



GENDER AND POLITENESS IN RELIGIOUS TEXTS: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

Hamid Gittan Jewad

English Language and Literature, Department of English language, College of Education for Humanities,
Kerbala University, Kerbala, Iraq

Hamid.g@uokerbala.edu.iq

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0688-1000>

Abstract

Women and men have been represented differently in different kinds of texts; while the image of power and hegemony is reflected for men, women are usually regarded as the inferior sex. The present study aims to investigate how males and females are addressed in the Qur'an, the most revered book of Muslims, and what politeness strategies/maxims are more frequently used for addressing each gender. The study drew on Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory of politeness and Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness. In order to interpret the meanings behind the chosen excerpts of suras (chapters) of the Qur'an, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. The findings indicated that both men and women are addressed decently and respectfully in the Qur'an; however, the language used for females is more respectful than that for males. The findings also showed that the strategy of 'giving deference or respect' and the 'agreement maxim' are the most frequent cases among the politeness strategies and maxims used for males and females, respectively. Moreover, the study showed that using politeness strategies and maxims has a strong relationship with the type of information conveyed to the addressees. The study stresses the significance of studying politeness as a socio-pragmatic concept with regard to morality and religion. The findings have sociolinguistic, religious, and cultural implications and can be effective in having a better understanding of Islam which has been condemned unfairly during the years. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed and some suggestions are made for future research.

Keywords: politeness strategies, gender, Qur'an, politeness theory, maxims of politeness

Introduction

Politeness is an important facet of pragmatic competence. It is a key element of daily interactions and a social behavior which is common in all cultures. Politeness is known as the way a speaker shows his/her intention to reduce face threats, resulting from face-threatening acts, toward his/her addressee (Mills, 2003). In fact, politeness is the reflection of a person's awareness of another individual's face and showing special importance for it (Yule, 2006) and as Grundy (2000) states, it is "the term we use to describe the extent to which actions, including the way things are said, match addressees' perceptions of how they should be performed" (cited in Bloomer, Griffiths & Merrison, 2005, p. 111).

The concept of politeness can be examined linguistically (verbally) or nonlinguistically (non-verbally). Generally, linguistic politeness relates to verbal communication and nonlinguistic politeness deals with some facets of communication like body language (Lakoff, 2004). Watts (2003) has defined linguistic politeness as "an abstract

term referring to a wide variety of social strategies for constructing and reproducing cooperative social interaction across cultures” (p. 47).

Linguistic politeness has been researched extensively since Lakoff started his works in the 1970s and Brown and Levinson followed this line of research in the 1980s. During the last few decades, there has been a rapid growth in research into this issue. The subject of this research has been considered from different perspectives (see, for example, Blum-Kulka, 1990; Brown, 1980; Brown & Gilman, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Held, 2005; Ide, 1989; Kasper, 1997).

Considering the topic of the previous research on politeness, it can be said that there is a lack of research on the issue of politeness in religious texts, e.g. Qur’an. Few researchers have examined politeness reflected in the Qur’an, the most respected religious discourse for Muslims. This holy book is known as the significant source of Islamic instructions since it deals with all dimensions of life (Al Momani et al., 2018). This book guides Muslims to have better lives by having good morals, behaving ethically in private and public, and having polite interactions with others (Abdalati, 2010). One of the important teachings in an Islamic society is the appropriate treatment of others. In the Qur’an, kindness and politeness are important elements which should be considered when interacting with others irrespective of their status (Al Momani, et al., 2018). In many different verses of the Holy Qur’an, severe points have been mentioned by God regarding politeness. As an example, in one verse God invites his prophet Mohammad (PBUH) to show polite behavior toward others: [and if you had been rude (in speech) and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from about you]” (Qur’an, chapter 3, 59).

Academic discourse includes research work that has applied the theory of politeness in various kinds of texts (e.g., political, social). However, religious texts have not been considered as a source of data in studies on politeness until recently when researchers such as Al-Khatib (2012) and Al-Fayyad (2014) examined the strategies of politeness in the Qur’an and Hadith (the verbal and non-verbal traditions of the prophet). Considering the significance of the Holy Qur’an and the points that politeness has been emphasized in any kind of interaction, and that politeness studies conducted on politeness in religious discourse are rare (Al Momani et al., 2018), the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature and explore the concept of politeness in the Holy Qur’an. More specifically, it regards the issue of politeness and gender in the Qur’an since research investigating politeness and the issue of gender in the Qur’an are lacking. In fact, the available few studies (e.g. Al Momani et al., 2018) have considered just females and paid no attention to the opposite sex. This study takes into account both genders. It draws on the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Leech’s (1983) maxims of politeness to delve deeply into the politeness strategies and maxims used for different genders in this holy book.

Literature Review

Politeness which is an important facet of pragmatic competence and communicative competence has been examined by many researchers using different approaches. Scholars of pragmatics and sociolinguistics have paid much attention to this concept to explicate the use of language. These researchers and scholars have been interested in the issue of politeness since this concept plays an important role in human interactions. Therefore, they have developed models and theories related to politeness and have considered its different aspects.

Lakoff (1973) is known as one of the primary linguists who has worked on politeness and introduced it as one of the key aspects of an interaction. Based on Lakoff’s (1973) theory of politeness, politeness has two rules whose purpose is to reduce conflict when individuals have an interaction. These two rules state that in an interaction individuals should attempt to be clear (according to Grice’s cooperative maxims) and polite (e.g., make other individuals have a good feeling by not imposing or not giving options)

Although it has been claimed that Lakoff’s (1973) politeness model suffers from a weak theoretical background since an obvious definition of politeness has not been given in this model, Lakoff (1973) is well-known for the works she did on language and gender (Keikhaie & Mozaffari, 2013). She was a pioneer in examining the relationship between gender and politeness and aroused the interest of other researchers in the issue of sex and language. Lakoff paid attention to the differences between the speech of women and men. Consequently, she inspired many researchers to conduct studies on these issues (Keikhaie & Mozaffari, 2013).

Among the scholars who have worked comprehensively on the concept of politeness are Leech and Brown and Levinson. Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness and Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness are the most extensively used models in studies on the issue of politeness. In the following sections, these theories are briefly explained.

Leech's Maxims of Politeness

Leech introduced his model of politeness based on Grice's (1975) cooperative principles (CPs) which states that you should "make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged" (p. 45) and theory of meaning which focuses on the meaning the speaker intends and the inferential ability the listener has. It explains how individuals employ language (Adel, et al., 2016).

Respecting the major elements of Grice's cooperative principles, Leech (1983) introduced the politeness principle which contains a group of politeness maxims as ways of behavior which create and preserve comity, respect, and friendship. As Leech (1983) states, the politeness principle refers to a class of maxims which are employed to explain the way politeness operates in individuals' conversational exchanges. Leech's maxims (1983, pp. 132–133) are summarized in the following section:

- The tact maxim minimizes cost to others and maximizes the benefit to others.
- The approbation maxim maximizes respect and praise of others, and minimizes disrespect and dispraise of others. It appreciates others' qualities.
- The generosity maxim maximizes cost to self and decreases benefit to self. In this maxim, the others' wants are given value.
- Sympathy maxim establishes sympathy between self and others and reduces antipathy between self and others. The others' feelings are appreciated in this maxim.
- Modesty maxim discourages praise of self and encourages dispraise of self.
- Agreement maxim decreases disagreement between self and others, and increases agreement between self and others. This maxim centers on others' opinions.

Sub-maxims accompany each one of the above maxims, whose importance is less than the major maxim. As Leech states, all these maxims and sub-maxims support the belief that negative politeness is more significant than positive politeness. Moreover, Leech argues that these maxims do not have equal importance. In his view, the tact and approbation maxims enjoy greater significance in the calculation of politeness (Al-Khatib, 2012). He also assumes that the tact maxim enjoys greater weight than the generosity maxim, and the approbation maxim than modesty maxim. Consequently, he believes that the focus of politeness is more on other than self (Al-Khatib, 2012).

An individual who purposely violates these maxims is known as an invader due to his/her aim to deceive and create an implicature (Al Momani et al., 2018). The speaker's unwillingness to cooperate based on the necessities of a maxim is demonstrated by him/her as he/she opts out of observing the maxim. As Leech (1983) states, politeness is a kind of behavior that lets interactants socially engage in a context of harmony. However, Leech (1983) mentions that some cross-cultural variations connected to the values of his maxims exist. In fact, he believed that what is taken to be polite in a culture may not be common in another culture (Al Momani et al., 2018).

Evaluating Leech's model of politeness, Thomas (1995) states that although this model suffers from some problems, it provides the ground for making specific cross-cultural comparisons explaining cross-cultural differences in the perception of politeness and the use of strategies of politeness.

Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness

Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) is one of the significant and effective theories of politeness that is based on Grice's (1975) cooperative principles and Goffman's (1967) notion of face. It is believed that most of the research into politeness is somehow associated with this theory (Watts, 2003). Although different facets of this theory have been criticized by numerous scholars, it has been the preferred model to focus on the concept of politeness (Adel et al., 2016).

The face is an important concept in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. The origin of this term is in English folk terms 'losing face' and 'saving face' (Afzali, 2017). All individuals in a society have potentially a face and should be paid attention in interactions (Keikhaei & Mozaffari, 2013). The face is classified into two separate, but connected facets. A positive face is "the positive and consistent image people have of themselves and their desires for approval", however, a negative face is "the basic claim to territories, personal pressure and rights to non-distraction" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 66).

In general, the face is too vulnerable and during a conversation, it may be lost, preserved, or improved. In daily interactions, the participants' faces can be threatened by particular acts named face-threatening acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These acts are against the addressee's and/or speakers' negative and/or positive face (Afzali, 2017). Brown and Levinson (1987) have identified four types of FTAs:

1. Acts which threaten the audience's negative face: Advising, ordering, threatening, warning
2. Acts which threaten the audience's positive face: Complaining, criticizing
3. Acts which threaten speaker's positive face: Apologizing, accepting, complimenting, and confessing
4. Acts which threaten speaker's negative face: Accepting an offer, accepting thanks, promising unwillingly (p.74).

Through some strategies, known as linguistic politeness, it is possible to minimize FTAs in interactions. Based on some social variables, such as the difference between the power of the addressee and the speaker and the social distance between them, speakers select a specific strategy to minimize FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) have stated that politeness is realized across cultures through different linguistic positive and negative strategies which can be effective in avoiding FTAs. They have recognized the two major strategies of bald-on-record and off-record. Bald-on-record strategy is categorized into two actions: bald on-record without redressive action, and bald-on-record with redressive action. The latter action is subdivided into negative politeness and positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The main idea of these four major kinds of politeness strategies, i.e. bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record (indirect), is realizing different strategies which can be employed by various individuals in their interactional behavior to meet particular wants of face (Adel, et al., 2016). A brief explanation of these strategies is provided in the following sections based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness.

Off-record (indirect)

Brown and Levinson (1987) have stated that off-record strategy is using indirect language which aims to remove the potential of the speaker to impose something (Adel et al., 2016). In this strategy, the speakers do not impose something on hearers, so there is no direct threat to the face and the addressee should interpret what the speaker says. According to Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), there are fifteen strategies which indicate off-record politeness. They are the following cases:

1. Giving hints,
2. Giving association clues,
3. Presupposing,
4. Understating or saying less than is required,
5. Overstating or giving information more than what is needed,
6. Using tautologies (uttering patent and necessary truth),
7. Using contradictions,
8. Being ironic,
9. Using metaphor,
10. Using rhetorical questions that do not require any answer,
11. Being ambiguous,
12. Being vague,
13. Overgeneralizing and not naming the hearer or addressing him directly,
14. Displacing,
15. Being incomplete by using ellipsis (Adel, et al., 2016).

Bald on-record

Bald on-record strategies do not aim to minimize the threat to the hearer's face. These strategies are employed to directly address the other individual to express his/her needs (Adel et al., 2016). Bald-on-record strategy is used when individuals are familiar with each other so maintaining face is not required. Being out of context, this strategy has the potential to be threatening. Using imperative forms is considered to be bald on-record. Adding mitigating devices such as 'please' can moderate the command (Adel, et al., 2016). Furthermore, bald on-record politeness strategy is employed when the threat to the listener's face is very small (e.g., in phrases such as *come in*) (Culpeper, 1996).

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness strategies are strategies whose purpose is maintaining the positive face. In fact, these strategies are used to reduce the threat to the hearer's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This action is possible by paying attention to the audience's needs, sense of belonging to the group, hedging, or being indirect. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, there are fifteen strategies which indicate positive politeness. They are the following strategies:

1. Noticing and attending to the listener,
2. Exaggerating by giving different intonation, tone and other prosodic features or exaggerating by using intensifying modifiers,
3. Intensifying interest to listener,
4. Employing in-group identity markers,
5. Seeking agreement by the addressee's statements via employing specific statements or repetition,
6. Avoiding disagreement by employing false agreement, expressing pseudo-agreement, using hedge or making white lies,
7. Showing common ground,
8. Joking,
9. Showing the speaker's concern for the hearer's wants,
10. Offering and promising,
11. Being optimistic,
12. Including both the speaker and the listener in the activity,
13. Telling or asking the reason,
14. Assuming reciprocity,
15. Giving gift to the listener in the form of sympathy, understanding, and collaboration in the conversation (Adel, et al., 2016).

Negative Politeness

The aim of using negative politeness strategies is minimizing the threat to the interlocutor's negative face (Keikhaei & Mozaffari, 2013). They are used to avoid imposing something on the listener. When these strategies are employed, the addressee's face wants deal with the desire not to be imposed upon while it is characterized by self-effacement and formality. Therefore, trying not to disturb others, being indirect while imposing obligations or making requests, demonstrating respect, emphasizing the other's relative power overtly and acknowledging one's debt to others are included among negative politeness strategies (Afzali, 2017). As Wolfson (1988) states, the increase of social distance between individuals in conversation is influential in increasing the frequency of negative politeness strategies exchanged between them (Afzali, 2017).

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, there are ten strategies which can indicate negative politeness. They are the following cases:

1. Being indirect,
2. Using questions and hedges,
3. Being pessimistic (i.e. being pessimistic whether the hearer wants to do what we ask or not),
4. Minimizing the imposition,
5. Giving deference and being deferent to the hearer,
6. Apologizing,
7. Impersonalizing speaker and hearer by making your addressee unmentioned,

8. Generalizing expression rather than mentioning addressee directly,
9. Nominalizing,
10. Going on record as incurring a debt, or as not incurring the hearer (Adel, et al., 2016).

Brown and Levinson (1987) aimed to develop an explicit model of politeness based on the appropriate features of a human being. What is significant in this theory is that in any culture politeness is established according to a limited number of universal phenomena. Brown and Levinson stated that the application of politeness strategies is universal and that they are similar in all languages and cultures. Many scholars and researchers have criticized this claim. Although many scholars have criticized this theory, it is still considered to be one of the most significant models in doing research on politeness (Keikhaei & Mozaffari, 2013).

Many different politeness studies have already been conducted by drawing on Leech's (1983) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) theories. Much research on politeness has been done to explicate interactional principles dominant in communication (e.g., Al-Khatib 2001; Fraser, 1990; Held, 2005, Matsumoto, 1989; Spencer-Oatey, 2002; Tracy & Baratz, 1994). The majority of these studies have been conducted to analyze conversational exchanges (e.g., Fraser, 1990; Leech, 1983; Matsumoto, 1989; Nwoye, 1992; Watts, 2003; Watts et al., 1992). However, there are works which have applied the models to written texts (e.g. Al-Khatib 2001; Cherry, 1998; Myers, 1989). The focus of both types of studies is to present an explanation for why speakers select using a negative politeness strategy, a positive one, baldly stated or an indirect one.

Among the studies which have worked on politeness in written texts, few studies have considered the concept of politeness in religious texts. As an example, Al-Khatib (2012) drew on Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness and Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) politeness theory to investigate the text-building mechanisms of chosen verses from the Qur'an. He categorized the verses he examined into two main sections: those which were concerned with God-man relationship and those which dealt with man-man relationship. Al-Khatib (2012) identified three forms for communicating a message in the Qur'an: addressing the reader directly, storytelling, and exemplifying. He found bald-on-record strategies, positive politeness strategies, and negative politeness strategies used in this holy book. He highlighted three kinds of interpersonal politeness based on Leech's concept of politeness: modesty, equality, and mercifulness. Al Khatib (2012) stated that the range of politeness strategies employed for conveying divine ethical messages were related to the type of information which were going to be communicated to the addressees. He also found that the number of bald-on-record strategies is much more than off-record strategies.

In another study, Al-Fayyad (2014) investigated politeness in Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) traditions by drawing on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and Leech's conversational maxims. Her study showed that the use of bald-on-record strategies is dominant in these sayings and traditions. She argued that the abundance of this type of strategy can be attributed to the theological type of communication in religious discourse. She also noted that the positive strategy is the second dominant strategy used in these traditions, the negative strategy has the third rank, and finally is the off-record strategy.

A recent study that has attempted to investigate politeness in the Qur'an has been conducted by Al Momani et al. (2018). Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness and Leech's maxims of politeness guided these researchers to analyze the data in order to investigate two aspects: the representation of women with regard to sensitive issues such as sex and marriage, and the ways women were addressed and referred to. The findings indicated that in all sections of the Qur'an women have been addressed in a polite way. Moreover, it was found that in contrast to many of the other topics where bald-on-record strategies are employed, in issues related to women, the use of off-record strategies and positive and negative face strategies of politeness is dominant. However, it was shown that bald-on-record strategies are employed in topics on legal matters regarding familial and social unity and solidarity. Concerning interpersonal maxims, it was shown that the approbation, modesty, sympathy, tact, and agreement maxims are used more to address women.

The literature on politeness clearly shows that not enough attention has been directed to the issue of politeness in the Holy Qur'an. It can be noticed, too, that there are few studies which have examined the relation between politeness and gender in this holy book. Therefore, the present study aims to examine politeness strategies used in the Qur'an to address men and women.

Taking the above mentioned points into consideration, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of politeness strategies and maxims used in the Qur'an for human beings (in comparison to those used for God and prophets)?
2. Which politeness strategies and maxims are more frequently used for each gender in Qur'an?
3. How are females and males addressed in the Qur'an in light of Brown and Levinson's theory and Leech's maxims?

Method

To examine politeness in relation to gender in the Qur'an, the present researchers selected five chapters (Surahs) (Joseph, Nuh, Al Kahf, the Ants, and Mary) from this sacred book. Then, they limited the domain of their investigation to 181 verses related to the purposes of this study in these surahs. These verses contained politeness strategies and maxims. While choosing these verses, the researcher was mindful of the point that he reflected strategies of politeness, have as many politeness strategies as possible, and contain self-identified strategies of politeness.

The present authors read and reread the selected surahs to comprehend and then choose the verses which include the politeness concept. They categorized them into different categories. After collecting the data, the researchers investigated which politeness strategies and politeness maxims were commonly used and which politeness strategies or Maxims were left behind. Then, their frequencies and percentages were calculated.

To answer the research questions of the study, the researchers analyzed the selected verses both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative approach was used to count the frequency of the various politeness strategies and maxims used for God, prophets, and human beings in general and for each gender more specifically. The qualitative approach was employed to interpret the hidden meanings in the chosen excerpts. The authors analyzed the selected verses qualitatively by drawing on Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) theory of politeness, whose aim is to save face and make the receiver have a good feeling. Moreover, the authors considered interpersonal relations derived from Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness in analyzing the data.

Although the results of the present study are based on a careful investigation of five surahs of the Qur'an, only 16 extracts are presented in the qualitative section. These verses are related to various topics that involve men and women.

Results and discussion

To answer the research questions of the study, it was necessary to employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the following sections, the results for the research questions of the study are presented and discussed.

Results for the first and second research questions

The first and second research questions of the study asked about the frequency of politeness strategies and maxims used in the Qur'an for human beings in general and for each gender, respectively. To answer these questions, the verses in the five surahs were examined carefully and the frequency of the different politeness strategies and maxims was calculated. The results are presented in the following tables.

Table 1 shows the general frequency and percentage of the politeness strategies and maxims used by God, prophets, and humans.

Table 1

The Frequency and Percentage of Politeness Strategies and Maxims Used by Characters in Five Surahs in General

Code	Politeness strategies/politeness maxims	Characters			Total
		Allah	Prophets	Humans	F
1	Positive politeness	25(%)	31(%)	22(%)	78(%)
2	Negative politeness	3(%)	40(%)	19(%)	62(%)
3	Politeness maxims	4(%)	15(%)	22(%)	41(%)
4	Total	32(17.67%)	86(47.51%)	63(34.8)	181(100%)

Of the total 440 verses, 181 verses included the positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, and politeness maxims. As Table 1 shows, the prophets have used politeness strategies and maxims 86 times, the common human beings have used them 63 times, and Allah has used them 32 times. Table 1 also demonstrates that positive politeness strategies are more frequently used (78 times) than negative politeness strategies and politeness maxims in all five Surahs. They indicate that the speaker is directed to the addressee's positive politeness through the strategies of seeking close relationships and giving appraisal to the listener. These strategies have been used to decrease the level of threat to the listener's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Negative politeness strategies have been used 62 times, that is the number of times the characters preferred to apply a negative politeness strategy in conveying their utterances. The results show that the prophets have used them more than God and humans. The negative politeness involves the listener's face. It also states that the speaker is in some way magnificent on the listener. The focus of negative politeness is on reducing the imposition by trying to make it softer and less unpleasant. Finally, politeness maxims (n= 41(22.65%)) have been used the least by the characters.

In Table 2, the frequency and percentage of politeness strategies and maxims used in the five surahs can be seen more specifically.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentages of Different Politeness Strategies and Maxims Used in the Five Surahs

No.	Politeness Strategies/Politeness Principle	Characters			Total
		Allah	Prophets	Humans/other	F
1	Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)	13(7.1%)	2(1.09%)	6(3.2%)	21(11.6%)
2	Seek agreement	-	8(%)	2(%)	10(5.5%)
3	The hedge of opinion to avoid disagreement	-	6(%)	3(%)	9(4.97%)
4	Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	1(%)	3(%)	2(%)	6(3.31 %)
5	Be optimistic	-	6(%)	2(%)	8(4.41%)
6	Offer, promise	11(6.07%)	6(3.31%)	7(3.86%)(1 angel)	24(13.25%)
7	Be pessimistic by doing indirect request	-	2(%)	-	2(1.10%)
8	Give deference or respect	1(0.55%)	21(11.60)	14(7.73)	36(19.88%)
9	Apologize for doing FTA	-	3(%)	1(%)	4(2.20%)
10	Minimize the imposition, Rx	2(1.10%)	9(9.97%)	3(1.65%) (2=angels)	14(7.73%)
11	Go on record as incurring debt, or as not indebting H	-	5(%)	1(%)	6(3.31%)
12	The tact maxim	2(%)	3(%)	2(%)	7(3.86%)
13	The generosity maxim	-	-	-	0(0%)
14	The approbation maxim	-	2(%)	4(%)	6(3.31%)
15	The maxim of modesty	-	1(%)	7(%)	8(4.41%)
16	The agreement maxim	-	7(%)	7(%)	14(7.73%)
17	The sympathy maxim	2(%)	2(%)	2(%)	6(3.31%)
	Total	32(17.67%)	86(47.51%)	63(34.8%)	181(100%)

According to the results shown in Table 2, positive politeness strategies are generally the most frequently used cases in comparison to the negative politeness strategies and politeness maxims in all five surahs. As this table shows, the most frequently used strategy is the negative politeness strategy of “give deference or respect” in the Surahs (used by Allah, prophets, humans, and Allah, 1, 21, and 14 times, respectively). This may be attributed to the fact that the prophets as exemplary human beings should show more respect to others in comparison to ordinary human beings. Moreover, Table 2 shows that the generosity maxim has not been used in any surah. This may be due to the point that in the five surahs investigated in this study maximizing cost to self, minimizing benefit to self, and giving value to the others’ wants have not been discussed.

Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of the politeness strategies and maxims used for males and females in the Qur’an.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of the Different Politeness Strategies and Maxims Used for Males and Females in the Qur’an

No.	Politeness strategies/maxims	Humans	
		Females	Males
1	Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)	0	6(%)
2	Seek agreement	2(%)	0
3	Hedge of opinion to avoid disagreement	2(%)	1(%)
4	Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants	1(%)	1(%)
5	Be optimistic	0	2(%)
6	Offer, promise	0	7(%)
7	Be pessimistic by doing indirect request	0	0
8	Give deference or respect	2(%)	12(%)
9	Apologize for doing FTA	0	1(%)
10	Minimize the imposition, Rx	2(%)	1(%)
11	Go on record as incurring debt, or as not indebting H	0	1(%)
12	The tact maxim	0	2(%)
13	The generosity maxim	0	0
14	The approbation maxim	0	4(%)
15	The Maxim of modesty	2(%)	5(%)
16	The agreement maxim	4(%)	3(%)
17	The sympathy maxim	0	2(%)
	Total	15(8.28%)	48(26.51)

As the results in Table 3 indicate, the majority of politeness strategies and maxims used in the five surahs belong to males. This may be because in the five surahs under investigation in this study, many more points have been mentioned for males in comparison to those considered for females. This table also shows that the strategy of giving deference or respect has been used more than other strategies and maxims for males. This finding may be due to the point that males are the head of the family and are in the society more than females and have more contacts with others, hence the extent of showing respect which is expected increases. For females, the highest frequency belongs to the agreement maxim. This finding indicates that females are expected to minimize

disagreement between themselves and others, and maximize agreement between themselves and others. They naturally give value to other individuals' opinions. This may be due to the different nature of the females.

Results for the third research question

The third research question of the study asked about the way females and males were addressed in the Qur'an. In order to answer this research question, the researchers drew on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness. Many politeness strategies have been used in the Qur'an, however, due to space limitations, few examples of some sub-strategies are mentioned here. In the following sections, some extracts have been taken from the five surahs investigated in this study as examples of politeness reflected for males and females.

Examples of off-record strategies

A speaker can go off the record when he/she uses ambiguous and vague expressions to reduce face-threats. As Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) have suggested, ambiguities exist between literal and possible meanings. The speaker must be clear enough when he/she interacts. In the Holy Qur'an, this strategy has been used when the topic is offensive (Al Momani et al., 2018). The following verses are examples of using this strategy in the Qur'an.

Extract 1

“What was your business, women, ’ he said, ’when you solicited Joseph? ’God save us! ’they said. ’We know no evil against him. ’The Governor’s wife said, ’Now the truth is at last discovered; I solicited him; he is a truthful man.” (The Qur’an, Joseph, 51).

Extract 2

“The king said, ’Bring him to me! ’And when the messenger came to him, he said, ’Return unto thy lord, and ask of him, "What of the women who cut their hands?" Surely my Lord has knowledge of their guile.” (The Qur’an, Joseph, 50).

In Extract 1, the words 'business' and 'solicit' do not have their literal meaning. In fact, they connote sexual intercourse and have nothing to do with their surface level meanings. Moreover, the phrase 'cut their hands' in Extract 2 is not used in the usual meaning. A previous event which has not been mentioned here directly has been hidden. These are euphemistic metaphors connoting sexual intercourse. The Qur'an uses off-record strategy to decrease FTAs. This finding is consistent with that of Al-Momani et al.'s (2018) research. In their study, these researchers showed that off-record strategies are employed for sensitive issues like sexual intercourse and divorce.

Examples of positive politeness strategies

When a speaker uses positive politeness strategies, or face redress, he/she aims to address the positive face needs of the listener, and in doing so enhance this face. Positive politeness strategies indicate a symmetrical friendly relationship between the speaker and listener who have similar wants in some ways (Al Momani et al., 2018). The concept of rapport is different because each individual has his/her own appreciation of being close to others. Positive politeness strategy is employed to lessen the distance by showing friendliness and having a strong interest in the listener's need to be valued. This is also used to reduce the negative face and also threatening acts.

Positive face is achieved via different methods explained previously. Brown and Gilman (1960) have stated that addressing an individual by his/her first name causes him/her feel inferior to the speaker if there is no solidarity. If no solidarity exists in a context, this kind of addressing can result in conflicts. In the Qur'an, first names are used mostly for men to indicate closeness and intimacy. The following example shows this point:

Extract 3

“Joseph, thou true man, pronounce to us regarding seven fat kine, that seven lean ones were devouring, seven green ears of corn, and seven withered; haply I shall return to the men, haply they will know.” (The Qur’an, Joseph, 46).

This verse reveals that the king of Egypt used positive politeness when he called Joseph by his first name. He also added the title of 'a true man'. This shows the reflection of another sub-strategy, noticing and attending to the listener, used here. The king has taken notice of the hearer's aspects. He saw the prophet as a true man. He also took notice of Joseph's ability to interpret the vision truly.

Concerning women, Al-Momani et al. (2018) stated that women in the Qur'an are not addressed by their first names except for the mother of Jesus. The Qur'an has addressed Mary by her first name for 34 times to show that she was close to God. Qur'an addresses women by titles, nicknames or by employing hints and allusions. For

example, they are addressed as “woman of Abraham,” “woman of Noah,” “woman of Pharaoh;”, " woman of Imran", or “mother of Moses;” or sometimes as [sister of + name of brother]. For example, when referring to Zulaikha, Qur’an does not use her first name and uses 'the governor's wife' (The Governor’s wife said, ‘Now the truth is at last discovered; I solicited him; he is a truthful man).

Another positive politeness sub-strategy which can be mentioned here is offering and promising. In this sub-strategy, the speaker displays his/her good intentions in satisfying the listener’s wants. The following extract is an example used by males.

Extract 4

“They said, ‘Father, what ails thee, that thou trustest us not with Joseph? Surely, we are his sincere well-wishers.” (The Qur’an, Joseph, 11).

This verse reveals that Joseph’s brothers promised their father (Jacob), that they were his sincere well-wishers to their brother (Joseph) when they said, “O our father! What causes you not to have any trust in us concerning Joseph and most surely, we are his sincere well-wishers. They used the positive politeness strategy (promising) to be more polite with their father and mitigate their potential threat of some FTAs when they request their father to agree to take Joseph with them.

Another positive strategy used in the five surahs is the hedge of opinion to avoid disagreement. In two verses in the Ants surah, this strategy has been used for the queen.

Extract 5

“She said, ‘O Council, pronounce to me concerning my affair; I am not used to deciding an affair until you bear me witness.” “They said, ‘We possess force, and we possess great might. The affair rests with thee; so consider what thou wilt command.” (The Qur’an, Ants, 22-23).

The queen said: ‘O Council, let me hear your counsel, concerning my affairs, for I am not used to deciding an affair until you bear me witness. They replied: ‘We are possessors of force and great might. It is for you to command, so consider what you will’. In these verses, the council used the positive politeness strategy ‘avoid disagreement’ to show their apparent agreement with their queen to avoid the damage to her positive face.

Examples of negative politeness strategies

In this section, some negative politeness strategies used in the five surahs are presented.

One example of negative politeness strategy used is giving deference or respect. In the following verse, God has used this negative strategy for his prophet, Moses.

Extract 6

” So, when he came to it, he was called: ‘Blessed is he who is in the fire, and he who is about it. Glory be to God, the Lord of all Being!’” (The Qur’an, the Ants, 8).

Allah in this verse uses negative politeness strategy ‘give deference or respect’ to express respect to his prophet ‘Moses’ when he came near, he was called: ‘Blessed be who is (Moses) in the fire and (the angels) who are around it! Exaltations to Allah, Lord of the Worlds!

Another example of the negative politeness strategy of "giving deference or respect" is used in reference to Mary (mother of Jesus) in Mary surah.

Extract 7

"Sister of Aaron, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a woman unchaste" (The Qur’an, Mary, 28).

In this verse, the people praised Mary when they said: “Sister of Aaron, thy father was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a woman unchaste.” It is clear that in the realization of deference two sides exist: in one side, the speaker humbles and abases himself and in another one, the speaker raises the listener (pays him a particular positive face, that is what satisfies the wants of the listener to be considered as superior) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In the accusation context, Qur’an tells us that people named Mary “sister of Aaron”, expressing blame and accusation, reminding Mary of her family who enjoyed a good reputation and was renowned for their honesty, morality, and integrity.

Another type of negative politeness strategy used in the five surahs is minimizing the imposition. Using this strategy results in devaluing the overall weightiness of the FTA. An example can be seen in the following extract:

Extract 8

“Said he, ‘Then if thou followest me, question me not on anything until I myself introduce the mention of it to thee.’ (The Qur’an, Al-Kahf, 70).

In this verse, the prophet (Ilyas) told Moses to be patient and not to ask him the reasons of the tasks he did, then he relieved it when he said: ‘until I myself introduce the mention of it to thee’. In fact, he tries to minimize the imposition on the hearer, the prophet Moses.

Examples of politeness maxims

The most frequent maxim in the five surahs investigated in this study is the agreement maxim, whereas there was no generosity maxim in these surahs.

The agreement maxim

Human beings usually have the tendency to exaggerate agreement with other people, and to lessen disagreement by expressing regret, partial agreement, etc. They tend to increase agreement between self and other individuals and decrease disagreement between self and others. In fact, they give value to others' opinions with this agreement. The following extracts are some examples of this maxim.

Extract 9

“He said, ‘Yet thou shalt find me if God will, patient; and I shall not rebel against thee in anything.’ (The Qur’an, Al-Kahf, 69)

The Prophet said: you shall find me, if God will, patient; and I shall not rebel against you in anything. In this verse, one prophet (Moses) tries to minimize disagreement and maximize agreement with the other prophet (Ilyas).

Extract 10

“She said, ‘O Council, pronounce to me concerning my affair; I am not used to deciding an affair until you bear me witness.’ (The Qur’an, the Ants, 32)

In this verse, the woman (the Queen) said: 'O Council, let me hear your counsel, concerning my affairs, for I am not used to deciding an issue until you bear me witness. The queen employed maxim of agreement to avoid the disagreement between herself and her council. So, she asks her nation to give their opinion.

The maxim of modesty

The purpose of using modesty maxim is minimizing praise of self and maximizing dispraise of self. A very good instance of this maxim in the Quran is the conversation between Mary and the Angels. They use a comforting strategy when they tell Mary that her son will speak in infancy. In fact, this is a positive face. Seemingly, the verse intends to instruct a lesson regarding the way an individual should approach a sensitive issue in order to reduce surprise and tension.

Providing some clarifications to explain some commands is the reflection of modesty since when there is a demand for a hard and sensitive issue, it is crucial to provide justifications. Although God does not have to provide clarifications for his commands, because he has the highest rank, when he addresses sensitive and hard issues, he takes the strategy of saving ‘face’ and making the addressee have a good feeling. An example can be seen in Extract 11 below.

Extract 11

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; And shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm-tree: It will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye (The Qur’an, Mary, 23-26).

Here, Mary dispraises herself when the throes of childbirth compelled her to betake herself to the trunk of a palm tree; she said, ‘would I had died, and become a thing forgotten.’ Mary employs this utterance to be more courteous. However, God is comforting her and asks her not to grieve.

The tact maxim

Tact maxim is used to minimize cost to others and maximize the benefit to others. Extract 12 is an example of using this kind of maxim for a male in the Quran.

Extract 12

So, we established Joseph in the land, to make his dwelling there wherever he would. We visit with our mercy whomsoever we will, and we leave not to waste the wage of the good-doers (The Qur’an, Joseph, 56).

In this verse, God says that he has provided benefits for his prophet, Joseph. He also adds that he will prepare the ground for such benefits for any person he desires.

The approbation maxim

The approbation maxim is used to minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise of others. It maximizes respect for others and minimizes the disrespect to others. Extract 13 and 14 are examples of approbation maxim used for a male and a female, respectively.

Extract 13

And there entered the prison with him two youths. Said one of them, ‘I dreamed that I was pressing grapes. Said the other, ‘I dreamed that I was carrying on my head bread, that birds were eating of. Tell us its interpretation; we see that thou art of the good-doers (The Qur’an, Joseph, 36)

The utterance above is spoken when the two prisoners want to praise the prophet (Joseph). Prisoners use the approbation maxim to express their praise to Joseph. They believe that he can interpret their dreams because he is a good-doer.

Extract 14

Sister of Aaron, thy father, was not a wicked man, nor was thy mother a woman unchaste (The Qur’an, Mary, 28)

In this verse, maxim of approbation has been used to praise Mary's family. They said that her father was not a wicked man and her mother was not unchaste. The sentence has increased the praise of her and reduced dispraise of her.

The sympathy maxim

Sympathy maxim is used to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and other. In this maxim, others' feelings are important. The examples used for a male and a female are seen in Extracts 15 and 16 below.

Extract 15

Cast down thy staff. ‘ And when he saw it quivering like a serpent, he turned about, retreating, and turned not back. ‘Moses, fear not; surely the Envoys do not fear in my presence (The Qur’an, Ants, 10)

Extract 16

But the one that was below her called to her, ‘Nay, do not sorrow; see, thy Lord has set below thee a rivulet (The Qur’an, Mary, 24)

In these two verses, the sympathetic tone is spread. These two situations are realized as hard events and the utterances “shake the trunk of the palm tree; it will let fall ripe dates upon thee, so eat and drink and cool eye” and “grieve not, God has provided a rivulet beneath thee” provide a soothing speech that minimizes the addressee's agony and pain, hence relieving their sorrows, reducing antipathy, and increasing sympathy.

Although no study has considered the issue of politeness for both males and females in the holy Qur’an, it can be said that the results obtained in this study are, in general, partly comparable with those found in Al Momani et al.'s research since both of them showed that a respectful language has been used in this holy book to address humans (females in Al Momani's study and both males and females in the present study). These studies have shown that Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness have been applied in the most sacred book of Muslims.

Conclusion and implications

The holy Qur'an is the main source of Islamic instructions and addresses individuals in different situations and locations. It contains rules for interpersonal relationships, for example the relationship between human and God, human and society, males and females, children and parents, and many other connections. It also addresses all individuals in the society equally irrespective of their age, gender, status, and rank (Al Momani et al., 2018).

The present study drew on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness and Leech's (1983) maxim of politeness to investigate what kinds of politeness strategies and maxims are employed for humans in general, and males and females more specifically, in five surahs. The results indicated that positive politeness strategies are more frequently used for humans in general in comparison to the negative politeness strategies and politeness maxims in all five surahs. Moreover, the findings showed that the strategy of giving deference or respect has been used more than other strategies and maxims for males and using the agreement maxim has the highest rank among the politeness strategies and maxims used for females. It was evident from the analyses that both males and females have been addressed politely and respectfully in the Qur'an. Even in some cases, the level of politeness and caution used for females was more emphatic.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), and maxims of politeness suggested by Leech (1983) have been employed in the Qur'an to convey the moral message of being respectful and polite. The Qur'an is an unmatched book and contains meanings and images that are beyond intellectual human abilities. This holy book has provided a wide variety of topics including behavior, the appropriate way to address and behave toward each other. The results of the study can be useful in increasing the comprehension of the pragmatics of the Qur'an. Besides, they can be helpful in expanding the readers' knowledge about linguistic politeness strategies and politeness maxims in various texts including other religious, academic, and political texts.

The present study worked on five surahs and relied on quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine politeness. Since there were many verses in this examination, just a few of them were reported. Future researchers can limit the domain of their research to one surah and employ both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the politeness strategies and maxims used more comprehensively. One other limitation of this study is that the English translation of the Qur'an was considered for data analyses. Since there are cultural differences between Arabic and English, this difference may have been influential in the process of translation. Future researchers can examine the problems in translating Arabic verses into English and see how they can affect the use of politeness strategies and politeness maxims in the Qur'an. Another avenue for further research can be contrastive studies on positive and negative strategies in the Holy Qur'an and other Holy books like Bible. Finally, in the five surahs investigated in this study, no generosity maxim was found. Future research can examine the why of this issue.

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