing findings for English. But on a broader scope, this study marks a significant departure in its focus on talk-in-interaction in Arabic. By taking a familiar phrase, *inshallah* (and its cognates), and examining its placement not only in single utterances and their responses but also across sequences of talk, we have highlighted an aspect of its use that is perhaps less salient, but no less intuitive to its users. We also sought to ground ethnographic observation regarding the prevalence of such religious invocations in the detail of actual moment-by-moment usage. We hope, in doing so, to have contributed to ongoing research in the linguistics of Arabic in general, and spoken Arabic in particular.

APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

The transcription symbols adopted for this article are those conventionally used for CA work, devised by Gail Jefferson (adapted from Ochs et al. 1996:461–65). The corpus was transliterated into the Roman Alphabet and then transcribed at a later stage. This also entailed introducing a list of symbols to present sounds that do not occur phonologically in English (see Appendix 2). Moreover, for analytic purposes, we have avoided the use of some conventional transcription symbols in the transliteration process. Hence, double letters, for instance, are used to indicate: (i) long vowels in words like *salaam* 'peace,' and (ii) a default stress on a consonant, known as *shadda* 'accent,' as in *ennas* 'the people,' rather than a colon or an underline, respectively.

[ ]	Utterances starting simultaneously are linked together with either double or single left-hand brackets.
[	When overlapping utterances do not start simultaneously, the point at which an ongoing utterance is joined by another is marked with a single left-hand bracket, linking an ongoing with an overlapping utterance at the point where overlap begins.
]	The point where the overlapping utterances stop overlapping is marked with a single right-hand bracket.
=	When there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first (without overlapping it), the utterances are linked together with equal signs.
(0.2)	When intervals in the stream of talk occur, they are timed in tenths of a second and inserted within parentheses eitherwithin an utterance, or between utterances.
:	Punctuation is not used to mark conventional grammatical units in these transcripts, but, rather, attempts to capture characteristics of speech delivery. For example, a colon indicates an extension of the sound syllable it follows.
.	A period indicates a stopping fall in tone, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
,	A comma indicates a continuous intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences.
?	A question mark indicates a rising inflection, not necessarily a question mark.
> <	Indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably faster than the surrounding talk.

↑↓	Marked rising and falling intonation is indicated by upward and downward pointing arrows immediately prior to the rise or fall.
<u>word</u>	Emphasis is indicated by underlining.
WORD	Capital letters are used to indicate an utterance, or part thereof, that is spoken much louder than the surrounding talk.
°word°	A degree sign is used to indicate a passage of talk that is quieter than the surrounding talk.
hhh & .hhh	Audible aspirations (hhh) and inhalations (.hhh) are inserted in the speech where they occur.
(( ))	Double parentheses are used to enclose a description of some phenomenon that may not be transcribable, such as a cough.
( )	In addition to the timings of intervals and inserted aspirations and inhalations, words (or parts thereof) enclosed within single parentheses are in doubt.
→	points to the phenomenon of interest
£	smile voice
*	creaky voice

APPENDIX 2: TRANSLITERATION CONVENTIONS

The data analyzed in this article is transliterated in a modified Roman alphabet. Unless otherwise indicated, the transliteration symbols of consonants and vowels are adapted from the International Phonetic Alphabet, as illustrated in the following table.

THE ARABIC SOUND	THE TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOL	EXAMPLES	
ا	a	t**a**maam	'perfect'
ب	b	**b**a'ref	'I know'
ت	t	me**t**el	'like'
ث	th	baħe**th**	'research'
ج	j	**j**ama'et	'you complied'
ح	ħ	mo**ħ**asabe	'accountancy'
خ	x	a**x**barak	'your news'

Continued

APPENDIX 2: Continued

THE ARABIC SOUND	THE TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOL	EXAMPLES	
د	d	je**d**anan	'very'
ذ	ż		
ر	r	akta**r**	'more'
ز	z	**z**awje	'wife'
س	s	maw**s**em	'season'
ش	sh	**sh**ağle	'thing'
ص	š	weta**š**let	'arrived'
ض	đ	tfa**đ**al	'go ahead'
ط	ŧ	f**t**o:r	'breakfast'
ظ	ž	ni**ž**a:m	'system'
ع	ʻ	ba**'**ref	'I know'
غ	ğ	mash**ğ**o:l	'busy'
ف	f	ki:**f**	'how'
ق	q	**q**ara:r	'decree'
ك	k	**k**ti:r	'much'
ل	l	sh**l**on	'how'
م	m	ta**m**a:m	'perfect'
ن	n	e**n**te	'you'
ه	h	**h**alá	'now'
و	w (produced with lips fully rounded)	a**w**al	'first'
	o (produced with lips slightly rounded)	x**o**d	'take'
ي	y	**y**om	'day'
ء	glottal stop: á (produced with lips in neutral position)	**á**letli	'she told me'

Continued

APPENDIX 2: Continued

THE ARABIC SOUND	THE TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOL	EXAMPLES	
	ó (produced with lips fully rounded)	Ba**ó**l	'I'm saying'
	é (produced with lips slightly spread)	da**é**nalak	'we called you'
Shada	(consonant double lettering)	e**nn**as	'the people'
Vowel length	(vowel double lettering)	sal**aa**m	'peace'

NOTES

*We are indebted to Barbara Johnstone and two anonymous reviewers for their very careful reading of the first draft and their suggestions for revision.

[1]We recognize that there exist variant forms of *inshallah*, as we use here, that may be transcribed in a number of different ways (e.g. *inshaalla*, *inshalla*, *insha'Allah*). In the transcription the spelling reflects possible variant articulations. In quotations from other sources, we retain the original spelling.

[2]The apparently increasing ubiquity of *inshallah*, at least in the Egyptian context, is captured in this observation by an American journalist in Cairo:

there has been *inshallah* creep, to the extreme. It is now attached to the answer to any question, past, present and future. What's your name, for example, might be answered "Muhammad, *inshallah*" … *Inshallah* has become the linguistic equivalent of the head scarf on women and the prayer bump … on men. (Slackman 2008)

[3]One such example (reported by Rachid Wadia in Morrow 2006:84–85) shows the ubiquity of references to Allah, observed in a vegetable *sūq* (market) in Settat, Morocco.

Buyer: Kam al-batātā?
"How much are the potatoes?"

Seller: Twakkal 'alā Allāh.
"You put your faith in Allah." [Meaning: offer me a price]

Buyer: Dirhamein b'kilo.
"Two dirhams a kilo."

Seller: Allāh yjīb rās al-māl.
"May Allāh bring my expenses." [Meaning: at this price, I can't recoup my cost]

Buyer: Allāh yahdīk. Allāh yaj 'al al-bāraka.
"May Allah direct you, Allah provides enough." [Meaning: Oh, come on, Allah provides.]

Seller: Allāh yahdina kāmlīn, wa lakin, wallāh ma wasalt hta rās al-māl.
"May Allah direct us all, but by Allah, you didn't even reach my expenses" [Meaning: Your price was far too low.]

Buyer: Ma krahnāsh sīdi. Allāh yi'āwn.
         "I can't be pushed further, Sir. May Allah help you!" [Meaning: No deal!]

As Gilsenan (1983:177) remarks, in such contexts, "transactions are marked by language in which reiterations of pious formulas and the swearing of religious oaths on the Quran and the Prophet are an integral part. The fact that they are conventional, are formulas, and are constantly and automatically produced is testimony to their absorption into life and not to a superficiality or insignificance."

[4]For work on the use of invocations in written Arabic, see Al-Khatib 1997, 2001. For a summary of research on how Arabic literature reflects basic cultural values, language and verbal communication, and nonverbal and paralinguistic patterns, see Feghali 1997.

[5]English, of course, is largely lacking in such expressions, but perhaps the closest English equivalent would be the appropriateness of "[God] bless you!" after someone sneezes—and, even then, the reference to God is, in modern English usage, deleted. It would seem that such references (apart from in profanities, and exclamations such as "Good God!") are now as obsolete in English as they are ubiquitous in Arabic.

To take one example:

> The most frequent use of *'Alla ya'tik l'afye* is probably as a salutation to someone you know who is obviously doing some fairly heavy manual work, e.g. in the garden or in the kitchen. It may also be said to someone who is no longer working but has obviously just been working. To continue the garden and kitchen examples, if there is a pile of weeds just pulled up or a complicated dish just prepared, the salutation would be appropriate to the person who has finished the job, and it could be interpreted as a kind of congratulation or praise. If the work has been done for the speaker, the formula is understood as a thank you. Some people use the formula also for hard mental work, for example to a university student who has been studying for hours. Finally, it may be used in encouragement to someone who is about to start a difficult task. (Ferguson 1983:69)

[6]See Appendix 1 for information about the transcription conventions used in this article. Each line of Arabic transcript in the text is followed by two lines of English. The first is a literal word-by-word translation; the second is an idiomatic English translation, which is transcribed, like the Arabic utterance, according to the conventions devised by Gail Jefferson (see Appendix 1) so as to facilitate the understanding and analysis of the Arabic talk, such as displayed below:

(a) (Helani: AR5:21)

> AR: raħu ktee:r mnel Soriyi::n =
>   left a lot of the Syrians
>   **a lo:t of the Syria::ns (have) left=**

In Arabic standard and colloquial speech, the verbal clause is headed by a verb that is followed by its subject. The example above shows that the verb *raħu* 'left' precedes its subject *Soriyi::n* 'Syrians,' which is not how the subject and verb are ordered in English; hence, we reverse this order in the idiomatic English translation. However, in cases when the order of words has an interactional bearing on the talk, the order is preserved in the idiomatic English translation, as in the following case:

> MA: [El] qešm   shlo:n.
>   The department how is
>   **[The] department ho:w is (it).**

We find here that the noun phrase *El qešm* 'The department' precedes the question word *shlo:n* 'how,' although question words in Modern Standard and Colloquial Arabic standardly appear in turn-initial

position (Cuvalay-Haak 1997:19–20). However, for analytic purposes relevant to our discussion of topic change, we leave the order of words in the idiomatic English translation as they occur in the Arabic talk when this word order is consequential to our analysis.

[7]Levantine Arabic is the collective name for the group of Arabic varieties spoken in the eastern Mediterranean coastal strip known as the Levant, that is, in western Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, western Jordan, Israel, and Cyprus.

[8]Hana's talk combines features of both Syrian and urban Palestinian Arabic, as her father is Syrian and her mother Palestinian (see n. 11). Following usual practice, names have been anonymized.

[9]In Syrian Arabic, the discourse marker *ya'ni* may often preface turns that provide the upshot of the previous multi-unit turn. The following excerpt is a case in point.

(*Stocks in store, from Al-Khalil (2005:161); TH works in a shoe shop.*)

1	BL:	Hallá yimken ma ğayyaron el-walla:de: hinni hado:l hinni
2		(0.4)
3	TH:	Waáafna 'an el-walla:de: ma: 'ad žibna ↓walla:de: (0.6) fi: 'anna
4		kti:r bđa:'a: koll illi sha:yfu fo:ó kullu walla:de: (0.6) ↑ma:
5		ha:da, ha:da: niswa:ne: ho:n bass hadi:k el-žiha il- il-'ulab el-
6	→	malya:ni fi: žoze:n žo:ze:n (1.5) **ya'ne:** keef ma: ka:n 'andu bmi:t
7		álf walla:de:
8		(0.5)
9	BL:	Áaxi: biddu yiksaħ is-su:ó Ábo Karam

1	BL:	Hallá I think he did not change the children's they are the same
2		(0.4)
3	TH:	We have stopped the children's shoes we no longer bring ↓children's (0.6) we have
4		plenty in sto:ck all what you see up there is children's (0.6) ↑not
5		these, these are ladies' here only on that side the- the full boxes
6	→	there are two pairs in each (1.5) **ya'ne:** at lea:st he has children's shoes which are
7		worth a hundred thousand
8		(0.5)
9	BL:	My brother Ábo Karam wants to destroy the market

[10]Helani (2008:54ff.) examines other uses of religious expressions in Arabic talk from a conversation-analytic perspective, such as in greetings and closing sequences.

[11]The recordings were made in three households: one of a Syrian family who had moved from Aleppo to the UK two years previously, and the two others of families living in Aleppo.

The data collected were overwhelmingly from Syrian speakers, although some of our recordings included speakers of urban Palestinian Arabic, the two Levantine dialects being mutually intelligible. The extent to which the practices detailed here are to be found in all vernacular dialects of Arabic, however, remains to be empirically determined. With respect to the mutual intelligibility of Arabic dialects, the clearest division is between the Maghrebi dialects and those of the Middle East. Holes (2004:3–4) states:

It is not … surprising to find that the varieties of Arabic spoken at the extreme peripheries of [North Africa and the Middle East] differ from each other considerably, and certainly to the point of mutual unintelligibility if we were to compare what might be called the plain uneducated vernaculars—say, that of an Omani nomad with that of a Moroccan townsman from Marrakesh. In practice, in the modern world, a number of factors work to reduce the effect of such geographical differences.

As Helani (2008:42) notes, education and television have been two such factors. For example, he states that 'the vernacular dialects of Arabic spoken in Egypt and Syria are almost entirely understandable to the vast majority of Arabic speakers", and further that mutual intelligibility is the case for "most dialects of Arabic spoken in the Middle East" (2008:22).

[12]As is evident in the data, all but one of our exemplars uses some combination of *inshallah* in the turn following possible sequence closure. The exception to this is extract (6), where, after possible sequence closure, the recipient moves to underline closure with *okay yalla sidi Alla ywafé* 'Okay *yalla sidi* (may) God help' and receives the response °*Alla(hh) yesla[mak]*° '(may) God save you.' For this reason, we prefer the generic term "invocation" to refer to what is overwhelmingly accomplished in our data by *inshallah* and its cognate forms.

[13]Hearable as heading towards *biézn Ellah* 'with the permission of God.'

[14]Indeed, in discussing the ORAL qualities of Arabic WRITTEN texts, Johnstone refers to the "formulaic, repetitive, paratactic quality of M(odern) S(tandard) A(rabic) writing" (1990:229), qualities that are much in evidence here.

[15]Ayham is here offering to provide an account of the occasion that demanded his having a video camera, an account that is produced, as line 20 projects, in a multi-unit turn (data not shown).

[16]El Bayati is one of the best-known Arab poets, whose work is taught in most universities in the Arab-speaking world.

[17]This is the Teaching Assistants' Competition, in which the person referred to was accepted in aesthetics.

[18]As Helani (2008:19) notes, a reciprocal *esh axbarak* 'how are you' inquiry is often prefaced by or appended with *ente* 'you,' which we here register in the colloquial English translation with a stress on *you* to capture Schegloff's (1996:130) analysis of similar questions in English.

[19]This is a reference to William Faulkner, the subject of Abdullah's doctoral research.

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