

# Politeness Strategies in Arabic-Scripted Friday *Khutbah* (“Sermons”)

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**Abstract**—This study examines politeness strategies employed by Muslim preachers in Arabic-scripted Friday *Khutbah* “sermons”, especially those available on the Internet. The data consist of four sermons delivered by renowned Saudi preachers in Mecca’s Haram, Muslims’ holiest mosque, and published on verified sites on the web. Findings reveal that the preachers have employed twelve distinct politeness strategies, based on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) four major types of politeness: positive face, negative face, off-record, and bald-on record. Positive politeness was found to be the most predominant. This suggests that the preachers tend to promote collective identity and mutual respect, in line with the principle of acceptance inherent in positive politeness. In addition, negative politeness, which emphasizes the listener’s autonomy, ranked second in frequency, consistent with the cultural norms, communicative intentions, and socio-religious sensitivities prevalent in Muslim communities. Through examining these sermons, this study contributes to broader research in politeness in religious discourse, providing data for comparison with earlier studies.

**Index Terms**—sermon, preacher, politeness, positive face, negative face

## I. INTRODUCTION

Politeness is an essential component of verbal and nonverbal interactions where speakers take into account the feelings and appropriate behavior of others (Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983; Wolfson, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987; House & Kádár, 2021; Zakaria et al., 2022). In the domain of language and communication, politeness is essential for building, maintaining, and fostering relationships because it allows people to show each other humility, respect, and reverence (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983; Sifianou, 2019). Its significance has motivated numerous inquiries and investigations within politeness theories such as Leech’s (1983) politeness maxims theory and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness model. Many researchers (e.g., Terkourafi, 2008; Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1995; Migdadi et al., 2012; Junaidi, 2018) have investigated how people’s speech conforms to social norms and expectations and demonstrates regard, decency, and respect. They also investigated if politeness is likely to promote peaceful and productive relationships, resolve disputes, and exhibit consideration for others’ feelings.

In Arabic, many studies (e.g., Atawneh, 1991; Al-Khatib, 2001; Migdadi, 2003; Migdadi, 2021) have investigated politeness phenomena in different genres and contexts within Arab-Islamic cultures. Contrary to other areas of sociolinguistic research, religious discourse has received little attention, despite the role this kind of discourse plays in social interaction and its influence on the thinking and actions of the hearers, particularly in Muslim societies. For example, in Islamic culture, the Friday *Khutbah* ‘sermon’ is noteworthy, and the way in which preachers address their audience can impact the effectiveness of the message. This study examines politeness strategies employed in Friday *Khutbah* in Arabic, drawing on Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. The study specifically attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the politeness strategies used in Friday *Khutbah* ‘sermons’?
- 2- What are the frequencies and percentages of these strategies?
- 3- To what extent are the results of the study significant to research on politeness in religious discourse?

This study holds significance for two major reasons. First, it aims to enhance a better understanding of politeness theory in religious discourse by developing an analytical framework of politeness strategies in scripted Friday *Khutbah* ‘sermons’ in Arabic. In addition, it provides data for comparison with earlier studies (e.g., Al-Khatib, 2012; Fayad, 2014; Al-Momani et al., 2018; Kareem, 2019) of politeness in Islamic discourse.

The Friday *khutbah* is translated into English as ‘sermon/s’, referring to a preaching that precedes the Friday Zuhr (i.e., noon) prayer (Mahmoud & Kasim, 2019). The content of the sermon can vary, with many focusing on the nourishment of the soul and the believers’ dependence on Allah. The Friday sermon is delivered as two smaller sermons with an *istigfār* (i.e., seeking forgiveness from Allah) gap in between (Saddhono et al., 2016). It is often delivered by an

eloquent preacher who attempts to affect the congregation's thinking and behavior on different religious issues (Robinson, 1980; Mahmoud & Kasim, 2019).

The Friday sermon has a major impact on the congregation by offering spiritual advice, addressing social issues, and fostering community cohesion. According to Ali and Khan (2017), it is a key method for spreading Islamic knowledge and fostering and reinforcing Muslims' faith. As argued by Madanat (2016), the Islamic Friday sermon is important in raising awareness of social issues, stimulating benevolence, and promoting social reform. Kamali (2008) points out that the Friday sermon fosters inter-group concord and strengthens the bonds of brotherhood among the members of the Muslim community.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars have examined politeness in different contexts, using various methodologies. Their interest in politeness derives from its essential role in interpersonal interactions. As a result, they have studied various aspects of politeness, developing models and hypotheses to understand it.

Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) were pioneers in studying politeness and its role in interpersonal communication. Lakoff's theory emphasizes reducing conflict through clarity and politeness, while Leech introduced a model grounded on Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims. Leech's politeness principle encompasses maxims like tact, approbation, generosity, sympathy, modesty, and agreement. Violating these maxims can result in being labeled as an "invader" and displaying a lack of cooperation in conversation (Al-Momani et al., 2018).

However, despite criticism, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, based on Goffman's (1967) notion of face, is the preferred theoretical framework for the present study. In this model, the term 'face' refers to an individual's self-image, influenced by expressions like 'losing face' and 'saving face'. It encompasses positive and negative aspects, influencing social interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Face can be lost, preserved, or enhanced in conversation, but it remains susceptible to face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson (1987) categorized FTAs into four types: threats to the audience's negative face, threats to the audience's positive face, threats to the speaker's positive face, and threats to the speaker's negative face.

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced four linguistic politeness strategies to minimize FTAs in interpersonal interactions: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record – indirect strategy, each focusing on on-record communication (p. 101). Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that when interlocutors anticipate performing an FTA, they can use either an off-record strategy or an on-record strategy (p. 69). They argue that when face is at risk, speakers use four types of politeness strategies to reduce the potential for face loss. These strategies will be further examined in the following section.

### 1. Bald-on-record Strategies

Bald-on-record strategies convey the speaker's needs directly without minimizing face threat, frequently using imperatives. They are used in situations when the conversation participants are familiar and face threat is minimal, like "come in".

### 2. Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies maintain positive face by addressing the hearer's desires and sense of inclusion, employing informal or formal language, and avoiding disagreement. These strategies include noticing listeners, exaggerating tone, fostering engagement, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, and providing justifications.

### 3. Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies aim to respect autonomy, recognize authority, and avoid imposition, acknowledging others' power and debt. Their usage is influenced by the degree of social distance between individuals (Wolfson, 1988). Brown and Levinson (1987) identified ten negative politeness strategies: being indirect, using questions and hedges, being pessimistic, minimizing imposition, giving deference, apologizing, impersonalizing, generalizing expression, nominalizing, and incurring the hearer.

### 4. Off-Record Politeness Strategies:

These are indirect strategies which use irony, tautology, understatement, rhetorical questions, and subtle hints to address sensitive topics without directly confronting them. They allow for various interpretations and effective responses during conversations.

Numerous studies have explored politeness through the perspectives of Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1987), predominantly focusing on conversational exchanges and occasionally extending to written texts (e.g., Matsumoto, 1989; Fraser, 1990; Watts et al., 1992; Nwoye, 1992; Elarbi, 1997; Pan, 2000; Al-Khatib, 2001; Watts, 2003; Held, 2005; Yuen, 2009; Migdadi et al., 2010; Al-Momani et al., 2018; Jewad, 2022). In religious discourse, politeness research has often focused on written texts and spoken language in both Christianity and Islam. In Christian discourse, Klein (1993) discussed how politeness operated as a political idiom in early modern Britain, particularly in the writings of Whig writers such as Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Hostetler (2012) employed linguistic theories of politeness to analyze the discourse features of the Early Middle English Ancrene Wisse, emphasizing how politeness strategies entwine with the genre's regulatory requirements to form a complex discourse field. Ushie et al. (2014) discussed how name-calling and vulgarity in online discourse can threaten religious peace and harmony among

Christians in Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of maintaining civility in public discourse. Al-Ameedi and Abood (2021) investigated mitigation in biblical verses and prophetic traditions from a pragmatic perspective, exploring how speakers convey and listeners understand this phenomenon.

In Islamic discourse, Al-Khatib (2012) applied Leech's (1983) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) theories to various verses in the Qur'an. He identified many politeness strategies pertaining to Brown and Levinson's (1987) four types of politeness - bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness. Murni et al. (2013) investigated the use of linguistic politeness strategies in emails discussing Islam among members of the Indonesian Muslim Society in America. Their findings reveal that the sample uses politeness strategies such as acknowledging weaknesses, asking questions, and referring to religious texts. Their study emphasizes that linguistic politeness is consistent with the Islamic principles of telling the truth and showing patience in communication. Al-Fayyad (2014) examined politeness in Prophet Mohammad's Hadith (i.e., traditions), noting the dominance of bald-on-record strategies in this type of discourse. Another investigation of politeness in the Qur'an by Al-Momani et al. (2018) depicted women respectfully in all areas, with off-record and positive and negative politeness methods prevailing in conversations related to women.

In the context of Islamic sermons, Kareem (2019) explored politeness in Friday sermons in English and Yorùbá, emphasizing the importance of strategic politeness to prevent hurting the congregation's feelings. Using a modified version of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, the study illustrated different politeness strategies used by preachers during their speeches, with sermons delivered in Yorùbá revealing evidence of cultural impacts. In their study of politeness in the Prophets' Qur'anic prayers, Arifianto et al. (2023) revealed that the Prophets employed the tact and acceptance maxims and 'on-record' and 'off-record' strategies. The study also identified language devices which conveyed respect and humility before God.

In the literature reviewed, it is emphasized how important politeness is in religious discourse across a range of cultural and linguistic contexts. This relevance of politeness emphasizes its essential role in enhancing interpersonal relationships within communities, establishing concord, and conveying religious messages. Despite these realizations, the politeness interactions in Islamic sermons have not been thoroughly investigated in research. By examining the frequency and types of politeness strategies employed in Arabic-scripted Friday sermons, this study attempts to address this gap, guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This section is divided into two parts. The first part describes the data collection procedures. The second part presents the study's coding scheme and data analysis procedures, illustrated with a sample from the data.

#### A. Data Collection

The data for this study consist of four online<sup>1</sup> Arabic-scripted Friday sermons delivered by renowned Saudi preachers. These sermons were delivered between the years 2006 and 2012 at Mecca's Haram, the holiest Muslim mosque. The sermons were selected based on the variety of topics used, including "good manners", "self-accountability", "contemplate the examples in the Holy Qur'an", and "if we only had obeyed Him (God)". The sermons are notably varied in length, with the longest including 4268 words and the shortest 1777 words, totaling 11510 words. Although the sermons were not based on the presence of polite language, each was found to contain different types of politeness strategies. A summary of the details of the studied sermons is provided in Table 1, below:

TABLE 1  
SUMMARY OF THE FRIDAY SERMONS DELIVERED AT MECCA'S HARAM

Topic	Preacher's name	Number of words	Date of delivery
Good manners	Al-Sudays	4268	2011, updated 27 August 2021
Self-accountability	Al-Sheikh	3162	December 17, 2010
Contemplate the examples in the Holy Qur'an	Al-Shuraym	2303	September 26, 2012
If we had obeyed Him (God)	Al-Muslih	1777	February 25, 2006

#### B. Data Analysis

Effective data analysis depends on a thorough understanding of the material under scrutiny (Taylor-Powell, 2003). Thus, using the socio-pragmatic approach, the data were analyzed qualitatively by examining politeness strategies

<sup>1</sup> The websites for the data are as follows:

Al-Sudais (2011). Good Manners.

<http://audio.islamweb.net/audio/index.php?page=FullContent&audioid=28213&full=1>

Al Asheikh (2013). Handicapped Rights in Islam

<http://www.alathary.net/vb2/showthread.php?15644->

Al-Shraraym: tadabur al-mithāl fil-qurān al-kareem

<https://www.alukah.net/sharia/0/62780/%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A8%D8%A9->

Al-Mosleh (2015). Oh, We Wish We Had Obeyed him.

<http://www.almosleh.com/ar/index-ar-show-20092.html>

within their social, cultural, and religious contexts. The analysis also considered both stated and unstated meanings, accommodating the typical interpretations of what the preachers conveyed. The data were coded based on previous research on politeness strategies, specifically Brown and Levinson’s (1987) model, which is discussed in section II. Additionally, politeness taxonomies from studies including Al-Khatib (2012), Kareem (2019), Jewad (2022), and Arifianto et al. (2023) were utilized in some cases. However, our naming protocol occasionally differed from the models used in these studies. Following the analysis of the politeness strategies, we implemented steps to ensure the reliability of our classification system. We conducted a second classification two weeks later using different Excel sheets. Subsequently, we assessed the agreement between the earlier and the latter classification using Holsti’s (1969) coefficient of reliability. This analysis showed a substantial similarity, with an experimental value of 0.87, which signifies remarkable consistency in the coding outcomes across both categorizations. Table 2 below exhibits twelve politeness strategies identified in the data, with each defined and exemplified.

TABLE 2  
POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN FRIDAY SERMONS IN ARABIC WITH DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

Strategy	Definition	Example
Attend to congregation’s needs	Communicating that the congregation’s wants and desires are similar to the preacher’s	<i>as’alu llaha lakum al-’afiya wa al-tawfiq</i> “I ask that God grant you well-being and success”
Being conventionally indirect	Using expressions with non-literal contextual meanings	<i>fihī tustabāhu ad-dimā’u</i> “Through it blood is shed.”
Using in-group markers	Using address forms such as brothers, sisters, etc.	<i>habībī, in kunta fi ni’ma</i> “Dear one, if you are in a blessing state”
Using inclusive language	Engaging both the preacher and the congregation in shared activities, encouraging unity	<i>hādā mā narāhu wa nasma’uhu</i> “This is what we see and hear.”
Minimizing the imposition	Lessening the severity of a statement through depersonalizing and presenting the message indirectly	<i>wa yu’adi ?ila ’ihlāki al-ḥarṭhi wa an-nasli.</i> “And it leads to the destruction of crops and lineage”
Reasoning	Providing or eliciting logical explanations, actions, and demonstrating respect for the congregants’ autonomy	<i>lā urīdu an uṭīl ’alaykum fa-nahnu fī al-’īd.</i> “I don’t want to take up too much of your time, for we are in the midst of the Eid celebration.”
Metaphorical urgency for emphasis.	Utilizing figurative and imperative language to create urgency	<i>unzur ilā mimman hum dūnaka fī al-ṣiḥḥah</i> “Look at those who are less fortunate than you in health.
Using rhetorical questions	Posing questions to subtly convey information or opinions	<i>?alaysa lana an la nastafīda min al-ahdāth al-tārikhiyya</i> “Shouldn’t we benefit from historical events?”
Over-generalization	Addressing congregants with general statements, allowing them to discern applicability	<i>mā daxalū baladan, illā afsadūhā.</i> “They did not enter a country without corrupting it.”
Showing sympathy	Using indirect expression of concern or understanding for the congregation’s situation	<i>innā min a’zami ṣuwaril ixtilālil fikri wal anḥirāfi al-’aqadiyyi.</i> “Indeed, one of the greatest forms of intellectual disorder”)
Apologizing	Using certain expressions to soften the impact of offending someone’s autonomy	<i>a’atathīru ilaykum ida kunt qad ?aTalt 9alaykum ’amal.</i> “I apologize to you if I have prolonged my sermon.”)
Doing FTA for the congregants	Fulfilling the congregation’s needs by directly requesting things or offering advice that is consistent with their interests	<i>uqadīmu lakum al-nasiha bian takūnū sādiqīn</i> “I advise you to be truthful.”

Moreover, the data were analyzed quantitatively by tallying the utterances pertaining to each politeness strategy and calculating their respective percentages. In case an utterance included multiple strategies, that was duly noted, thus counting these strategies separately. This coding approach differed from some earlier studies, such as Kareem (2019), which considered such strategies as complex, comprising two or more strategies simultaneously.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using the data collected for this study, the three research questions are answered in this section. We first provide the results of the study using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This is followed by a discussion of the results in light of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory and Arab-Islamic cultural norms.

A. Results

As shown in Table 3 below, there is a clear ranking of the identified politeness strategies, based on their frequencies in the data. The most prevalent strategy is attending to the hearer’s needs, accounting for 16.2% of all the politeness acts. This finding does not only suggest a substantial emphasis on the concerns and needs of the congregants, but it also implies a great tendency towards establishing connection, empathy and solidarity within the preaching environment. Being conventionally indirect is the second most occurring strategy, representing 14.05% of the total politeness acts. As this strategy employs expressions whose contextual meanings differ from their literal interpretations, it is likely to promote subtle communication while maintaining social harmony.

Using in-group-markers is in third place in terms of frequency, comprising 12.4% of all instances of politeness. By employing inclusive language such as "brothers," "sisters," or other identifiers, this technique aims to promote a sense of belonging and unity among the congregation. Using inclusive language is in the fourth position, including 11.9% of

the total politeness acts. It promotes harmony and collective participation in rituals and shared experiences, which fosters the bond between the preacher and the congregation. After these strategies, we observe a gradual decrease in frequency among the remaining tactics, such as reasoning (8.1%), metaphorical urgency for emphasis (7.02%), using rhetorical questions (5.9%), overgeneralisation (5.4%), showing sympathy (4.32%), apologizing (3.32%), and doing the FTA for the congregation (2.16%). Overall, this distribution highlights the variety of politeness strategies employed in Arabic Friday sermons, with some strategies being more common than others.

TABLE 3  
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN FRIDAY SERMONS

Politeness Strategy	Politeness Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Attend to congregation's needs	Positive Politeness	30	16.2%
Being conventionally indirect	Negative Politeness	26	14.05%
Using in-group markers	Positive Politeness	23	12.4%
Using inclusive language	Positive Politeness	22	11.9%
Minimizing the imposition	Negative Politeness	17	9.2%
Reasoning	Positive Politeness	15	8.1
Metaphorical urgency for emphasis	Bald-on record	13	7.02
Using rhetorical questions	Off-record	11	5.9
Over-generalization	Off-record	10	5.4
Showing sympathy	Positive Politeness	8	4.32
Apologizing	Negative Politeness	6	3.32
Doing FTA for the congregation	Bald-on record	4	2.16
Total		185	100

To gain a deeper understanding of the identified politeness strategies, it is essential to categorize them according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record politeness, and on-record politeness, as shown in Table 3 above. Positive politeness strategies include attending to the congregation's needs, using in-group markers, using inclusive language, reasoning, and showing sympathy. The calculated frequency for positive politeness strategies is 54.57%. Negative politeness, which includes being conventionally indirect, minimizing imposition, and apologizing, has a usage rate of 24.92%. Off-record politeness comprises the strategies of using rhetorical questions and over-generalization, with a calculated percentage of 11.3%. Finally, on-record politeness, which involves metaphorical urgency for emphasis and performing the FTA for the congregation, accounts for 9.18% of the data. Table 4 below provides a summary of the frequencies of these four main types of politeness, illustrating their hierarchical occurrence. Positive politeness is shown to be the most frequent, accounting for 54.57%, followed by negative politeness at 24.92%, off-record politeness at 11.3%, and on-record politeness at 9.18%.

TABLE 4  
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF POLITENESS TYPES IN ARABIC FRIDAY SERMONS

Politeness Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive Politeness	98	54.57
Negative Politeness	49	24.92
Off-record Politeness	21	11.3
On-record Politeness	17	9.18
Total	180	100

## B. Discussion

In this section, the study's findings are discussed in relation to Brown and Levinson's (1987) four major categories of politeness. Due to space limitations, the discussion focuses on the politeness strategies that are identified to be most frequent or distinctive within a particular category of politeness.

### (a). Positive Politeness

As explained above, positive politeness accounts for the highest percentage of politeness acts, at a usage rate of 54.57%. This predominance is consistent with the situational contexts of the sermons regarding their place of delivery and their potential recipients. Specifically, as the Friday sermons were delivered in Mecca's Haram, the holiest Muslims' mosque, they were addressed to a diverse group of people from various backgrounds, ages, and levels of religious knowledge. Therefore, the predominance of positive politeness is helpful in addressing this diversity by developing an inclusive message that considers varied viewpoints and emotions. It also assists in spanning differences and ensuring that the sermon aligns with a broad audience (Holmes, 1995).

In addition, this predominance of positive politeness is in agreement with findings from studies on politeness in the Qur'an by Al-Khatib (2012), Arifianto et al. (2023), and Kareem (2019) on Islamic sermons in English and Yorubá. Consequently, religious discourse frequently emphasizes the requirements of the recipient's positive face. This reflects a prevalent tendency toward fostering goodwill and rapport with the audience, emphasizing mutual appreciation and camaraderie within the context of the message conveyed.

The role of positive politeness strategies in fostering a sense of community and solidarity among interactants (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is evident in this study through the preachers' frequent attempts (16.2 %) to attend to the congregation's needs and desires, as shown in Table 3 above. Since sincere Muslims usually seek God's approval, when the preachers attempt to guide them on how to attain this goal, it is perceived as an effort to address their concerns and desires. An example of the preachers attending to the needs of the congregation is provided in Extract 1 below:

Extract 1

*Eman ḥāfaẓa 'alā ḥādīhi al-ṣalawāti kānat lahu nūran wa burhānan wa najātan yawma alqiyāmati. wa lihādā lā budda*

*lanā an nuqadima al-ṣalāta 'alā bāqi al-ṣū'ūn al-dunyawīyati al-zā'ilati li nanāl riḍā Allāh yawma liqā'ih.* (AlSheikh: Self accountability)

"Whoever preserves these prayers will have for him light, evidence, and salvation on the Day of Resurrection. Thus, it is necessary for us to prioritize prayer over the fleeting worldly affairs to attain the satisfaction of Allah on the Day of Resurrection"

In this extract, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preserving prayers by highlighting the benefits that individuals will receive on the Day of Judgement: light, evidence, and salvation. By doing this, the speaker shows that he is conscious of the audience's spiritual wants and concerns, which are critical to their interests and needs as sincere believers looking for God's favor. In addition, the speaker urges giving prayer precedence over material affairs to obtain the grace of Allah. This advice addresses the audience's desire for spiritual satisfaction and guidance, which is consistent with their interests in achieving closeness to God and receiving His approval. In general, the speaker attends to the hearers' wants and perspectives, which "may operate as an expression of good intentions, indicating that the speaker assumes that speaker and the hearer share common ground" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 124).

In addition, when the preachers employ positive politeness, the congregants often feel valued and accepted. This encourages engagement and receptivity to the messages being delivered. Specifically, the use of inclusive language and in-group markers and expressions of solidarity can make the sermon more influential and meaningful to the listeners (Holmes, 1995). In so doing, the preachers implicitly claim common ground with the congregation by using address forms such as brothers, sisters, Allah worshipers, and Islamic nation. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), "the use of in-group codes— language, dialect, jargon, and local terminology assumes that hearer understands and shares the associations of the codes" (p. 124). An example of this approach is provided in Extract 2 below:

Extract 2

*"yā ixwat al-islām, linata'amal fī wāqi' akhlāqinā wa sulūkinā ma' anfusinā wahlīnāwaawlādinā wa usarinā wa ixwāninā al-muslimīn."* (Al-Sudays: Good manners)

"O brothers of Islam, let us contemplate the reality of our ethics and behavior with ourselves, our families, our children, our households, and our fellow Muslim"

In this extract, the preacher addresses the audience by using the term "O brothers of Islam", invoking a sense of shared identity and belonging within the Islamic community. This in-group identity marker fosters a sense of unity, solidarity, and mutual understanding among the listeners. Furthermore, by addressing the audience as "brothers of Islam," the speaker establishes a sense of camaraderie and closeness, which emphasizes the shared connection and mutual values that unite members of the Muslim community. This enhances a positive social atmosphere and reinforces positive relationships within the group.

Moreover, as shown in Table 3 above, the preachers have frequently (8.1%) utilized the strategy of reasoning to engage the congregation in the action and reduce the risk of encroaching upon their positive self-image by providing explanations for their desires. The frequent use of this strategy reflects the diverse nature of the congregation receiving the sermon. By involving the congregation in their practical reasoning process and assuming reciprocity, the preachers aim to persuade them to recognize the validity of their FTAs, or at least hope to do so (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 128). The use of reasoning to address the congregants' positive face needs is illustrated in Extract 3 below:

Extract 3

*murū awlādakum biṣ-ṣalāti iḍā balaḡa al-i'bn sinna sab' sinīn, wa balaḡat al-bint sab' sinīn,fa-l lāh sā'ilikum yawm*

*al-qiyāmah hal amartuhu biṣ-ṣalāti.* (Al-Sheikh: Self-accountability)

"Instruct your children to pray when they reach the age of seven, for Allah will question you on the Day of Resurrection: Did you command them to pray?"

In this example, the preacher uses the belief in accountability before Allah on the Day of Resurrection as a reason to motivate parents to instruct their children to pray. By framing the instruction within this religious context, the speaker provides a reason for why it is important to teach children to pray at a young age. This reason appeals to the parents'

sense of duty, responsibility, and religious devotion. By highlighting the potential consequences of not fulfilling this duty—being questioned by Allah—the speaker employs a persuasive strategy that encourages compliance. It acknowledges the autonomy of the parents while also appealing to their values and beliefs, thus enhancing the likelihood of them taking action.

(b). *Negative Politeness*

The preachers have also frequently addressed the congregants' negative face needs, with a notable percentage (24.92%), just slightly lower than that of positive politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), negative politeness is "specific and targeted; it aims to reduce the specific imposition caused by the Face Threatening Act (FTA)" (p. 129). Thus, negative politeness strategies emphasize respect for the listener's autonomy and aim to minimize imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This tendency for respecting the addressees' autonomy was also found prevalent in Al-Khatib's (2012) and Arifianto et al.'s (2023) investigations into politeness in the Qur'an, indicating that indirectness is a major characteristic of Islamic discourse.

The frequent use of negative politeness in the data also aligns well with the cultural norms, communicative intentions and religious sensitivities in Muslim communities. For example, in many Arabic-speaking communities, hierarchical social systems and a high reverence for authority are prevalent. This regard and reverence to the audience is maintained by the preachers' frequent usage of negative politeness techniques, including being conventionally indirect and minimizing imposition, accounting for 14.05% and 9.2 %, respectively. The preachers use these two strategies as a sign of humility and wisdom. In the former technique, indirect illocutions are more polite due to their increased optionality and diminished force (Leech, 1983, p. 108). In Extract 4 below, the preacher employs expressions that have contextually unambiguous meanings that differ from their literal meaning.

Extract 4

urīdu an ta'lam anna taḡyīr al-munkar bil-yad lahu ḍawābiṭ. 'iḍā tamma al-i'ltizāmu bihā kānat al-natā'ju ṭjābīyah wa 'mat al-fā'ida." (Al-Muslih: If we had obeyed Him (God))  
 "I want you to understand that changing the wrong with your hand is subject to regulations. If these rules are adhered to, the results will be positive and the benefits widespread".

The statement in this extract begins with "I want you to know", which is a conventionally indirect way of expressing a request or imparting information. It avoids directly instructing or commanding the listener, which could potentially be seen as impolite or confrontational. Furthermore, to express the need for compliance, the preacher utilized a conditional statement "If these rules are adhered to". In this context, the conditional clause added uncertainty to the press and undermined the assertiveness of the message. The speaker does not state that people need to comply; he only speculates about what might happen in such a case. Finally, the last indication of positive rhetoric is the passive voice "the results will be positive". With the passive voice, there is no emphasis on specific actors and actions; thus, it sounds more impersonal and removed. The facts presented became not something that will happen if people comply with the regulations but simply a natural outcome.

In the other technique of negative politeness, the preachers use various lexical and syntactic forms to reduce the magnitude of what is requested from the hearers, as in the following example:

Extract 5

āyuhā al-muḥaqqiq fī al-aṣyā', qif ma'a nafsika qalīlan, hal kān al-taḥqīq 'indak ' ādilā? (Al-Sudays: Good manners)  
 "O investigator of things, pause for a moment with yourself, was the investigation fair?"

In this extract, the preacher uses two expressions to minimize the imposition involved in the utterance. First, he calls the addressee the "investigator of things", which designates the addressed person as someone who generally has authority and takes the business they do seriously. Instead of putting down a direct statement or making a request, the opponent asks the addressee to "make sure of the truth." This form of the question is an example of struggling against the imposition of the speaker, and therefore we are dealing with the strategy of negative politeness. The speaker, thus, tries to put less strain on the autonomy and freedom of the addressee. In addition, the use of *qalīlan* "a little" shows consideration for the addressee's time and priorities. It implies that the speaker knows that the addressee may be engaged with other things; therefore, this person needs only a few minutes of his/her time. By doing so, he keeps out of their business while at the same time reducing chances that such may be considered as invasive or overbearing.

(c). *Off-Record Politeness*

The third type of politeness that is used considerably (11.3%) by the preachers is off- record politeness, including the strategies of over-generalization and rhetorical questions. These are indirect ways of conveying messages or intentions without making explicit statements. They can enhance the communicative effectiveness of the sermons by engaging the audience, emphasizing moral lessons. For instance, rhetorical questions, which are used repeatedly (5.9%) in the data,

can capture the congregants' attention and provoke thought, inviting them to reflect on their beliefs and actions without directly confronting them. An example of using this type of questions to convey off-record politeness is in Extract 6 below:

Extract 6

fa-man 'anta yā ibn ādam? 'alast al-faqīr wa-llāh huwa al-ġaniyyu al-ḥamīd, 'alast aḍā'if wa-llāh huwa al-qawīyyu al-'azīz (Al-Shuraym: Contemplate the examples in the Holy Qur'an)  
 "So who are you, O son of Adam? Are you not the poor one, while Allah is the rich, the praiseworthy? Are you not the weak one, while Allah is the powerful, the mighty?"

In this example, the speaker employs rhetorical questions to convey an indirect message and provide helpful guidance without directly interfering with the listener's autonomy or offending them. Instead of imparting the lesson verbatim, the speaker uses rhetorical questions to get the listeners to consider their identity and relationship with Allah. When he asks "Who are you, O son of Adam?" he implies that the listeners should reflect on their humble position in relation to Allah. Rhetorical questions can also gently persuade someone to reconsider their viewpoint or behavior without using explicit orders or directives. In this example, the speaker prompts the listeners to acknowledge their dependence on Allah and to adopt a more modest and grateful attitude.

Another off-record politeness strategy employed by the preachers at a considerable rate (5.4%) is over-generalization. It is used to address general populations indirectly and politely by making generalizations. As can be observed in Extract 7 below, this strategy allows the congregants to determine whether or not the general remark applies to them.

Extract 7

sayudriku al-mar' bi istiḥḍār al-ḥaḍr anahu laysa kullu bayḍā'ih ṣaḥmatan wa lā kullu sawḍā' faḥmatan wa lā kullu lāmi' ḍaḥaban. (Al-Shuraym: Contemplate the examples in the Holy Qur'an)  
 "A person will realize by being cautious that not every white is fat, nor is every black charcoal, nor is every shiny [metal] gold".

In this example, over-generalization is indicated through the speaker's use of a proverb including broad statements about certain objects. For instance, the statement "not every white is fat" exaggerates the correlation between the color white and fatness, while "not every black is charcoal" exaggerates the association between the color black and charcoal. Similarly, "not every shiny [metal] is gold" exaggerates the association between shininess and gold. In addition, by presenting these statements as if they were universally true, the speaker implies that they apply to all instances of the objects mentioned. However, these statements are clearly exaggerated and not meant to be taken literally. Instead, they serve to convey a broader message about the need for caution and discernment in making judgments or assumptions.

(d). *Bald-On-Record Politeness*

The least-occurring type of politeness is bald-on-record, accounting for 9.18% of the instances, and conveyed within the strategies of metaphorical emphasis and favoring the speaker. Although the preachers do not often make any effort to minimize the threats to the hearer's "face" in these strategies, they can enhance the clarity, directness, and impact of the sermon, aligning with the communicative goals and religious objectives of the preacher. For example, as in Extract 8 below, using metaphorical urgency for emphasis allows preachers to convey the importance of their message with a sense of immediacy and seriousness.

Extract 8

waṣāhid mā yajrī 'ala al-islam wal-muslimin min fasād 'arīd wa ṣarrin mustatīr, bisababi hā' ulā' al-gulāt al-takfiriyyīn, fī ṣarq al-ardh wa ġarbiḥā bism al-jihād zurān wa buhtānā. (Al-Muslih: If we only had obeyed Him)  
 "And witness what is happening to Islam and Muslims of widespread corruption and intense evil, because of these Takfiri extremists, in the east and west of the earth, falsely and deceitfully in the name of Jihad."

In this example, the speaker uses metaphorical urgency of emphasis to reflect bald-on-record politeness by delivering a direct and assertive message aimed at highlighting the seriousness of the issue at hand. The phrase "widespread corruption and intense evil" serves as a direct command, in which the speaker does not hedge or soften the statement but rather presents it assertively, urging the listener to recognize and acknowledge the severity of the issue. Furthermore, the use of strong language such as "Takfiri extremists" and "widespread corruption and intense evil" enhances the urgency and emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. By explicitly condemning the actions of these groups in clear

and forceful terms, the speaker is employing the bald-on-record strategy to convey the urgency of addressing the problem without ambiguity or reservation.

In addition, doing the FTA for the congregation, or emphasizing the advantages or special considerations given to the audience, can make the listeners feel included and special. The preacher and the congregation may become closer as a result, as in Extract 9 below:

Extract 9

*fakirū fī dunyākum wa āxiratikum, fī hayātikum wa mawtikum, fī hāḍirikum wa mustaqbalikum wa lā tansū al-halāl, fahuwa nasībuk min al-dunyā* (Al-Sheikh: Self-accountability)

"Think about your worldly life and your Hereafter, about your life and your death, about your present and your future. Do not also forget the lawful, for it is your share of this world".

In this example, the speaker is asking the listeners to reflect on various aspects of life, such as worldly matters, the Afterlife, life and death, and the present and future. Due to its introspective character, this message may at first seem aggressive or difficult, but in the end, it is conveyed for the listener's benefit. By encouraging them to reflect on these serious subjects, the speaker aims to enhance spiritual development and a deeper understanding of life's purpose and significance. The principal goal is to guide the listeners toward greater awareness and fulfillment, although this may involve presenting existential challenges and difficulties to them. Therefore, despite its discomfort, this bald-on-record strategy serves the listener's best interests by encouraging introspection and spiritual growth.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the politeness strategies employed in online Arabic-scripted Friday sermons, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The analysis of four sermons delivered by prominent scholars at Mecca's holiest mosque showed that all four of Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness strategies—bald on record, positive, negative, and off-record—were utilized. The positive politeness strategy—with five sub-strategies—was the most prevalent, where preachers emphasized shared values and group unity to encourage obedience to Allah. Negative Politeness strategies were next in frequency, including three sub-strategies that focused on respecting the listener's autonomy and freedom of behavior. Off-record and bald on record strategies were used in lower percentages, with only two sub-strategies for each. These findings validated earlier studies by Al-Khatib (2012) and Al-Fayyad (2014), Kareem (2019), Jewad (2022), and Arifianto et al. (2023), emphasizing the importance of politeness in Islamic discourse. Future research should explore specific speech acts in Islamic discourse and consider the impact of social variables like gender, age, and belief.

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