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Multifunctionality of *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic: A Discourse-Pragmatic Perspective

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Abstract: The present study explored the pragmatic functions of *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic. The data consisted of 175 tokens of *MʕIif* compiled from naturally occurring interactions among speakers in the sample. The objective of the present research was to investigate the pragmatic functions of *MʕIif* through a qualitative discourse-analytic approach, supported by descriptive quantitative analysis. Findings revealed that the Jordanian speakers in the sample utilized this discourse marker to perform 11 pragmatic functions: reassurance, politeness marker of requests, consolation, apology, disapproval, disagreement, asking for permission, conflict-calming, threat-making, turn-taking, and conversational closing. The data also showed that some functions, such as consolation, politeness markers of request, reassurance, and apology, were produced more frequently than others (e.g., disapproval and disagreement), which may reflect broader cultural values of harmony, solidarity, tolerance, and empathy. The study also suggests a possible association between gender and the distribution of these functions. The study indicates that women tended to use *MʕIif* to perform politeness and supportive functions more than men did. Using a three-domain framework (facework-oriented functions, interactional management functions, and stance-marking and evaluative functions), the analysis of the research outcomes demonstrates that *MʕIif* serves as a multifunctional pragmatic marker and that its interpretation depends on the situation or context.

Keywords: Discourse Markers, Jordanian Arabic, *MʕIif*, Multifunctionality, Pragmatics

1. Introduction

Discourse markers (DMs) are a class of expressions widely recognized for playing an important role in connecting discourse, organizing conversations, and conveying interpersonal meanings (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999). Even though these expressions are syntactically optional, they play a significant role in maintaining and organizing interaction (Fraser, 1999). One distinct feature of DMs is multifunctionality, as they are adapted to perform different pragmatic functions in different situations (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999; Andersen, 2001; Brinton, 1996). Several scholars have examined the function of discourse markers from different viewpoints (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999; Blakemore, 1987; Brinton, 1996; Hansen, 2006). Schiffrin (1987: 31) describes discourse markers as "sequentially dependent elements that bracket units of talk". This perspective focuses on the function of discourse markers as a means of connecting and organizing discourse so it flows naturally from one speaker to the next. Fraser (1999) presented another perspective by saying that discourse markers guide the hearer to interpret an utterance as it relates to a previous utterance.

While Schiffrin (1987) and Fraser (1999) emphasized the role of discourse markers in shaping and managing conversations, other authors have discussed their functioning within the framework of Relevance Theory (Blakemore 1987). These scholars suggest that the use of discourse markers helps constrain the hearer's interpretation, making the interaction more relevant. In addition, according to Brinton (1996), discourse markers are pragmatic devices that serve to express politeness, attitude, harmony, and solidarity. Hansen (2006) underscores their role in achieving interactional and interpersonal coherence. All of these approaches highlight the key role of DMs in spoken interaction, not only in what they literally mean but also in how they function across different contexts. Jordanian Arabic contains numerous DMs, suggesting that interaction in this variety is relational. Many discourse markers used in Jordanian Arabic, like, hasa "now" (Al Kayed, 2021), yalla "come on" (Al Kayed, 2023), mashi "okay" (Al-Shishtawi, 2020), and bas "enough" (Qaishat & Al-Hyari, 2002), are used to perform different functions such as expressing politeness, taking turns, ending a conversation, showing agreement, expressing threat, etc. The study of these DMs in Jordanian Arabic demonstrates the significant functions of these markers in social interaction. However, the DM *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic is under-researched and lacks the scholarly attention it deserves. Thus, there is a need to investigate the DM *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic, as it contributes to understanding the pragmatic system of Jordanian Arabic and its discourse markers.

The current study fills this gap by exploring the pragmatic functions of *MʕIif* in daily interactions in Jordanian Arabic. Rather than aiming to provide a comprehensive or exhaustive classification, the present study seeks to offer an initial, data-driven mapping of the pragmatic functions of *MʕIif* as they emerge in naturally occurring interactions. In doing so, it contributes a context-sensitive and exploratory account that can serve as a foundation for future large-scale and comparative research. It will answer the following questions:

- What are the pragmatic functions of *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic?
- How does *MʕIif* relate to facework, interactional management, and stance?

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- What is the impact of gender on the use of *Mʕlíʃ* in Jordanian Arabic?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical framework

The current study adopts a three-domain functional typology (politeness theory, conversation analysis, and stance-taking) to account for the multifunctionality of the DM *Mʕlíʃ*.

2.1.1. Facework-Oriented Functions

The concept of facework is a fundamental element in the study of the function of *Mʕlíʃ,* particularly in managing interpersonal relationships through communication. This area of study is based on what is called politeness theory, particularly within Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of communication, which defines FTAs and strategies for mitigating FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987) define the two aspects of face: positive face (the desire for approval/acceptance from others) and negative face (the desire for freedom and autonomy from other people's imposition).

Politeness strategies are considered redressive acts, which lessen the effects of FTAs, such as requesting something, issuing an apology, or disagreeing with someone. Within this context, the many uses of *Mʕlíʃ,* e.g., as a request mitigator, apology, reassurance, or consolation, can be interpreted as acting to reduce imposition, repair tensions in the relationship, or increase solidarity among individuals through their use. These uses of *Mʕlíʃ* correspond to classic politeness theories of Brown and Levinson (1987) as well as more contemporary relational approaches to politeness (Locher & Watts, 2005; Kádár & Haugh, 2013) that view politeness as a part of a larger interpersonal negotiation that occurs during discourse. However, facework is only one aspect of *Mʕlíʃʔs* functions. Not every instance of this marker is used for mitigating face threats, and its range of pragmatic functions goes beyond politeness in the traditional sense.

2.1.2. Interactional Management Functions

The second domain involves the function of *Mʕlíʃ* in terms of coordinating and organizing interactional flow within discourse, as opposed to being primarily used as a means of expressing politeness, but rather discourse markers provide a means of assisting speakers in organizing their talk and coordinating their participation. Research into conversation analysis shows that conversation is organized systematically through mechanisms such as turn-taking, organization of sequences, and repair (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Within this framework, markers such as *Mʕlíʃ* play a role in facilitating the ending of a conversation, signalling turn-taking, and managing speaker transitions. Additionally, discourse-pragmatic approaches illustrate how the use of discourse markers contributes to the structure and cohesion of discourse (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999; Hansen, 2006). In this regard, the use of *Mʕlíʃ* in turn-taking and providing closure to a conversation can be conceptualized as strategies for managing social interaction. While these strategies may sometimes overlap with politeness strategies, their focus is on helping to manage social interaction rather than providing face-threat mitigation for participants.

2.1.3. Stance-Marking and Evaluative Functions

Mʕlíʃ may be used as a marker for taking a stance, in which speakers use this marker to index their evaluative, epistemic, or affective position with respect to an interlocutor or proposition. Research on stance demonstrates that speakers are always positioning themselves in relation to what they are saying and with respect to other participants in the interaction (Du Bois, 2007; Kärkkäinen, 2006). Within this domain, *Mʕlíʃ* occurs in contexts of disagreement, disapproval, and occasionally threats. The use of *Mʕlíʃ* in these contexts does not typically serve to mitigate an FTA or to organise discourse, but rather it serves to manifest or frame the speaker's stance. The three frameworks used in this research can help to capture the different functions of the DM Mʕliʃ observed in the data. These frameworks allow for the examination of the role of *Mʕlíʃ* within politeness and relational work while also capturing how *Mʕlíʃ* contributes to the organisation of discourse and the expression of stance.

2.2. Discourse markers in Jordanian Arabic

Numerous studies have examined the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in Jordanian Arabic (Huneety, Alkhawaldeh, & Mashaqba, 2023; Alkarazoun & Riziq, 2025; Alghazo, Alkhatib, Rababáh, & Algazo, 2025). These studies can be grouped according to the main pragmatic functions that discourse markers perform in interaction. A number of studies have focused on discourse markers as tools for organizing discourse and managing conversational flow (Kärkkäinen, 2006; Huneety, Alkhawaldeh, & Mashaqba, 2023; Alkarazoun & Riziq, 2025; Alghazo, Alkhatib, Rababáh, & Algazo, 2025). For instance, Al Kayed (2021) investigated the marker hasa ("now") within Relevance Theory, indicating that it was used to perform five main functions: showing disagreement, marking a reason, opening markers, ideational shifting, and orientation shifting. In a subsequent study, Al Kayed (2023) explored the DM yalla and found that it was employed to signal a topic shift, indicate the end of a conversation, yield a turn, take turns, and initiate a topic. Similarly, Al-Daher et al. (2024) investigated halaʔ ("now"), identifying its syntactic behavior and discoursal functions in natural conversations. The study identified six pragmatic functions: marking shifts in the participation framework, introducing a contrast or comparison, listing, changing a topic, marking disagreement, explanations or clarifications, and producing reasons. In addition, Qaishat and Al-Hyari (2002) studied bas ("enough") and found that it served functions such as ending a conversation, reasoning, condition, and conjunction, all of which contribute to structuring discourse.

Other studies have emphasized the role of discourse markers in expressing stance and emotional meanings. For example, Al-Shishtawi (2020) examined the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker mashi "walking" in Jordanian Arabic. The compiled mini-corpus consisted of 400 instances taken from the website Arabicorpus. The study found an impressive range of 28 pragmatic functions, including threat, walking, approval, not bad, behavior, execution, contentment, confirmation, acceptance, and irony. Other studies focused on less frequent but culturally salient markers. Hamdan and Abu-Rumman (2020) examined Yahummalali, revealing its use in conveying dissatisfaction, disappointment, dismay, regret, surprise, anger, sarcasm, jealousy, shock, and unhappiness. More recently, Hamdan et al. (2025) analyzed *away* as it occurred in real-life situations. The study showed that "away" was employed to signal reserved approval, indicate interest, express confirmation, convey irritation, and show understanding, depending on the conversational setting.

A further line of research has explored discourse markers as politeness and mitigation devices. Kanakri and Al-Harahsheh (2013) explored ʔa:di ("normal/fine") in Jordanian Arabic, showing that it served different functions such as expressing consolation, asking for permission, indicating disapproval, showing disappointment, and expressing courtesy. In a recent study, Al Rousan and Sharar (2024) studied the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker basita in Jordanian Arabic. The data were compiled from 70 conversations containing the DM basita. The study elicited 11 different functions of basita, such as providing reassurance, showing disappointment, making a threat, providing consolation, expressing irony, signaling insufficiency, showing courtesy, offering assistance, and expressing mitigation. A number of specialized studies also highlighted the multifunctionality of bas. Ennasser and Hijazin (2021) conducted a detailed pragmatic analysis of bas, identifying twelve functions, including indicating insufficiency of information, denying expectation, signalling a topic shift, making a repair, showing a threat, returning to main topic, indicating a completion of cognitive process, mitigating a face-threatening act (FTA), acting as expressive marker, a filler marker, modifier, and directive marker.

Some studies have also highlighted the role of discourse markers in expressing logical relations between ideas. More recently, Alqahtani (2023) analyzed baʕdin, using a small corpus consisting of 105 tweets. The study found that bʕdın served different pragmatic functions, including a marker of result, a marker of reason, a marker of orientation shift, a marker of disagreement, a conditional marker, and a marker of agreement. Similarly, earlier findings on bas (Qaishat & Al-Hyari, 2002) also showed its use in expressing reasoning, condition, and exception. Despite the breadth of research on Jordanian DMs, *Mʕlif* has yet to be systematically identified and classified. Most studies ignored it, leaving its pragmatic functions under-researched. Thus, the present study aims to address this gap to enrich the analysis of discourse markers in Jordanian Arabic and to help cross-pragmatic studies to investigate how a discourse marker may serve different functions in different languages and dialects.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The present study adopts a primarily qualitative, discourse-analytic approach to investigate the pragmatic functions of *Mʕlif* in Jordanian Arabic. To identify the pragmatic function of each occurrence of *Mʕlif*, an interpretive analysis of each instance was conducted within its conversational context. The frequency and percentage of identified functions were documented as descriptive statistics to capture distributional patterns; however, the intention of these descriptive analyses is to assist in identifying patterns, not to use them as grounds for inferential generalizations. This study draws upon three theoretical frameworks: conversation analysis, politeness theory, and stance theory. In addition, this study employs a naturalistic, observational design, focusing on *Mʕlif* as produced in spontaneous conversations rather than through experimental or elicited means; therefore, the findings are intended to be exploratory and contextually bound.

3.2. Data Collection

3.2.1. Sampling Procedure

The sampling followed an opportunistic but guided approach. Interactions were integrated into the sample if they: 1) occurred naturally (i.e., no researcher involvement), 2) included the discourse marker *Mʕlif* clearly within the appropriate context, and 3) provided sufficient contextual discourse beyond the 3rd point described above to aid in a pragmatic interpretation. While sampling was not statistically controlled, every effort was made to collect interactions across different social situations to maximize contextual diversity and reduce situational bias.

3.2.2. Recording and Transcription

Data were collected through a combination of short audio recordings and contemporaneous field notes. When recording was not feasible, detailed notes were taken immediately following the interaction. Transcriptions focused on capturing the immediate conversational context surrounding each instance of *Mʕlif*, rather than full-length conversations, in order to preserve the pragmatic environment in which the marker occurred. All examples were subsequently translated into English.

3.2.3. Settings

The data were collected between June and October 2025 across a variety of naturally occurring social contexts, including Domestic settings (homes and family gatherings), Educational settings (classrooms, universities, student interactions), Commercial settings (markets, cafés, and shops), and workplace settings (offices and semi-formal professional exchanges). This range of settings was intended to capture variation in interactional norms across different social domains.

3.2.4. Corpus Description

The corpus consisted of 4,527 spoken-language words, including 175 instances (tokens) of *Mʕlif.* A token was defined as each identifiable occurrence of *Mʕlif* in conversational turns. Thus, if more than one instance of *Mʕlif* appeared during a single interaction but performed distinct pragmatic functions, they were counted separately as different tokens. Each token of *Mʕlif* was treated as an analytical unit along with its immediately surrounding context.

3.3. Participants

The dataset included interactions involving Jordanian Arabic speakers of varying ages and social backgrounds. Due to the naturalistic and non-intrusive nature of data collection, participants were not recruited through systematic sampling procedures, and individual speakers were not tracked longitudinally. Therefore, the reported number of approximately 200 participants should be understood as an estimate based on observed interactions rather than a precise count. It is possible that some individuals contributed more than one token.

3.4. Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed several stages designed to ensure transparency, reliability, and analytical rigor in identifying the pragmatic functions of *Mʕlif.* All occurrences of *Mʕlif* in the data were first identified and extracted from their immediate conversational contexts. All instances of *Mʕlif* were transcribed and translated into English, with contextual information to allow for the pragmatic interpretation of each occurrence. Each occurrence of *Mʕlif* and its surrounding discourse constituted a unit of analysis. The analysis adopted an inductive, data-driven coding approach. Rather than applying a predetermined

classification scheme, functional categories were derived from the data through close examination of each token in context. Initial coding focused on identifying the interactional role performed by *Mʕlif,* guided by pragmatic criteria including (1) the speaker's communicative intention, (2) the sequential position of the utterance within the interaction, and (3) its observable effect on the hearer and the unfolding discourse.

In the first stage of analysis, a provisional functional label was assigned to each instance of *Mʕlif,* resulting in 14 categories. These initial categories underwent iterative refinements through comparative analysis of the instances to identify distinctions in their meaning. Categories that had considerable functional overlap or could not be reliably distinguished from one another were merged; conversely, categories that demonstrated unique patterns were retained. Through the initial analysis of all *Mʕlif* tokens in the dataset, a set of nine functionally distinct categories emerged, which provided a more accurate representation of the pragmatic uses of *Mʕlif* found in the dataset. Following the development of the coding scheme, all tokens were assigned to one of the nine primary functions according to the refined category set. Two trained independent coders, who were provided with descriptions and examples of the categories, did the coding. Both coders assigned only one primary function to each token based on the dominant role that the token played in interaction.

For *Mʕlif* tokens where it was not clear which primary function the token should be assigned to, coders used the dominant role that the token played in a sequence of turns to determine the primary function of the token. Any ambiguous coding resulted in the designation of that token as 'ambiguous'. This was done via a separate discussion among coders, during which the coders reached a final agreement on the primary classification of *Mʕlif* tokens. In the situations where tokens could fulfill several pragmatic roles, their main function was identified as the one that had the major interactional impact in a given sequence. Any ambiguous cases were highlighted at the coding stage and later on resolved through discussions with the coders. The final categories assigned were based on consensus to ensure consistency in category application.

Inter-coder reliability was assessed by comparing the independent classifications produced by the two coders across all tokens. Agreement was calculated using percentage agreement, yielding a concordance rate of approximately 90%. Discrepancies were examined and resolved through iterative discussion, leading to the refinement of category boundaries where necessary. To further enhance the robustness of the classification scheme, a team of four linguists specializing in pragmatics and discourse analysis conducted a review of the finalized coding. Their input helped refine the definitions of the categories and ensure that the theoretical and analytical differences between the functions are accurate. Following the finalization of coding, the distribution of pragmatic functions was quantified using frequencies and percentages. These descriptive statistics were used to identify dominant patterns in the data and to support the qualitative analysis. The findings were then interpreted using three frameworks: conversation analysis, politeness theory, and stance theory. Given the observational and exploratory nature of the data, the analysis emphasized context-based interpretation and analytical transparency over statistical generalization.

3.5. Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability, two independent coders classified all instances of *Mʕlif*, achieving an agreement rate of approximately 90%, which indicates a high level of consistency in functional categorization. Several steps were taken to enhance validity. First, the use of naturally occurring data supported ecological validity by reflecting authentic language use. Second, expert review by four linguists helped refine the classification scheme and reduce individual bias. Third, the integration of qualitative analysis supported by descriptive statistics provided both contextual depth and systematic pattern identification. While strict replicability was limited by the dataset's opportunistic nature, the study ensured methodological transparency in data selection, coding, and analysis, enabling analytical comparability with future research.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Given the study's naturalistic, observational design, particular attention was paid to ethical considerations related to privacy, consent, and data handling. The data were collected in everyday social contexts where interactions occurred spontaneously, and no sensitive personal information was intentionally elicited. In public and semi-public settings (e.g., cafés, markets, and university spaces), interactions were observed in contexts where participants could reasonably expect to be overheard. In more private settings (e.g., homes and small group interactions), verbal consent was obtained where feasible prior to recording. In cases where prior consent was not practicable due to the spontaneous nature of interaction, only non-sensitive excerpts were documented, and no identifying information was recorded. All data were anonymized during transcription. Personal names and any identifying details were removed or replaced with pseudonyms to ensure participant confidentiality. The examples presented in this study were limited to short excerpts that could not be traced to specific individuals. The study adhered to general ethical guidelines for linguistic research involving naturalistic observation, prioritizing minimal intrusion, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' privacy.

4. Findings

4.1. The pragmatic functions of *Mʕlif* in Jordanian Arabic

For analytical clarity, the identified functions were interpreted within a three-domain framework: (1) facework-oriented functions (e.g., consolation, request mitigation, reassurance, asking for permission, calming a conflict, apology), (2) interactional management functions (e.g., turn-taking, conversational closure), and (3) stance-marking and evaluative functions (e.g., disapproval, disagreement, threat). These results support the multifunctionality of *Mʕlif* as a discourse marker in Jordanian conversation. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1: The pragmatic functions of *Mʕlif*

Pragmatic function	Frequency	Percentage
Providing consolation	34	19%
Politeness marker of requests	30	17%
Providing reassurance	27	15%
Expressing apology	23	13%
Expressing disapproval	14	8%

Pragmatic function	Frequency	Percentage
Asking for permission	13	7%
Indicating disagreement	9	5%
Taking turns	8	5%
conversational closure	7	4%
Calming a conflict	6	3%
Making a threat	4	2%
Total	175	100%

Source: Developed by the researcher based on the analyzed dataset.

Table 1 indicates that *MʕIif* was mostly used for facework-oriented functions, especially in situations involving consolation, request mitigation, reassurance, and apologizing — these functions comprised 64% of the total occurrences. The high frequency of these functions demonstrated a tendency to use the discourse marker for solidarity purposes and to save the hearer's face. In contrast, the less frequent functions, including disagreement, threat, turn-taking, and conversational closure, illustrated how *MʕIif* operates across both stance marking and interaction management, highlighting its flexibility beyond facework-oriented functions. Table 1 alos revealed that the most frequent functions of *MʕIif* fall within the facework-oriented domain, particularly in contexts involving consolation, request mitigation, reassurance, and apology, as they account for 64% of all occurrences of *MʕIif*. The frequent use of these functions suggests a tendency toward using the discourse marker to show solidarity and save the hearers' face. Less frequent functions, such as disagreement, threats, turn-taking, and conversational closure, illustrated how *MʕIif* operates across stance-marking and interactional management domains, highlighting its flexibility beyond facework-oriented uses. In addition, Table 1 showed that a relatively small number of tokens represented certain functions, such as turn-taking, conversational closure, making threats, and calming a conflict. These low-frequency categories should be interpreted as tentative, exploratory observations rather than as robust or fully established functional patterns.

4.1.1. Providing Consolation

Providing consolation was the most frequent function of *MʕIif* (19%) in the dataset. It was used to express sympathy and to offer hope, assistance, and encouragement after loss, pain, or disappointment. Consider the following example:

Example (1)

Ahmed: خسرت امبارح ألف دينار بالبورصة

xsirt ʔmbaːrħ ʔlf djnaːr bilbwrsˁah

"I lost a thousand dinars in the stock market yesterday."

Noor: معلش. تعوض المرة الجاية

MʕIif. tʕawwaḍ ʔlmarr ʔldʒaːj

"Don't worry. You'll make it back next time."

This conversation occurred between two friends: Noor and Ahmed. Ahmed told his friend Noor that he lost 1 thousand JD in the stock market. Noor employed *MʕIif* to encourage her friend and to give him hope that he will compensate for his loss next time. The use of *MʕIif* was functional, as it appears to reduce the negative impact of the event and to focus on hope and optimism.

Example (2)

Shahid: ما زبطت بالامتحان

maː zabtˁt bilʔimtħaːn

"I didn't do well on the exam."

Farah: معلش. رح تزبطي بالفاينل

MʕIif. raħ tzˁbṭi bilfaːjnl

"Do not worry. You'll do better in the final."

This was an exchange between two colleagues at the university. Shahid did not do well on the midterm exam, and Farah sympathized with her and tried to encourage her, telling her she would do better on the final exam. Farah used *MʕIif* to save the face of her colleague by offering sympathy and support. The use of this discourse marker to provide consolation was consistent with Brown & Levinson's (1987) notion of positive politeness, which aims to save the hearer's positive face by reinforcing self-esteem and highlighting hope. The use of discourse markers, such as *MʕIif* and similar markers, was found in Arabic discourse (Al-Shishtawi, 2020) to reduce pain and maintain harmony and solidarity.

4.1.2. Politeness marker of a request

The findings of the study indicated that 17% of *MʕIif's* occurrences were used as a politeness marker to reduce and mitigate the impact of the request. The speakers in the following examples used *MʕIif* as a mitigating device to make their request more polite.

Example (3)

معلش. ممكن تعطيني دفترك؟

MʕIif. mumkin tʕtˁiːni daftarak?

"Excuse me, could you give me your notebook?"

In the previous example, a classmate asked his friend to lend him her notebook. The speaker used *MʕIif* as a mitigating device to reduce the force of the speech act of a request.

Example (4)

معلش تعطيني كاسة قهوة؟

MʕIif. tʕtˁi:ni ka:sit ʔahweh?

"Excuse me; could you give me a cup of coffee?"

In example 4, a customer asked a waiter for a cup of coffee. The speaker used *MʕIif* as a politeness marker to soften his request. In the previous examples, *MʕIif* functions as a politeness marker that softens the impact of a request and reduces its force on the addressees' negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Here, *MʕIif* operates as a lexical hedge 'excuse me' in English, indicating politeness in conversations. Similar findings were reported in other Arabic dialects, such as Egyptian Arabic and Gulf Arabic (maʕlesh) (Al-Khazraji, 2019), indicating that this discourse marker was used to express politeness.

4.1.3. Providing Reassurance

One of the main functions observed in the dataset of *MʕIif* in Jordanian Arabic was to reassure others that what happened was not a serious problem. It appears to be used as a soothing strategy to decrease anxiety and the seriousness of an issue. The findings revealed that this strategy was used 27 times (15%). Consider the following example.

Example (5)

Child: بابا كبيت العصير

ba:ba:! kbe:t ʔlʕaṣˁi:r

"Daddy, I spilled the juice."

Father: معلش. ولا يهمك. بشتريلك غيره

MʕIif. wala jhimmak. bʃtiri:lak ɣe:ruh

"It's okay. Do not worry about it. I'll get you another one."

The previous example was a conversation between a father and his child. The child spilled the juice, and the father comforted him, saying not to worry about it. The father used *MʕIif* to minimize the child's feeling of guilt and anxiety by reassuring his child that spilling the juice was not a serious problem and could be easily fixed. The use of *MʕIif* to provide reassurance aligns with the positive politeness notion, which focuses on expressing support and empathy. Moreover, providing reassurance with discourse markers such as *MʕIif* echoes Jordanian cultural norms of tolerance and resilience (Kádár & Haugh, 2013).

4.1.4. Expressing Apology

An apology is a strategy used by a speaker to admit the responsibility of an offense and therefore to mend relational damage to the hearer. The data showed that in 13% of tokens, *MʕIif* appeared to function as an apology marker, as shown in the following example:

Example (6)

Lama: استيننتك اكثر من ساعة. وين كنتي؟

ʔstajjanitk ʔaktar min saːʕa. weːn kunti?

"I waited for you for over an hour. Where were you?"

Malk: معلش. تأخرت شوي، كان فيه أزمة.

MʕIif. taʔaxxart ʃway, kaːn fiːh ʔazmeh

"Sorry about that. I was a bit late; there was some traffic."

This was an exchange between two friends. Malk apologized to her friend and explained why she was late. Here, *MʕIif* was used to express an apology and to minimize conflict with the hearer. The findings of the study showed that the discourse marker *MʕIif* was employed as an apology marker, with the same function as "sorry" in English. It aims to repair positive face (by showing concern for approval) and negative face (by acknowledging imposition). In cross-cultural studies, the use of discourse markers such as *MʕIif* to express apologies plays a significant role in maintaining understanding, agreement, and harmony (Holmes, 1995; Culpeper, 2011).

4.1.5. Expressing Disapproval

Disapproval is an expressive speech act that is used by speakers to express their disapproval or negative evaluation of a behavior or an action done by others (Searle, 1976). This speech act threatens the positive face of hearers. The results of the study found that disapproval was used in 8% of *MʕIif's* tokens.

Example (7)

Driver A: معلش ليش تصف مكاني

MʕIif, leːʃ tṣuff makaːni?

"Seriously? Why are you parking in my spot?"

Driver B: أنا اسف

ʔnaː ʔaːsif

"I am sorry."

In this example, driver A complained that another driver had taken his private parking spot. He used *MʕlifMʕlif* to express disapproval, framing the complaint and signaling an evaluative stance toward the situation. Rather than functioning solely to reduce confrontation, *MʕlifMʕlif* can be understood here as modulating the speaker's stance. This use is compatible with observations in interactional pragmatics that certain markers can temper or frame potentially confrontational acts without necessarily neutralizing their force (Culpeper, 2011; Bousfield, 2008).

4.1.6. Asking for Permission

Asking for permission is a speech act in which the speaker asks the hearer to give him/her permission to do an action without imposing authority or restricting the hearer's freedom. The data showed that *MʕlifMʕlif* was employed in 13 instances.

Example (8)

معلش أروح على عرس صاحبتي؟

MʕlifMʕlif, ʔaruːħ ʕala ʕurs ṣaːħbti?

"Is it okay if I go to my friend's wedding?"

In the previous example, a daughter asked her mother for permission to attend her friend's wedding. The speaker used *MʕlifMʕlif* to ask for permission while respecting her mother's authority. The use of this marker in permission-seeking contexts aligns with the notion of negative politeness. It also mirrors Jordanian cultural norms of respect for authority and social hierarchy (Hamdan & Abu-Rumman, 2020).

4.1.7. Indicating Disagreement

Disagreement is a speech act that threatens the hearer's positive face as it is used to reject opinions and propositions of others (Malamed, 2010). The data showed that this strategy accounted for (5%) of all *MʕlifMʕlif's* instances, often used in friendly exchanges as shown in the following example.

Example (9)

Mohammad: ما حبيت الكافيه اللي رحنا عليه امبارح

ma ħabbayt il-kafeeh illi ruħna ʕaleh ʔmbaːrħ

"I didn't like the café we went to yesterday."

Marwan: لا. معلش، بس المكان كثير حلو

la. *MʕlifMʕlif*, bas il-makaan kteːr ħilu

"No. Come on, it is actually a nice place."

This was a conversation between two friends in which Marwan disagreed with his friend about a café. The speaker used *MʕlifMʕlif* to express disagreement, signaling a stance of non-alignment with the prior utterance. The analysis of the data suggests that *MʕlifMʕlif* can function as a marker of stance, framing the disagreement and modulating its delivery. *MʕlifMʕlif* in this context serves to index the speaker's evaluative position rather than functioning primarily as a face-saving device. (Schiffrin, 1987; Fraser, 1999).

4.1.8. Calming a Conflict

Conflict-calming is a speech act performed by a third party to reduce conflict and preserve harmony. Although relatively infrequent in the dataset (n = 6), *MʕlifMʕlif* appeared, in some cases, to function as a marker of conflict mitigation or de-escalation. These instances occurred in interactional contexts where tension was present, and the speaker attempted to reduce disagreement or restore conversational balance.

Example (10)

Ali: ما حبيت عرضك. كان غير منظم

ma: ħbeat ʕrdˤk. kaːn ɣear mnðˤm

"I did not like your presentation. It was disorganized."

Jawad: ما بدي نصيحتك

ma: bdj nsˤjħtk

"I do not want your advice."

Kamal: معلش ما كان قصده هو يحاول يساعدك

MʕlifMʕlif, ma: kaːn qaṣduh. hw jħaːwl jsaːʕdk

"It's okay, he didn't mean it. He is trying to help you."

This interaction occurred between colleagues at the university. Ali criticized Jawad's presentation, and Jawad responded negatively to Ali's comment. Kamal used *MʕlifMʕlif* in his speech to mitigate the conflict between them and redirect it towards forgiveness. The use of this marker to calm a conflict between people appears to mirror the discursive politeness (Locher & Watts, 2005), which highlights relational harmony in daily exchanges.

4.1.9. Making a Threat

Although it was represented by only 4 instances in the dataset (n = 4), *MʕlifMʕlif* appeared in some cases to function as a marker of threat. In these instances, the expression occurred in contexts where the speaker adopted a potentially confrontational or warning stance. Consider the following example.

Example (11)

(Context: Sami called his co-worker multiple times to ask him a favor. However, he did not answer his calls. When they met at work, Sami threatened him that he would not answer his calls in the future.)

Sami: معلش. رح تحتاجني وما رح أرد عليك

Mʕlif: raħ tħta:dʒni w ma: raħ ʔrudd ʕale:k

"Just wait. You'll need me one day, and I won't answer you."

This utterance was produced by a speaker engaged in a heated argument with their colleague. By using the expression *Mʕlif*, the speaker framed a threat directed at the co-worker, signaling strong misalignment and negative evaluation. Rather than functioning as a politeness marker, *Mʕlif* in this context contributed to the speaker's interactional positioning, conveying an assertive and potentially hostile stance.

4.1.10. Turn-taking

Discourse markers such as *Mʕlif* may be used by speakers to manage turn-taking and organize the flow of interaction (Sacks et al., 1974). Although not among the most frequent functions (n = 8), *Mʕlif* appeared in some instances to play a role in coordinating speaker transitions. These occurrences suggested that the marker might be used to signal a shift between turns or to negotiate speaking rights within the ongoing interaction, thereby contributing to the organization of conversational exchange.

Example (12)

Context: three friends were sitting in a café discussing the quality of education in Jordan. One of them took his turn to speak, saying:

معلش بدي أحكيلك شي

Mʕlif, biddi ʔaħki:lak ʃi:

"Excuse me, can I tell you something?"

In the previous utterance, the speaker employed *Mʕlif* to take his turn politely among other speakers. *Mʕlif* may function as a polite discourse marker similar to 'excuse me' in English, which is used as a polite discourse marker to manage the flow of conversation (Schiffrin, 1987; Hansen, 2006).

4.1.11. Conversational Closure

Although represented by a small number of instances (n = 7), *Mʕlif* appeared in some cases to function as a marker of conversational closure. In these contexts, it was used to signal the end of a topic or to facilitate the termination of an interaction.

Example (13)

Context: Alaa and Dina were sitting on the campus discussing midterm grades. Dina was late for her grammar lecture so she wanted to end the conversation and leave. She said:

معلش، نحكي بكرة

Mʕlif, naħki bukra

"Okay then, we will talk tomorrow."

In this example, a friend used *Mʕlif* to bring the conversation to a close in a smooth and orderly manner. The marker appeared to facilitate conversational closure by signaling the end of the exchange and coordinating the transition out of the interaction. Such uses were consistent with analyses of discourse markers as markers for structuring talk and managing discourse boundaries, including the closing of conversations (Brinton, 1996).

4.2. Gender variation in *Mʕlif's* patterns

The analysis of the dataset suggested observable differences in the distribution of *Mʕlif* functions across male and female speakers. However, these patterns should be interpreted with caution, as they were based on a relatively small number of tokens and descriptive frequency counts rather than on inferential statistical testing. The findings of the study suggested a possible association between gender and the distribution and function of *Mʕlif*. The data indicated that men used *Mʕlif* in 70 tokens (40%), whereas women used it in 105 tokens (60%). The data also showed that males and females employed *Mʕlif* for 11 functions, but there were differences in their preferences for certain strategies. While men tended to use assertive functions, women tended to use supportive functions (See Table 2 below).

Table 2: Distribution of *Mʕlif* by Gender and Function

Pragmatic Function	Total Tokens	Female n (%)	Male n (%)
Consolation	34	23 (67.6%)	11 (32.4%)
Reassurance	27	19 (70.4%)	8 (29.6%)
Apology	23	15 (65.2%)	8 (34.8%)
Request mitigation	30	18 (60.0%)	12 (40.0%)
Permission-seeking	13	7 (53.8%)	6 (46.2%)
Disapproval	14	5 (35.7%)	9 (64.3%)
Disagreement	9	4 (44.4%)	5 (55.6%)
Conflict calming	6	4 (66.7%)	2 (33.3%)
Turn-taking	8	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Conversational closure	7	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)
Threat	4	1 (25.0%)	3 (75.0%)
Total	**175**	**105 (60.0%)**	**70 (40.0%)**

Source: Developed by the researcher based on the analyzed dataset.

Table 2 showed that women preferred to use *Mʕlif* in supportive roles, such as consolation, reassurance, apology, and request mitigation. While women used consolation in 34 instances (68%), men used it in 23 instances (32%). Similarly, of the 27 tokens of reassurance, 19 (70%) were produced by women and 8 (30%) by men. Additionally, while women employed *Mʕlif* in 15 tokens (65%) of apologies, men used it in only 8 (35%) of apologies. Women also produced request mitigation in 18 occurrences (60%) of *Mʕlif,* men produced 14 tokens (40%). On the other hand, men used the assertive and confrontational roles, such as disapproval and threats, more than women. Men used disapproval in 9 tokens (64%), while women used it in 5 (36%). For rare functions like threats, men used threats in 3 out of 4 instances. The study's findings suggested that gender might play a role in the use of *Mʕlif* functions in daily Jordanian interactions. Whereas men favored roles in the dataset that conveyed confrontation and power, women preferred roles that communicated face-saving acts, highlighting sympathy, harmony, forgiveness, and politeness. Consequently, *Mʕlif* may function as a discourse marker and an index of gender and identity in the dataset.

5. Discussion

The findings should be interpreted as exploratory and indicative, reflecting patterns observed within a relatively small, naturalistic dataset rather than a definitive account of all possible functions of *Mʕlif.* The analysis of the results of the study indicates that *Mʕlif* appears to be a multifunctional discourse marker in the present dataset. Although the word *Mʕlif* literally means "it does not matter" or "it is okay", it appears to be used to express different meanings across pragmatic contexts, such as reassuring, apologizing, and comforting, in addition to acting as a means for turn-taking and showing disagreement. The multifaceted nature of *Mʕlif* suggests that it plays an important role in managing social interaction in Jordanian Arabic.

5.1. *Mʕlif* across three main domains: facework-oriented functions, interactional management functions, and stance-marking functions.

The most frequent uses of *Mʕlif* in the dataset—consolation, reassurance, request mitigation, and apology—fall within the domain of facework-oriented functions. These uses align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of redressive action, as they attend to the interlocutor's positive and/or negative face. In these contexts, *Mʕlif* functions as a marker for expressing empathy, minimizing imposition, and maintaining relational harmony. Using *Mʕlif* for consolation purposes is in line with Brown and Levinson's concept of positive politeness, which reinforces solidarity, reduces disappointment, and provides reassurance. For example, when someone loses one thousand Dinars, their friend might respond by saying *Mʕlif* tʕawwaḍ ʔlmarr ʔldʒaːj, meaning "It will be okay, you'll get it back next time." Thereby, it saves the hearer's positive face by providing hope. Request mitigation and permission seeking can be seen as examples of negative politeness strategies, where they minimize imposition on the hearer. A student, for instance, uses *Mʕlif* in the utterance *Mʕlif mumkin tʕtˤiːni daftarak?* "Excuse me, could you give me your notebook?" to save the negative face of the hearer by softening his/her request. Apologies can function to repair both positive and negative face, addressing both approval and acknowledgment of disruption. For instance, a friend who arrives late apologizes using *Mʕlif*, taʔaxxart ʃway, kaːn fiːh ʔazmeh "Sorry, I was a bit late; there was traffic", directly restoring the need to maintain approval and lessen the inconvenience caused. A second set of functions reflects the role of *Mʕlif* in organizing interaction. Uses such as turn-taking, conversational closure, and permission-seeking illustrate how the marker contributes to the coordination of discourse. These functions are not directly related to facework and are better understood in terms of managing conversational flow and speaker alignment. Finally, *Mʕlif* is used to show disagreement, disapproval, and threats. In these instances, it functions as a stance marker that indicates the evaluative position of the speaker. Although some examples may exhibit some degree of softening, that is not always the case. Therefore, *Mʕlif* cannot be treated as a politeness marker but rather as a contextually shaped marker.

5.2. Cultural values reflected in *Mʕlif*

The analysis of data suggests that the dominant functions of *Mʕlif (*consolation, reassurance, politeness marker of request, and apology) tend to be associated with preserving social cohesion, understanding, acceptance, solidarity, and forgiveness. Additionally, these functions can be interpreted as a mirror of Jordanian tradition and culture, as they may contribute to maintaining social harmony and discouraging conflict while promoting sympathy within social interaction. The analysis also indicates that *Mʕlif* appears in a range of contexts within the dataset, including family and close friends. It is often used in the dataset as a means of providing emotional support, reassurance, and minimizing other people's disappointments. For example, after her friend lost her watch, one friend said *Mʕlif*, raħħ tlaːqjhaː ("it's fine; you will find it") to minimize the loss. Similarly, a wife reassured her husband, saying *Mʕlif* ħabibi ("it's ok honey") when he forgot the groceries, which suggests the importance of emotionally supportive behaviors in interaction between family and friends among Jordanians. Moreover, the analysis indicates that Jordanian speakers in the dataset use *Mʕlif* in formal contexts to show respect for social authority and hierarchies, to lessen the force of a request or an order, and to encourage the listener to engage in polite behaviour. For instance, a client employs *Mʕlif* to mitigate his order and express politeness by saying *Mʕlif, dʒiːbli: kaːsit ʃaːj!* "Excuse me, bring me a cup of tea!" *Mʕlif* can signify cultural values in contexts that are meant to reduce conflict or tension. By using *Mʕlif maː kaːn qaṣduh* "it's okay, he didn't mean it", a speaker not only reduces the tension between the speakers but also maintains cultural values of harmony and tolerance.

5.3. Sociolinguistic variation

One of the study's main findings is the observed gendered distribution of *Mʕlif* in the dataset. While men tended to employ it more frequently in assertive functions such as disapproval (64%) and threats (75%), women tended to use it more often in supportive roles, including consolation (68%) and reassurance (70%). *Mʕlif* is often used by female speakers to express sympathy, encouragement, and support. For example, a female student comforts her friend after an exam failure, saying *Mʕlif*, raħ tzˤbṭi bilfaːjnl "it's okay, you'll do better in the final". These uses reflect values of social cohesion, solidarity, hope, and care.

On the contrary, men more frequently used *Mʕlif* in assertive or confrontational functions. In a heated argument, for example, a male speaker employs *Mʕlif* to disapprove how a stranger spoke with his child by saying *Mʕlif* laː tħkj mʕ ʔbnj hjk "Hey,! do not talk to my kid that way". These findings agree with previous research suggesting that women tend to use supportive and polite strategies more than men (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995; Coates, 2004). This demonstrates that *Mʕlif* can be interpreted as an index of identity in Jordanian Arabic speakers. Although the observed distribution of

functions across genders aligns with patterns reported in previous sociolinguistic research, the findings related to the impact of gender in the distribution of *Mʕlif's* function should be interpreted as exploratory. The dataset does not provide sufficient evidence to support general claims about gendered language use in Jordanian Arabic, but it highlights tendencies that warrant further investigation in larger, more controlled studies.

The findings from this research have several theoretical and practical implications. This study contributes to the growing corpus of research on Arabic discourse markers by providing an in-depth pragmatic analysis of an under-researched discourse marker. The findings also support the use of politeness theory in the Arab world by illustrating how linguistic forms are employed to negotiate face and preserve social harmony. As a result, this research can be useful for foreign language instruction, intercultural communication, and translation professionals, as a better understanding of the multifaceted usages of *Mʕlif* may help enhance students' pragmatic competence and the quality of cross-cultural translations. Furthermore, this research illustrates how discourse markers may function within the Jordanian dialect to reflect social identity, stance, and cultural values within Jordanian society.

6. Limitations And Future Research

The present study has several important limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the size of the corpus is relatively small (175 tokens of *Mʕlif)*. Second, the data were collected through face-to-face interactions but did not include data from digital modes of communication (i.e., social media or instant messaging), in which the use of *Mʕlif* may have different pragmatic functions. Third, several identified functions are represented by a small number of tokens, which limits the strength of conclusions that can be drawn regarding their distribution and interactional significance. These categories should therefore be considered preliminary and subject to confirmation in future research with larger datasets. Additionally, future studies may explore prosodic features and regional variations of *Mʕlif.* Future studies may also examine how this discourse marker is used on social media as a means of expressing social solidarity, harmony, and deference.

7. Conclusion

The current study is one of the first attempts to explore the pragmatic functions of the discourse marker *Mʕlif* in Jordanian Arabic. It analyzed 175 tokens collected from naturally occurring data. The results of the study suggest that *Mʕlif* is a multifunctional marker that operates across three main domains: facework-oriented functions, interactional management functions, and stance-marking functions. The findings indicate that many uses of the DM *Mʕlif* in the dataset fall within the domain of facework-oriented functions (consolation, reassurance, apology, and a marker of politeness). The results indicate that the majority of the uses of the DM are supportive in nature, suggesting the importance of this DM in Jordanian culture for maintaining social harmony, reducing face-threatening acts, and showing empathy. The findings also indicate that this marker can be used in a few instances to perform functions related to stance marking and discourse organization. The study shows that men in the dataset tended to use *Mʕlif* in assertive/confrontational contexts, while women used it to express politeness and provide support.

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