Mahmoud A. Al-Khatib

Politeness in the Holy Quran: A sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective

Abstract: This study investigates politeness in the Holy Quran from a sociopragmatic perspective. Drawing on politeness theory, we examine the text-building mechanisms and functions of a large number of chapters and verses selected from the Holy Quran. Data is analyzed in terms of both Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness and Leech’s maxims of politeness. These two theoretical frameworks have been, so far, attested against data collected from various sources, but no single study has yet used data from any of the Holy books. This paper addresses this issue in light of data drawn from the Holy Quran. The data were analyzed in two main parts: The first included the verses that are concerned with the God-man relationship and the second with the man-man (i.e., interpersonal) relationship. By analyzing the structural and functional features of the verses, the study found a range of various politeness strategies employed for conveying a huge number of divine ethical messages. The study concludes that such a variety of politeness strategies relates strongly to the type of information being conveyed to the addressees. From a theoretical perspective, this paper contributes to the discussions of God-man communication and man-man communication in relation to the negotiation of politeness meaning in the context of religion. The findings presented here bear on orientations toward the importance of studying politeness as a socio-pragmatic phenomenon in relation to religion and morality.

Mahmoud A. Al-Khatib: E-mail: mahmoud@just.edu.jo

1 Introduction

The last few decades witnessed a rapid growth in research into politeness. The subject has been tackled from different standpoints (see, for example, Held 2005; Ide 1989; Brown 1980; Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987; Blum-Kulka 1990; Brown

1 This research project has been conducted during my sabbatical leave (2010/2011). So, I am grateful to Jordan University of Science & Technology for its financial and moral support.
and Gilman 1989; Bargiela-Chiappini 2003; Kasper 1997). Unlike most previous studies, the present study deals with politeness in religious discourse from a socio-pragmatic point of view. It is a study of the way in which people act appropriately and politely according to a set of divine laws as embodied in the Holy Quran.

1.1 Objectives

The present study was conceptualized with the following objectives:

1. To extend two linguistic theories of politeness, namely the face-saving theory of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) and the conversational-maxim model (Leech 1983) to new area of investigation (i.e., religious discourse). This, in turn, may encourage other researchers to test the applicability of these frameworks to similar sociolinguistic phenomena.

2. To show how politeness in the Holy Quran works within two frameworks of communication, namely the God-man relationship and the man-man (i.e., interpersonal) relationship. By God-man relationship, we mean the politeness rules and guidelines that regulate the relationship between man and God in terms of faith, worship, and obedience (i.e., rights and obligations); and by man-man relationship we mean the set of politeness rules that regulate relations between people themselves in terms of rights and obligations from an Islamic point of view. It should be noted here that, as will be seen below, in some cases there is some overlap between the two types of relationships.

3. To examine the various ranges of strategies and substrategies of politeness as used in the Holy Quran, and to show their forms and functions.

Bearing these goals in mind, the study attempts to render a detailed characterization of politeness in this particular type of material and to relate it to a set of theories of politeness that have, so far, been attested against data collected from interpersonal communication. More specifically, it is set out to make a qualitative analysis of the various ranges of strategies and substrategies of speech acts employed in delivering divine massages calling for a harmonious relationship between man and God, on the one hand, and man and man on the other. This study is by no means exhaustive, but is intended as a starting-point to explore certain aspects of politeness as embodied in the Quran.
1.2 Significance of the study

Previous research into politeness has, for the most part, focused on various aspects of politeness of the type taking place in interpersonal communication. To the best of my knowledge, this subject has not been studied before, despite the recent explosion of interest in politeness as a pragmatic and socio-cultural phenomenon. If they have been, their findings are not made known, so the extent of the problem is still non-understandable. It is however worth mentioning that only one study was conducted in the context of Iran on God-man communication. This study tackled the issue from a semiological point of view (Gheituri and Golfam 2009), and examined the appropriateness of the concepts introduced by modern sciences of the sign, particularly by structural and post-structural approaches, to studying God-man communication in the Quran. This phenomenon was studied in terms of two models, i.e., communication as “sending” and communication as “reading.” Gheituri and Golfam noted that these two concepts, which represent an uncompromising dualism in the modern approaches to the sign, come to a compromise in the religious discourse, leading them not merely to conceiving a powerful God but also to a powerful man. Thus, the present exploratory study aims to contribute toward a better understanding of how politeness in this particular type of material (i.e., the Quran) operates.

In addition, as it is an important element in intercultural communication, politeness helps establish, maintain, or consolidate harmonious interpersonal relationships, and reduces conflicts and misunderstandings. This study intends to shed some light on the principles of politeness in Islam, so this work is expected to help people of different cultural backgrounds have a better understanding of the religion, and as such facilitate intercultural communication.

1.3 A socio-religious background

Language never acts separately and individually – it always stands in a tight connection with the culture and religion. Thus, for a better understanding of politeness in Islam, it is worth shedding some light on the socio-religious background of the study.

The Arabic word “Islam” is a verbal noun originating from the triliteral root s-l-m. It is derived from the Arabic verb “aslama” which means, “to give up, to surrender, to resign oneself (to God)” (Islam 2011). Thus, in Islam, the basic duty of each individual is to submit and surrender to Allah (The God) and to His will. Muslims believe in one, unique, incomparable God; in the angels created by Him; in the prophets through whom His revelations were brought to mankind; in God’s
complete authority over human destiny; and in life after death. Muslims believe in all messengers of Allah without any discrimination (Masjid Al-Huda 2011). Another word derived from the same root is “salaam,” which means “peace” (Info2islam.com 2012). The Islamic form of greeting is “Assalamu Alaikum,” which means, “Peace be upon you.”

Muslims believe that the Quran is the last revealed Word of God. It is the basic source of Islamic teachings and laws since it covers all aspects of life. It deals with all the subjects that concern people as human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, and law, but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures (Islamic Education 2011). At the same time, “it provides guidelines for a just society, proper human conduct and an equitable economic system” (Islamic-dictionary.com 2010; enjoyturkey.com 2011). One of the most important beliefs in Islam is that Allah has 99 beautiful names, which indicate such traits as kindness, forgiveness, graciousness, compassion, mercy, kindliness, pity. This fact is clearly manifested in the following Ayah (i.e., verse): “wa lillahi ?al-?asma?u ?al-?usna: fadςuhu biha: . . . . , “The most beautiful names belong to Allah (God): so call on Him by them; . . . . ” (Araaf 7: 180). The Hadith (i.e., the teachings, sayings and actions of Prophet Mohammed), second only to the Quran in importance and authority, is also another important source of teachings and laws for Muslims (for more information on the fundamental articles of faith in Islam see also Abdalati 2010).

As far as politeness is concerned, Abdalati (2010) believes that Islam is a complete code of conduct and it regulates every aspect of life by detailed commandments and instructions. For instance, it directs Muslims on how they should greet each other: “wa ?iđa ħuyyitum bitaḥiyatin fahayyu bi?ahsana Minhā ?aw rudduha ?inna ?al-laha kana ςala kulli šay?in ħasiba” ‘When a (courteous) greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. God takes careful account of all things’ (En-Nisa 86). He adds that Islam aims to form a well-knit society in which ethics is the core concept. Allah says, addressing the Prophet: “wa?innaka la ςala xuluqin çađim,” ‘Most surely, you conform yourself to sublime morality’ (Translation of the Holy Quran 2011, 2 The names of Allah are those proper nouns and attributes employed in reference to The Almighty God (Allah). Every one of those names refers to one or more attributes of Allah. Most of the Ar-Rahman (‘The Beneficent’), Ar-Rahim (‘The Merciful’), Al-Wadud (‘The Loving’), Al-Wali (‘The Protecting Friend’), Al-Latif (‘The Subtle One’), Al-Ghaffar (‘The Forgiver’), Al-Muhsin (‘The Reckoner’), As-Salam (‘The Source Of Peace’), Al-Wahhab (‘The Bestover’).
Al-Qalm: 4). Similarly, Prophet Muhammad emphasized this same issue when he says: “?inakum lan tsaςu ?annasa b?amwalikum, fasaςuhum bibestalwjh whusn ?aIxulq,” ‘You cannot treat people by means of your wealth; hence, you should treat them by means of your moral conduct’ (Saħiħ Bukhari 2010). In another place he also says: “If you have nothing to give, give a kind word or even just an affectionate smile” (Sahih Bukhari 2010).

2 Data and method

Taylor-Powell (2003) asserts that a “good analysis depends on understanding the data. For qualitative analysis, this means you read and re-read the text.” The text under investigation has been read several times back-to-back before we began collecting data. The materials in this study constitute a huge number of verses (Ayahs) presented in narrative form. As pointed out earlier in this investigation, focus is on the politeness strategies and their co-occurrence with the selected expressions in written text, either in a clear or idiomatic manner. Although the present study’s results are based on a careful examination of all chapters of the Quran, only 22 extracts will be analyzed, discussed, and presented here for illustration. It is worth mentioning that we tried from the very beginning to select our sample in the best possible way from as many chapters as possible. Thus, the extracts upon which this study is based are collected from 20 chapters. These chapters are organized in such a way as to provide a comprehensive view of both types of relationship (i.e., man-man relationship and God-man relationship). They were chosen for the following reasons: (a) they have as many politeness strategies as possible, (b) they include self-identified strategies of politeness, and (d) they are thought to serve the purposes of this study against the theoretical frameworks chosen for investigation.

Data analysis is a process, within which several phases can be distinguished, such as working with the data, organizing data, and breaking data into manageable units (see Singh and Jones 2007). Taking these phases into consideration, this work consists of two main phases. Phase one represents a basic case, namely an inspection of all politeness formulas that are used in the selected chapters. This process served as a screening phase to identify and select the appropriate verses for phase two of the study. It also provided a descriptive account of the contexts in which the politeness strategies were used. Phase two was a detailed analysis of politeness strategies as used in two types of communications, namely God-man communication and man-man communication. In so doing, we introduce, identify, and interpret the text-building mechanisms in relation to the set
of politeness theories discussed below. In addition, further material taken from Al-Hadith (i.e., The Prophet’s Traditions) will be provided as it becomes relevant to each analysis. To put it differently, for more clarification, the data will be supplemented with some examples drawn from the Prophet’s Traditions (i.e., Al-Hadith).

It is worthwhile to mention that we did our best, in so far as possible, to consult several books of Quranic interpretation. We do feel that we were able to give the exact interpretations as they would be given by a specialist in this field. Therefore, we may claim that the results of this study do provide a useful source of information on the basic conceptions of politeness, ethics, and morality in Islam.

3 Theoretical background and related literature

Two major theoretical frameworks underpin this study, namely the face-saving theory of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987), which is essentially based on Goffman’s (1967) notion of face, and the conversational-maxim view (Leech 1983; Lakoff 1973). These are the most popular and extensively used models in previous research on politeness.

First, we will start with the face-saving view of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Brown and Levinson’s theory comprises two main parts. The first part is concerned with the nature of “politeness” and how it functions in interaction. The second part is a list of “politeness” strategies. Brown and Levinson assume that most speech acts, such as requests, offers and compliments – intended to be done by verbal or non-verbal communication – inherently threaten either the hearer’s or the speaker’s face-wants, and that politeness is involved in redressing those face-threatening acts (FTA). The various face-threatening acts (FTAs) are distinguished depending on whether they are directed toward the negative face or positive face, and whether they are likely to harm hearer’s face or speaker’s face.

Brown and Levinson (1987, 1978) outline four types of politeness strategies that sum up human politeness behavior. These are: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record-indirect strategy. Brown and Levinson (1987, 1978) argue that three sociological factors play a significant role in selecting strategies for performing a face-threatening act (FTA): social distance between parties (P), power relations between parties (D), and the degree of imposition of the speech act (R). Different FTAs are used depending on the social distance between interlocutors. People are apt to speak to their social equals differently than those whose status is higher or lower than their own in a particular
situation. Brown and Levinson (1987) add that some impositions are greater than others. They believe that highly imposing acts like requests demand more redress to alleviate their increased threat level.

Brown and Levinson (1987, 1978) assume that the “politeness mechanisms” that their model encompasses are universal, in the sense that they can be applicable to all languages and all cultures as well. Much of the debate in previous research has been concerned with how universal it can really be, or whether Brown and Levinson failed to take certain kinds of cultures into consideration. A considerable number of researchers, however, believe that these factors are not universal and in any case not refined enough to capture all the circumstances that may influence the production of politeness (Calvo, and Geluykens 1995; Holmes 1995; Blum-Kulka 1990; Brown and Gilman 1989; Ide 1989; Kasper 1997; Tannen 1990; Wilson et al. 1992). As stated earlier, one of the main objectives of this study is to examine the applicability of this model to this particular type of data in this particular milieu.

Now, we provide a brief description of the main tenets of Leech’s (1983) model of politeness. Leech defines politeness as forms of behavior that establish and maintain comity. The politeness principle (PP), according to Leech, is a set of maxims used as a way of explaining how politeness operates in conversational exchanges. It is seen by Leech as the ability of participants to engage in a social interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. Leech (1983) has suggested six maxims of politeness: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The first and the second form a pair, as do the third and the fourth. In discussing his maxims, he uses his own terms for two kinds of illocutionary acts. He calls representatives “assertives,” and calls directives “impositives” (for more details on the Maxims see Thomas 1995).

Each of these maxims is accompanied by a sub-maxim, which is, according to Leech, of less importance. Leech believes that they all support the idea that negative politeness is more important than positive politeness. In addition, Leech contends that not all the maxims are equally important. He argues that the tact and approbation maxims have greater weight in the calculation of politeness. More specifically, he assumes that the tact maxim has greater weight than the generosity maxim, and approbation maxim than modesty maxim. Thus, he suggests that “politeness is focused more strongly on other than on self” (1983: 133). In commenting on Leech’s model of politeness, Thomas (1995: 167, cited in Al-Khatib 2001: 7) argues that “for all its problems, it allows us, better than any of the other approaches discussed here (in her book) to make specific cross-cultural comparisons and (more importantly) to explain cross-cultural differences in the perception of politeness and the use of politeness strategies.”
Much research on politeness as a socio-pragmatic phenomenon has been
done to unraveling interactional principles in communication (e.g., Fraser
1990; Tracy and Baratz 1994; Brown and Levinson 1987; Spencer-Oatey 2002;
Matsumoto 1989; Al-Khatib 2001; Held 2005). The bulk of these studies have been
based on the analysis of conversational exchanges (e.g., Ide 1993; Watts 2003;
Watts et al. 1992; Leech 1983; Fraser 1990; Brown and Levinson 1987; Matsumoto
1989; Nwoye 1992). However, a few works have applied the models to written texts
(see, for example, Al-Khatib 2001; Sell 1992; Cherry 1998; Myers 1989). Both types
of studies are geared around putting an explanation for why speakers choose
to use a positive politeness strategy, a negative one, baldly stated or an indirect
one.

With Brown and Levinson’s notion of face as central to their model, Sell
(1992), examining politeness in literary texts, emphasized the diachronic aspects
of politeness. He distinguished the politeness of the text, which is politeness ex-
pectations at the time of publication, from the politeness in the text, which is a
parameter of politeness the readers apply to the text in the reading process. A
further work is that of Cherry (1998), who examined politeness in letters written
by academics at different ranks in support of a colleague who had been denied
promotion and tenure at a major university in the United States. He argues of
the important role of self-representation in written discourse. Maier (1992), who
made a comparison between business letters written by non-native speakers with
those by native speakers, observed that politeness strategies used by non-native
speakers were less formal and direct than native speakers. In another recent
study, focusing on personal letter writing as a mode of communication between
an L2 writer and an L1 reader, Al-Khatib (2001) examined 120 personal letters that
are supposed to be written to native English speakers. The data were analyzed
and discussed in the light of Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness as well as
Leech’s principle of politeness. The main purpose of this study is to establish in-
terpretive links between the type of material collected and its situational and cul-
tural context. Based on the results of his study, Al-Khatib concluded that the vari-
ability of presenting ideas and politeness is due to contextual influences, among
other factors.

The importance of studying the Quran in relation to society is often blurred in
the literature since early times. One may claim that it dates from the first day of
Quranic revelation in 610 AD. Overall, the literature to date on the Holy Quran has
attempted to lend itself to two basic areas: language (Nahw – grammar and mor-
phology) and meaning (Tafsir – interpretation). Some of these studies focus on
the language and vocabulary of the Quran (e.g., Bin Ahmed and Al-Ahadali 2006;
Al-Asfahani 2001), and some the meanings (e.g., Sanadiqi 2011; Agharr 2005).
Today, a huge number of books on these sciences have appeared. A number of
other works enumerate the number of chapters and their verses, while others relate these numbers to the whole Quran. Reported and observed instances of these sorts of studies are accumulating (e.g., Bin Ahmed and Al-Ahadali 2006; Al-Asfahani 2001; Sanadiqi 2011; Agharr 2005; Moral and Ethics 2010; Islamic Education 2011).

4 Data analysis and discussion

Having provided an overview of previous literature, and the theoretical background of the study, discussion of the main results of the study is in order. As stated previously, essentially qualitative analytic methods are employed in this investigation to discuss the data, but an attempt will also be made to provide some statistics that may help to show any emerging themes or patterns of politeness. Before we proceed any further, it is necessary that we first discuss the Quranic approach in addressing man.

4.1 The Quranic patterns of address

This part is intended to provide overview information about the Quranic methods of address. Broadly speaking, patterns of address in the Holy Quran can be classified into three main types: communicating a message by addressing the reader directly, communicating a message through storytelling, and communicating a message by exemplifying (see Abdalati 2010; Mustafeh 2011).

4.1.1 The direct method of address

This is usually done by directly addressing the readers or a particular group of people (i.e., without asking the prophet to tell them on behalf of Him) as “O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done” (translation of the Holy Quran, Al Hujurat 2010: 49). This technique is found to be the most common method used in the Quran. The core feature of this method is its emphasis on a particular set of facts. It helps the reader to know the facts about a particular topic and then to decide his/her actions accordingly. This method can be seen as an explicit method of persuasion, which presents enough evidence to make the claim. Through the given evidence and facts, the readers can have a firsthand experience of his/her rights and obligations as a husband, wife, neighbor, friend, employer, employee, etc.
It has been noticed that this technique is frequently used in the Quran so as to direct people toward God and faith and to give them some lessons on the basics of Islam. Here is an example:


When a (courteous) greeting is offered you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy. God takes careful account of all things. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Nisa: 43)

These verses, which are given in the form of imperative sentences are used here as commandeering statements ordering the target people to accomplish a particular goal or assignment according to a particular set of norms and standards. The widespread use of this feature (i.e., directives) in the Quran suggests, as will be seen later, a more intimate relationship here between God and man (see the bald-on-record strategy below).

4.1.2 Storytelling

A close examination of the different chapters of the Quran shows that different types of stories form almost one-third of the Quran. This is one of the key methods through which the Holy Quran aims to deliver knowledge and achieve Islamic education (Mustafeh 2011; Abas 2000). Speaking of the aims of using this method, The Quran Blog (2010) demonstrates that:

Among the aims of the Quranic story are stressing the unity of the Divine Message, the unity of the methods the messengers use to call to the way of God, the unity of the spiritual world they live in while making efforts to deliver the Message and in enduring the trials and tribulations in executing their missions, including the challenges mounted against them by their adversaries.

The Quran Blog (2010) adds that some of these stories have been historical in nature talking about the prophets of old and bygone generations while others have been meant to serve a moral purpose. A third type of tale, which is precise and brief in what it tries to convey, usually discusses a certain position or a particular aspect of a certain human being. The story of Miriam (i.e., Mary) is one effective example of this phenomenon: “waðkur fee ?alkitabi maryama iði ?intabaðat min
4.1.3 Exemplifying

This technique is different but closely related to the previous one (i.e., storytelling) in that many stories are used for the purpose of exemplifying. There are two types of exemplifying found in the Quran: direct examples and indirect examples. Direct examples are those that use the word “exemplify” explicitly (see example 3 below). On the other hand, indirect examples are those that speak of a particular case – taken as self-exemplifying cases. Most of the given examples are tales of prophets and nations of the past. This can be seen as one of the most effective and successful methods of teaching and preaching. A close examination of the different examples given in the Quran shows that they are used for the following reasons, among others:

1. Reminding people of matters of faith
2. Clarifying a particular point of view
3. Speaking of matters of the family and societal order
4. Discussing moral principles
5. Speaking of life after death, reward and punishment

Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: "I seek refuge from thee to (God) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear God." He said: "Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son." She said: "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" He said: "So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, 'that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us': It is a matter (so) decreed." So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree: She cried (in her anguish): "Ah! would that I had died before this! would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!" But (a voice) cried to her from beneath the (palm-tree): "Grieve not! for thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath thee; . . . . . . .
Consider the examples in (2) and (3) below:

(2) Explicit exemplifying


God sets forth a Parable: a city enjoying security and tranquility, abundantly supplied with sustenance from every place: Yet was it ungrateful for the favors of God: so God plagued it with hunger and terror (in extremes) (closing in on it) like a garment (from every side), because of the (evil) which (its people) wrought. (Translation of the Holy Quran, An-Naĥl: 112)

(3) Implicit exemplifying


O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it . . . But fear God: For God is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Hujurat: 12)

4.2 Politeness strategies

Having established an idea about the text-building mechanisms of chapters and the methods of address used, we turn our discussion to politeness strategies. A substantial part of the discussion will be focused on how politeness is manifested, the type of strategies employed, and their linguistic realizations in the Quranic verses. Selected portions of the verses from the data under discussion are used as examples.

---

⁴ The pronoun used in this verse is of the type called enclitic pronoun (you). Enclitic pronouns are suffixes standing for direct object pronouns and/or indirect object pronouns. They are suffixed to verbs, nouns etc. (For more information on the Arabic pronouns see Caspari; Wright 2011)
4.2.1 Bald on-record

The *bald on-record* strategy does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer’s “face.” Brown and Levinson (1979: 95) assume that a situation requiring maximum efficiency justifies the use of bald-on-record strategies, which focus on clarity and efficiency, conform to Grice’s maxims, and pay attention to face. Evidence from the present study seems to support this allegation. It has been observed that some verses of the Quran are as informative as required (Grice 1975), namely they are given directly and clearly that they should not cause the hearer to produce implicatures. These types of verses are referred to in the Quran as the basic verses (i.e., verses of established meaning) “He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical” (translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Imran 2010: 7). The basic type of verses contains instructions and guidelines on what is, and what is not, permissible in Islam. It seeks to set out the Islam general policy towards several issues of human beings’ life, to list the principal instructions for the believers, to protect the orphans’ wealth and safeguard their rights, for instance.

The results of data analysis show that, almost without exception, this type of verse is given in the imperative type of language. It has also been observed that the use of this strategy is based on topic. It should be noted here that, just like other languages, the imperative mood is used in Arabic in issuing commands, requests, suggestions, and in some cases warnings, or even a mixture of all these to a second person. For instance, it is formed by using the verb in its simplest root form: give!, say!, look! The imperative mood in Arabic occurs only in the second person, and the subject “you” is generally not expressly stated, because it is implied. An examination of the various chapters of the Quran indicates that when the Quran gives a command regarding any of the crucial issues that it addresses, it is still directed at the second person. In a word, the imperative mood here is read and is frequently used where the Quran is asking for something to be done and where the reader has the obligation to comply.

Overall, there are several instances when bald on-record is used. Firstly, where maximum efficiency is very important, especially when talking about the Oneness of Allah’s Lordship, “Say: He is God, the One and Only” (Al-Ikhlas: 112) Secondly, when providing metaphorical urgency for emphasis such as using attention-getters, “Then after them We sent Moses with Our Signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs, but they wrongfully rejected them: So see what was the end of those who made mischief” (Al A’raf: 103). Thirdly, when using sympathetic advice or warnings. Lastly, when welcoming, greeting, offering, or rewarding the good believers.
Among the most frequently used directives which convey request, instructions, orders, and commands in the Quran are: waqada rabukka ‘thy Lord hath decreed,’ ya’amur ‘command,’ and qull ‘say.’ It is worth noting that the word “say” has been used in the Quran 332 times to indicate order (Jeddmath.com 2011). The following examples are illustrative, though certainly not exhaustive:

Say: He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Ikhlas: 112)

Another case in which the bald on-record strategy is used in the Quran is when the FTA is in the interest of the hearer. See the example below:

Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine, and that on which hath been invoked the name of other than God; that which hath been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, . . . . . . . (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Maidah: 3)

In addition to the cases discussed above, we also noticed some instances of offering without redressive action in which the threat is minimized implicitly. Consider the example below:

God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition; Fulfill the Covenant of God when ye have entered into it, and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made God your surety; for God knoweth all that ye do. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al Nahl: 90–91)
Because such requests, offers, and commands arise from the close and intimate relationship that links man to God, it is highly likely that they will not impose on the negative face of the believers. Speaking of this issue, Shigenaga (2002: 22) maintains that in certain cases “the use of the bald-on-record strategy often occurs as the ultimate indication that the speaker and the hearer are so close that they are not offended by mere words.” As the major purpose of these verses is to develop the moral and ethical values of Islam (i.e., teaching and preaching), one may claim that the high level of directness used here is similar to the method of directness used by teachers in classroom interactions (see, for example, Falsgraf and Majors 1995; Koester 2002; Dalton-Puffer 2005; Kasper 2001). According to Falsgraf and Majors (1995), the high level of directness in this environment not only reflects the status differential between students and teachers, but also characterizes the relationship between teacher and students as close and informal (cf. Kasper 2001: 38; cited in Dalton-Puffer 2005).

4.2.2 Positive politeness strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) contend that positive politeness utterances are used as a kind of “metaphorical extension of intimacy.” They are employed to imply common ground or sharing of wants even between strangers. Brown and Levinson (1987) spoke of 15 positive politeness strategies. Results from our analysis show that all of these strategies are used in the Quran, though to varying degrees, except the strategy of joking.

The most common positive politeness strategies which have been attested to in the data are: attending to hearer’s interests, needs, wants, intensifying interest to the hearer, exaggerating interest, approval, sympathy with the hearer, offering and/or promising, and lastly “assume or assert reciprocity” strategy. Detailed analysis of each strategy follows.

4.2.2.1 Notice, attend to hearer’s interests, needs, wants

As stated earlier, positive politeness is redress directed to the hearer’s positive face, his or her persistent desire that his/her wants or actions should be thought of as acceptable and desirable. Insofar as this study is concerned, redress here consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating the message that the addressee’s wants or desires are, in some respects, similar to the addressee’s wants and desires (Brown and Levinson 1987), especially, if we know that sincere believers spend every minute of their life hoping only to win God’s approval and doing those things that they hope God will most approve of. The example below illustrates how sincere believers will be rewarded in return for their sincere faith:
(7) Verily those who say, “Our Lord is God,” and remain firm (on that Path) – on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. Such shall be Companions of the Gardens, dwelling therein (for aye): a recompense for their (good) deeds.

(8) O ye who believe! Shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a grievous Penalty? That ye believe in God and His Apostle, and that ye strive (your
utmost) in the Cause of God, with your property and your persons: That will be best for you, if ye but knew! He will forgive you your sins, and admit you to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow, and to beautiful mansions in Gardens of Eternity: that is indeed the Supreme Achievement. And another (favor will He bestow), which ye do love, help from God and a speedy victory. So give the Glad Tidings to the Believers. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al Saff: 10–13)

4.2.2.3 Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with hearer)

Brown and Levinson (1987: 104–107) maintain that the speaker may claim common ground with the hearer by exaggerating interest, approval, or sympathy. They also add that this strategy is often achieved through “exaggerated intonation, stress, and other aspects of prosodics, as well as with intensifying modifiers.” Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that emphatic words are a linguistic feature of exaggeration. This proved to be the case in many verses of the Quran, with the main emphatic words including “wonderful,” “absolutely,” “beautiful,” “great,” and “so.” Yet, another way of exaggerating sympathy with man is by asking human beings to recognize their parents after recognition of Allah Himself. To see how this works, look at the example below:


Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor; And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: “My Lord! bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.” (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al Isra’ 2010: 23–24)

This example calls for obedience to God and respect and honor for parents. Such a call is expected to be accepted willingly by the addressee, though the request here is given in a bald on-record manner “Thy Lord hath decreed.” However, it is still accepted as a positive politeness strategy understood in relation to the power difference between the speaker (God) and the hearer/reader (man). The positive type of politeness evidenced here appears to be embedded
in the fact that those who are asked to recognize and take care of their parents would be treated similarly in the future as they get older and become parents. This same call is emphasized in many of the prophet’s traditions, as well. A case in point is the story of the man who once consulted the Prophet Muhammad about taking part in a military campaign. The Prophet asked the man if his mother is still living. When told that she was alive, the Prophet says: “(Then) stay with her, for Paradise is at her feet” (Al-Tirmidhi: 730, as quoted in Islamicstuffs.blogspot.com 2007).

4.2.2.4 Offer or promise
Searle (1969: 58, reported in Bretag 2006) contends that a promise “is a pledge to do something for you, not to you.” Offer and promise can indicate that speaker and hearer are cooperators. Given the situational context of our data as representing a dialogue between God and His servants, it was no surprise that the speech acts of promise and offer were commonly used here as positive politeness strategies. Very often, this strategy is used with phrases like waçaça ?aL-Lahu ?alaðin ?amano ‘God has promised the believers’ and wa bashshiri ?al-Mu?uminiin ‘give the glad tidings to the believers,’ among other expressions, as the following excerpt show:


God has promised, to those among you who believe and work righteous deeds, that He will, of a surety, grant them in the land, inheritance (of power), as He granted it to those before them; that He will establish in authority their religion – the one which He has chosen for them; and that He will change (their state), after the fear in which they (lived), to one of security and peace: ‘They will worship Me (alone) and not associate aught with Me.’ If any do reject Faith after this, they are rebellious and wicked. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Nur: 55)

Employing offers and promises as positive politeness is a common feature of many other verses of the Quran. It is true that a believer is seeking God’s pleasure and His paradise. So, one would expect that the use of such expressions may raise the believers’ awareness of the benefits they may be entitled to in case of acting in accordance to the commands of God.
4.2.2.5 Assume or assert reciprocity

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) argue that the cooperativeness between the speaker and the hearer can be stressed by giving reciprocal rights or obligations obtaining between speaker and hearer. The Quran Blog (2010) maintains that in Islam, ascent toward Allah remains forever open and is never closed. It adds that Islam is a religion that calls for optimism and trust. In Islam, there is always reason for hope and optimism (see The Quran Blog 2010). The Quran teaches Muslims that with every difficulty, there comes ease and with every sin there comes maghfira ‘forgiveness’ provided that it isn’t a big sin (e.g., adultery) and it won’t be done again (The Quran Blog 2010).

\[(11) \text{ qul ya } \text{ `ibadi } \text{ ?al-la}^\ddagger \text{diiina } \text{ ?asrafu } \text{ `ala } \text{ ?anfusihim la taqnaţu min ra}^\ddagger \text{hmati } \text{ ?al-Lahi } \text{ ?inna } \text{ L-Laha yayfiru } \text{ ?ađ-} \text{ðunuuba jamii}^\ddagger \text{an } \text{ ?innahu huwa } \text{ ?al-yafuur } \text{ ?ar-rahiim. (Adapted from Quran Transliteration, Al-Zumar: 53)}\]

Say: “O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al-Zumar: 53)

In the above example, the use of “despair not of the Mercy of God” can be seen as a linguistic politeness strategy that has the potential to address the face needs of the addressees. It is ever God’s desire to forgive; it is God’s gift to mankind. This is an instance of the many offers and promises where God clearly holds the addressees responsible for the perceived offenses, and appears to encourage them to rectify matters by doing “good” and staying away from evil.

Another example of asserting responsibility is through thanking. There are many places in the Quran where God speaks of thanking. In Ibrahim chapter, for example, He says: “And remember! your Lord caused to be declared (publicly): ‘If ye are grateful, I will add more (favors) unto you; But if ye show ingratitude, truly My punishment is terrible indeed.’” To put it in Brown and Levinson’s formula, speaker treats hearer to do something he or she wants since speaker already or will do something hearer’s wants too to achieve their goal (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

4.2.3 Negative politeness strategies

As stated earlier, negative politeness is oriented toward satisfying the listener’s negative face. Brown and Levinson (1978: 129) assert that negative politeness is “specific and focused; it performs the function of minimizing the particular imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects.” The negative politeness does, on the
other hand, presume that the speaker will be imposing on the listener. Brown and Levinson (1987: 129) state that negative politeness is redressive action. They classify negative politeness into 10 strategies:

1. Be conventionally indirect
2. Question, hedge
3. Be pessimistic
4. Minimize the imposition, Rx
5. Give deference
6. Apologize
7. Impersonalize Speaker and Hearer
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalize
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting Hearer

Based on the results of our analysis, only a few of these strategies stood out in our data. Due to limitations of space, we are going into a deeper discussion of only the most common ones. These are discussed below.

4.2.3.1 Minimize the imposition

Negative face involves a person’s desire to remain autonomous and free from imposition. This happens by minimizing the imposition on the addressee either by giving the reader freedom of action or choice as seen in the following example: “Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out Clear from Error” (Al-baqara: 256). The illustration below is also another example of how the Quran call for non-imposing or minimizing the imposition on people who are invited to Islam.


Therefore do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish; Thou art not one to manage (men’s) affairs; But if any turns away and rejects God; God will punish him with a mighty Punishment; For to Us will be their return; Then it will be for Us to call them to account. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Al Ghashiyah: 21–26)

Politeness resides here in the way God asked the Prophet not to impose on people “do thou give admonition, for thou art one to admonish.” He was asked just to
Politeness in the Holy Quran

4.2.3.2 Indirectness

As said previously, Grice (1975) assumes that conversational implicature plays a significant role in personal interactions. In conversation, we usually grasp what others are saying even when people do not express their intentions clearly. Searle (1975, cited in Zhang and You 2009) defines indirectness as “those cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by ways of performing another.” Speaking of the role played by indirectness in conversations, Tannen (1989: 23) says that it is “a fundamental aspect of language call ellipsis and analysts of conversation call indirectness conveying unstated meaning.” She also argues that indirectness is not only a fundamental and pervasive element in human communication, but also one of the elements which vary most from one culture to another (Tannen 1995).

Like all other negative strategies of politeness, indirectness is usually employed to mitigate the effect of an FTA. Fraser (1980: 342) argues that one of the functions of mitigation, is to “ease the blow of bad news,” which applies to problematic situations. Moreover, he supposes that mitigation occurs “only if the speaker is polite” (Fraser 1980: 344).

By indirectness we mean here how some verses in the Quran refer to or speak of some people, who, for example, committed or attempted to commit a sin, without mentioning their names. It is argued that such technique is used to minimize threats to the concerned person’s “face” and to set as an example for others to follow. Below is an example – taken from Yusuf Chapter – of how this happens:


But she in whose house he was, sought to seduce him from his (true) self: she fastened the doors, and said: “Now come, thou (dear one)!” He said: “God forbid! Truly (thy husband) is my lord! He made my sojourn agreeable! Truly to no good come those who do wrong!” And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of
his Lord: thus (did We order) that We might turn away from him (all) evil and shameful deeds; for he was one of Our servants, sincere and purified. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Yusuf: 23)

As can be seen in this example, Potiphar’s wife, the lady who attempts to seduce Joseph into sleeping with her, has no name in the story, though her name – Zulaikha – is well-known to many of the Quran interpreters. This type of information that has not been released to the readers is likely intended to convey two messages at once: First, it intends to teach significant moral lessons about the incident itself; second, it intends to tell that there is no reason to publicize the issue or the name of the sinner beyond you and him/her (i.e., meaning Yustur in Arabic). By infringing on the Gricean maxims of manner and quality, viz., the sinner here is referred to indirectly, and is also lengthy in terms of informing (not concise) and is not to the point. Upon reading a verse like this, a reader may communicatively receive the message by implicating that the sinner’s name is not mentioned so as to communicate a message of morality.

4.3 Man-man (interpersonal) politeness

This part provides an overview of some aspects of man-man interpersonal politeness as manifested in the Holy Quran. The discussion below highlights only three major types of interpersonal politeness, namely modesty, equality, and mercifulness. The notion of politeness and interpersonal relationship here will be discussed in terms of Leech’s assumptions of politeness.

4.3.1 Modesty

Modesty is defined by having or showing a moderate or humble estimate of one’s merits, importance, etc.; free from vanity, egotism, boastfulness, or great pretensions (Dictionary.com 2012). Modesty can be seen as one important aspect of politeness, especially when dealing with others. Insofar as Islam is concerned, Zohery (2011) contends that Islam teaches men and women, equally, how to overpower the desires of the ego. It makes modesty part of faith, a fact that is stressed in several Traditions as well as in several places of the Quran. Prophet Muhammad is the finest example of a modest man in the full sense of word (Zohery 2011). To be modest with people is nearness to God. This fact is clearly manifested in the verses below in which Luqman says to his son, by way of advising, “Swell not thy cheeks (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for God loveth not any arrogant boaster.” In calling for modesty, among other aspects of polite-
ness, man has to fulfill the PP by behaving politely toward God, him/herself and others. Consider the example in (14) below.


O my son! establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, and forbid what is wrong: and bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of) affairs. “And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for God loveth not any arrogant boaster.” And be moderate in thy pace, and lower thy voice; for the harshest of sounds without doubt is the braying of the ass. (Translation of the Holy Quran, Luqman: 17–19)

In this extract, 10 precious advices Luqman offered his son. Here, the verses attempt to communicate several messages simultaneously, by touching on both God-man relationship and man-man relationship. At the level of God-man relationship, the father advises his son not to join in worship others with God, and to establish regular prayer. At the man-man level, he recommends him to enjoin (people) for good, and forbid from evil, bear with patience whatever befalls him, turn not his face away from men with pride, and not to walk in insolence through the earth because God does not like each arrogant boaster.

Clearly, these verses imply that the most ideal form of human relationship is the prevalence of modesty among people. To put it in Leech’s formulas of politeness, they basically call for minimizing the expression of praise of self and maximizing the expression of dispraise of self. They also call for minimizing the expression of beliefs, which express dispraise of other and maximizing the expression of beliefs which express approval of other. Such behavior will inevitably results in “minimizing the expression of disagreement between somebody and others, and maximizing the expression of agreement between him/her and others.”

### 4.3.2 Equality as politeness

According to the Quran, in Islam, people are all equal; there is no difference between them in terms of human values. Zohrey (2011) pointed out that, “the
Prophet Muhammad always treated people courteously, irrespective of their social status or religious beliefs, and entertained everyone who came to his house and all whom he met in the street with the same refined manners.” In this respect, he never discriminated between people on the basis of their social status or beliefs, but treated them all alike with courtesy and politeness. The only case in which the prophet was blamed for is when Abdullah bin Umm Maktum (a blind man) came to a gathering where the Prophet was conversing with some people, among who were some leaders of Quraysh. The blind man came and interrupted the Prophet and asked him to teach him what Allah had taught him, not knowing that the Prophet was busy with this group of people, then the Prophet frowned and turned away (for more information on this story see Al-Munajjid 2006).

This story is meant to teach a lesson in manners. The politeness in this extract basically resides in the way it addresses people regardless of their socio-economic background or status. These verses are seen as tokens of agreement and recognition of all types of people. A number of expressive speech acts were used in this extract with different politeness strategies in order to attain various communicative goals. In this communicative event, paying attention to the blind man was not only used to show concern for his face, but was also used to save the face of many others like him. They conveyed a sense of intimacy because they created a common ground for all Muslims and, therefore, intended to forge bonding. This can be seen as a vivid reminder that separation does not necessarily mean denial of their rights. Even though the man (a blind) was not able to see the reaction of the Prophet, he still has the right to be treated fairly and equally. By
telling this story, God, the speaker here, tries to save the hearer’s positive face by reducing the distance between him and the non-disabled people. What happens here is that two maxims have been made use of, namely the tact maxim and the agreement maxim. In other words, God asks people to minimize the expression of beliefs, which imply cost to others, and maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to others. In addition, the verses attempt to advance the idea of equality among people by minimizing the expression of disagreement between self and others and maximizing the expression of agreement between self and others.

4.3.3 Mercifulness as politeness

Mercifulness is defined as “companionate treatment of or attitude towards an offender, adversary, etc., who is in one’s power or care” (The Collins English Dictionary 1984). Another definition given by (hyper Dictionary 2009) says it is “a disposition to be kind and forgiving.” In reality, mercifulness is more than an attitude, more than polite manners and positive thinking. It is a way of life in which people, regardless of age, status, gender, or ethnic background, deal with each other politely and respectfully. An examination of the various chapters of the Quran demonstrates that all of them, except one chapter (Repentance Chapter), begin with the following words: “Bismillahi Al-Rahman Al-Rahim” (i.e., in the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful). God, addressing the Prophet, says: “We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures” (Al Anbiya 107). An examination of the frequent use of this word “mercy” in the Quran shows that it has been used 298 times with various but interrelated meanings (The Quran Blog 2011). This indicates how much value and importance Islam places on this expression and its contribution to social solidarity.


It is part of the Mercy of God that thou dost deal gently with them Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (Their faults), and ask for (God’s) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision put thy trust in God. For God loves those who put their trust (in Him). (Translation of The Holy Quran Online, Al Imran 2011: 159)
Taking the cost-benefit scale suggested by Leech (1983) as a crucial parameter, the above verses attempt to serve several functions simultaneously in few words. For example, they encourage people to be merciful, gentle, considerate, easy and forgiving. By so doing, a person may exploit at least three maxims simultaneously: An attempt will be made to minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to others, and maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to others (i.e., making use of the “tact maxim”); and, at the same time, be more generous by minimizing the expression of benefit to self; and maximizing the expression of cost to self. Moreover, it attempts to make use of the agreement maxim, i.e., “Minimizing the expression of disagreement between self and others, and maximizing the expression of agreement between self and others,” by calling for the principle of taking counsel with people in matters of public concern.

5 Conclusion

This study is by no means exhaustive. This article extends the validity of politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987) by investigating the linguistic aspects of politeness in a new type of communication. The main objective of the present investigation was to shed some light on various aspects of politeness in the Holy Quran from a socio-pragmatic perspective. The study has examined a large number of verses taken from more than 18 chapters of the Quran. It has been observed that, in addition to the primary function of the verses (i.e., calling for submission to God), these verses communicate a great deal of theological and moral messages. They also convey a huge amount of information about the interactive relationship between God and man, man and man, and man and society. These range from the very personal to the most public ones. Such information was found to be encoded in both the linguistic and structural features of the verses. Politeness strategies were found to be expressed through different channels of communication. Three main approaches were found to be used for communicating such messages: the direct method of address, storytelling, and exemplifying. Building upon the results of this study, one might claim that storytelling and exemplifying represent here a twofold goal-oriented process. That is to say, they are aimed at conveying some information about the prophets of old and bygone generations on the one hand, and directing people toward the good, and criticizing and amending unsatisfactory behavior on the other.

From the results of our investigation, it can be seen that all the four strategies of politeness suggested by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) are used in the Quran, with the bald on-record strategy making up the greatest proportion, and next the
positive strategy, then the negative strategy, and lastly the off-record strategy is almost absent. It is unsurprising that the bald on-record is the most-used strategy, rather than positive or negative, since the theological type of communication that takes place between God and man; most of the information given is of the type dealing with discipline instructions, discipline directives (orders, requests, questions, and calls), procedural instructions, and procedural directives. Off-record was found to be almost absent because the communication method in this particular type of data is a written formal type of communication taking place between a sender (Allah) and receiver (people) who are not of the same rank or status, so it is a unidirectional type of communication. Hints or metaphors in carrying out God’s divine messages have no place in such a mode of communication. These results demonstrated that the meaning of politeness was not an absolute concept. Instead, politeness should be perceived as the evaluation of an act based on the collective relationship that links the speaker to the hearer in this particular type of interaction. In this sense, the determination of politeness is interaction-dependent.

In the second part of this study, which analyzes verses dealing with interpersonal relationship, the research supports the politeness principle proposed by Leech (1983), in that “politeness is a form of behavior that establishes and maintains comity” as long as the interactants adhere to a set of strict rules and principles that regulate their mutual rights and obligations relating to the society in which they live.

Finally, the present study proves that polite request strategies differ from context to context. Thus it proves that imperative form is not as impolite in the context of religion as it is in other types of communication. We may claim that instructions and requests can be classified in a God-man interaction as solidarity politeness strategies because they imply that God assumes only a small distance between Him and the addressees (i.e., the true believers). Hopefully, this study will trigger further works, which will contribute to a better understanding of new types of communication such as the one discussed herein within the theoretical approach of pragmatics and sociolinguistics. As morality is a common aspect to all religions, further research is needed to precisely comprehend how politeness works in other divine religions.

References


