

A Strategic Analysis of Verbal Politeness Mechanisms in the Fifteen Supplications of Imam Sajjad (AS): An Approach to Ahl al-Bayt Epistemological Insights

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article Article history: Received 05 March 2025 Received in revised form 30 March 2025 Accepted 24 April 2025 Available online 23 August 2025 Keywords: discursive strategies, Imam al-Sajjād's Fifteen Supplications, english translation, verbal politeness, Ṣaḥīfat al-Sajjādiyya	Prayer, as one of the most prominent linguistic and spiritual acts in human-divine communication, possesses distinctive linguistic and theological structures. This qualitative, corpus-based research analyzes the discursive strategies in the English translation of Imam al-Sajjād's fifteen supplications (munājāt). Findings reveal that the most frequent discursive strategy in these supplications is the indirect strategy (encompassing request and allusion), deeply rooted in the theological and spiritual structures of devotional prayers. This approach, employed to preserve decorum and reverence in verbal discourse with the Divine, demonstrates the humility and spiritual depth of Imam al-Sajjād as the author of these supplications. Such a characteristic not only facilitates the deepening of spiritual and theological communication with God but also creates a respectful interpretive space within these texts. An examination of the English translation indicates that the translator, by adhering to the original Arabic text's theological structure and precisely conveying the embedded politeness and spirituality, successfully reflects a nuanced representation of Ahl al-Bayt theological insights in the English language. This research contributes to elucidating the theological dimensions of Imam al-Sajjād's supplications and their role in disseminating Shi'i theological knowledge on the international stage.
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Introduction

Supplication (du‘ā’), as a profound linguistic and communicative act, serves as a bridge between humanity and God, characterized by distinctive linguistic structures that reflect spiritual and cultural dimensions. These structures have evolved throughout history across diverse cultures, conveying the speaker's intent to maintain respect and humility in dialogue with a superior being, such as God. In linguistic studies, politeness strategies in oral and written discourse have been extensively examined, particularly through the lens of politeness theories, such as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which emphasizes the concept of "face"—the social image individuals present and strive to preserve in interactions. This theory posits that indirect politeness strategies are often employed to maintain politeness, especially in situations involving high social distance, power dynamics, and imposition levels. Despite abundant research on politeness strategies, their application in religious texts, particularly supplicatory invocations (munājāt), has received limited attention. This gap is particularly notable in the context of Islamic supplications rooted in the spiritual and theological traditions of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘alayhim al-salām).

The present research focuses on the Fifteen Munājāt of Imam al-Sajjād (‘a), a collection of supplications attributed to the fourth Shi‘i Imam, documented in works such as *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Thāniya al-Sajjādiyya*, *Bihār al-Anwār*, and *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān* by scholars including Shaykh al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, ‘Allāmah al-Majlisī, and Shaykh ‘Abbās Qummī. These munājāt, presented over fifteen consecutive days, address ethical and mystical themes, seeking divine mercy for the well-being and salvation of servants. This study examines the politeness strategies employed in these munājāt and their English translation by William Chittick (1997), with a particular emphasis on how these strategies reflect politeness and the theological teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, the research investigates how linguistic choices in the munājāt and their translation preserve the speaker's humility and foster a respectful and spiritual dialogue with God. This study addresses two research questions:

- 1) What is the most frequent politeness strategy in Imam al-Sajjād's (‘a) Fifteen Munājāt, and how does it contribute to deepening the spiritual connection with God?
- 2) How do the politeness strategies in these munājāt reflect the theological teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt in religious discourse?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, corpus-based approach to analyze politeness strategies in Imam al-Sajjād's (‘a) Fifteen Munājāt and their English translation. The corpus comprises the Arabic text of the munājāt, as contained in *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* (Alī b. al-Ḥusayn, 2005), and Chittick's (1997)

English translation. The theoretical framework is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which categorizes politeness strategies into direct and indirect types, with subcategories of requests and hints for indirect strategies. The analysis focuses on identifying the frequency and function of these strategies in the Arabic text and evaluating their preservation in the English translation.

Data collection involved extracting linguistic structures from the *munājāt*, such as indirect requests, exclamatory phrases, and metaphorical expressions, which were coded according to Brown and Levinson's classification. The qualitative analysis examined contextual factors influencing politeness strategy selection, including social distance (between the speaker and God), power dynamics, and degree of imposition. The analysis of Chittick's translation assessed his fidelity to the polite structures and theological nuances of the original text, drawing on his preface to consider his translation philosophy. A comparative analysis was conducted to determine how the spiritual and cultural essence of the *munājāt* is reflected in the translator's literal and meaning-oriented approach. Additionally, the study considered the broader context of *al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya* to identify consistent patterns in Imam al-Sajjād's ('a) linguistic style.

Findings

The findings indicate that the most frequent politeness strategy in Imam al-Sajjād's ('a) *Fifteen Munājāt* is the indirect strategy, encompassing two subcategories: requests (such as optative supplications) and hints (such as metaphorical or allusive phrases). This strategy is rooted in the linguistic and theological structures of the *munājāt*, designed to maintain politeness and humility in dialogue with God. For instance, instead of direct imperatives, Imam al-Sajjād ('a) employs phrases like requests or rhetorical questions, signifying respect and submission. These indirect strategies align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) assertion that greater social distance and power asymmetry encourage more polite linguistic choices. The analysis reveals that this approach not only reflects the speaker's humility but also creates a sacred and contemplative space, deepening the spiritual connection between the supplicant and God.

Examination of Chittick's English translation demonstrates a high degree of fidelity to the polite structures of the Arabic text. Chittick adopts a literal yet context-sensitive approach, preserving indirect expressions and theological nuances of the original. For example, metaphorical phrases and exclamatory structures are rendered accurately, maintaining the *munājāt*'s respectful tone. This fidelity aligns with Chittick's stated goal, as expressed in his preface, of providing a transparent and pluralistic translation of sacred texts. The translation effectively conveys the theological teachings of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, particularly the emphasis on humility, respect, and spiritual

introspection, thereby contributing to the global dissemination of Shi'i theological discourse. The study also identifies consistent patterns of indirect expression in other supplications within al-Ṣaḥīfa al-Sajjādiyya, suggesting that this strategy is a hallmark of Imam al-Sajjād's ('a) rhetorical style. The use of indirect requests, exclamatory phrases, and metaphors not only ensures politeness but also evokes emotional and psychological responses in the audience, fostering deeper engagement with religious concepts. The findings highlight the role of linguistic structures in reflecting the theological and ethical teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt, particularly in preserving a respectful dialogue with God.

Conclusion

This study underscores the central importance of indirect politeness strategies in Imam al-Sajjād's ('a) Fifteen Munājāt, which serve as a model for politeness and spiritual discourse in Islamic theology. By prioritizing indirect requests and hints, Imam al-Sajjād ('a) exemplifies humility and respect, aligning with the theological principles of the Ahl al-Bayt. Chittick's English translation successfully preserves these linguistic and theological features, facilitating global access to Shi'i religious texts. The research illuminates the interplay between language, politeness, and theology, offering insights into how linguistic choices shape spiritual communication. Future studies could extend this analysis to other supplications by Shi'i Imams or compare various English translations to further elucidate strategies for translating religious texts. This work advances the understanding of linguistic politeness in sacred texts and supports the dissemination of the Ahl al-Bayt's teachings in international academic and religious contexts.

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