Prayer and (Im)Politeness: Reading Psalm 7

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is generally understood as culturally bound. Recently, however, scholars have been mining the world's languages to discover a typology of linguistic politeness. While living languages have been studied extensively, scholars have also begun investigating ancient languages, such as Egyptian and Hittite, for evidence and use of such language. Scholarship on the Hebrew Bible has made some initial steps in this type of study. The research thus far has centred on speeches within Hebrew narrative with little to no attention paid to poetry. This is disappointing as the book of Psalms consists of performative prayers directed to YHWH. To begin to fill this gap in research, this article highlights the significance of the taxonomy of linguistic politeness in order to bring more clarity to the language of prayer in the Psalms and in Ps 7 in particular.

KEYWORDS: Rhetoric, Psalms, Psalm 7, Poetry, Linguistic Politeness

A PRELIMINARY REMARKS

What does prayer have to do with politeness? More specifically, is politeness related at all to a theology of prayer; and if so, how? These questions are taken up in this article as we consider the book of Psalms, particularly Ps 7, in light of the study of politeness.

In daily life, we often sense, typically, without much effort, when someone is polite or rude. However, scholarship shows that precision and clarity are "surprisingly elusive when it comes to defining politeness."[1] Despite the lack

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[1] Kim Ridealgh and Andreas Junker, "Late Egyptian, Old English and the Re-Evaluation of Discernment Politeness in Remote Cultures," *Journal of Pragmatics* 144 (2019): 56, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2019.02.012. Cf. Karen Grainger, "'First Order' and 'Second Order' Politeness: Institutional and Intercultural Contexts," in

of precision, the quest has not ended—politeness is a flourishing field of study.[2] Nonetheless, before pressing too far into the subject, we need to be clear that ‘politeness’ in the present study does not denote customs and manners per se, but instead it has to do with *linguistic* politeness. To our benefit, this focus of politeness has been observed and analysed in detail, both in modern and ancient languages.[3]

In the last decade, politeness research has made its way into biblical studies in earnest.[4] This is overall a positive sign. The scope, however, is typically restricted to biblical narratives within the Hebrew Bible.[5] This limitation has left biblical poetry unattended and, in particular, the Psalms await such a study.[6] The Psalms, as is well known, are speeches, prayers and songs to YHWH that contain praise and protest. It is the latter, protest, that should prove especially productive for the study of politeness as the psalmist is regularly making a request or demand to Israel’s deity.

In simple terms, *how* the psalmist speaks connects to *what* the psalmist is trying to do. Therefore, politeness research could be insightful for grasping the purpose of a psalm and the language chosen (or not chosen) by the psalmist. To explore the Psalms for politeness, we will look at one specific case, Ps 7. Before doing so, I provide an overview of the complex world of politeness research and the precedents in historical politeness study that serve as catalysts. While there

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Discursive Approaches to Politeness (ed. Linguistic Politeness Research Group; Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 167.

2 Mohammad Ali Salmani Nodoushan, “Clearing the Mist: The Border between Linguistic Politeness and Social Etiquette,” *International Journal of Language Studies* 13 (2019): 109.

3 See, e.g., the special issue on historical politeness (ancient languages) in *Journal of Politeness Research* 12 (2016): 149–294.

4 For example, John Pilch, “Insults and Face Work in the Bible,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 70 (2014): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2655.

5 See the fine work of Edward Bridge, “Self-Abasement as an Expression of Thanks in the Hebrew Bible,” *Bib* 92 (2011): 255–273, https://doi.org/10.2143/BIB.92.2.3188807; Edward Bridge, “An Audacious Request: Abraham’s Dialogue with God in Genesis 18,” *JSOT* 40 (2016): 281–296, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089216637143; Edward Bridge, “Polite Rhetoric: Judah’s Plea to Joseph in Genesis 44.18-34,” *JSOT* 43 (2019): 571–587, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089218762284. Cf. Marco Di Giulio, “Mitigating Devices in Biblical Hebrew,” *KUSATU* 8 (2007): 33–62.

6 One can only speculate why poetry has not undergone more detailed studies. In any case, I do not presume any programmatic or negative reasons for the trend in scope.

are numerous sub-categories of politeness studies to be explored, we begin with the most basic.

The aim of this article is both simple and modest—to glean from linguistic politeness, especially in terms of scope and procedure, in order to consider the nature of prayer in the Psalms. This study is preliminary. It is hoped, nevertheless, that it would spur theologians and exegetes to deliberate with due care the ways in which biblical texts might signal politeness linguistically.

B LINGUISTIC POLITENESS

The ground-breaking work in linguistic politeness appeared in 1987.[7] Brown and Levinson developed a taxonomy of politeness that hinged on the concept of 'face.' At a fundamental level, there is **'**positive' face and 'negative' face. These terms are not necessarily common-sensical and some comment is required. The former, 'positive' face, emphasises the common ground between speaker and addressee. Here is a desire for connection. In the latter, 'negative' face has to do with the speaker *not* imposing on the addressee.[8] This latter type of communication entails a certain level of autonomy.

Face-work is essential, Brown and Levinson observe, across the world's languages. These concepts sown in cross-linguistic literature have become highly productive. Indeed, scholars have challenged, tweaked and nuanced nearly every aspect of Brown and Levinson's program, but the work on 'face' still remains a critical and mainstream avenue for research.[9]

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[7] Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); see also Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena," in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction* (ed. Esther N. Goody; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 56–289.

[8] Sara Mills and Karen Grainger, *Directness and Indirectness Across Cultures* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

[9] Thus, e.g., Sara Mills, "Discursive Approaches to Politeness and Impoliteness," in *Discursive Approaches to Politeness* (ed. Linguistic Politeness Research Group; Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011), 19–56; Bruce Fraser, "Whither Politeness," in *Broadening the Horizon of Linguistic Politeness* (ed. Robin T. Lakoff and Sachiko Ide; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005), 65–83; Dániel Kádár, Vahid Parvaresh and Rosina Reiter, "Alternative Approaches to Politeness and Impoliteness: An Introduction," *Journal of Politeness Research* 17 (2021): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2020-0028; Konrad Werkhofer, "Traditional and Modern Views: The Social Constitution and the Power of Politeness," in *Politeness in Language: Studies in Its History, Theory and Practice* (ed. Konrad Ehlich, Sochiko Ide

1 Face

In this article, we observe the general contours of ‘face’ as outlined by Brown and Levinson. Specifically, we survey the text and label *positive* and *negative politeness* strategies used by the psalmist. For *positive politeness* strategy, a speaker may, for example, exaggerate for interest or sympathy, seek agreement, use in-group markers, give reasons and/or gifts and assert reciprocity.[10] A *negative politeness* strategy could entail questioning or hedging, showing deference, apologising and minimising any ‘face-threatening’ actions.[11] Beyond these, our methodological horizons broaden so as to forgo certain infelicities in Brown and Levinson’s research and in turn to highlight the strengths of recent study. The use of additional linguistic tools proves beneficial, especially given our study of the ancient Hebrew language.[12]

2 Discernment

One such addition is *discernment*. *Discernment* in pragmatics is the linguistic behaviour that “is socially and situationally appropriate and quasi mandatory and which closely reflects the social relationship between speaker and addressee, as well as the social and linguistic context within which the exchange takes place.”[13] A possible implication, for example, is that honorifics do not speak to face-wants of the addressee (so Brown and Levinson), but merely acknowledge

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and Richard J. Watts; Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2005), 155–199. Mills and Grainger, *Directness and Indirectness*, 4, for example, observe that “many theorists still adhere to a great deal for their terminology and concepts, whilst modifying some elements of their theorization.”

[10] Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*. For illustration and discussion of this strategy in the Hebrew Bible, see Bridge, “Polite Rhetoric,” 576.

[11] Again, Brown and Levinson, *Politeness* and Bridge, “Polite Rhetoric,” 576–577.

[12] Ridealgh and Junker, “Late Egyptian,” 65. See also Kim Ridealgh, “‘Without You I Am an Orphan’: Exploring Emotion and Interpersonal Pragmatics in the Late Ramesside Letters,” in *The Expression of Emotions in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (ed. Shih-Wei Hsu and Jaume Llop Raduà; Leiden: Brill, 2021), 127; Kim Ridealgh, “Polite Like an Egyptian? Case Studies of the Politeness in the Late Ramesside Letters,” *Journal of Politeness Research* 12 (2016): 245–266, https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2016-0007. Dickey, analysing four different theoretical frameworks for politeness, claims that “multiple frameworks will provide the best understanding of the data; Eleanor Dickey, “Politeness in Ancient Rome: Can It Help Us Evaluate Modern Politeness Theories?” *Journal of Politeness Research* 12 (2016): 197, https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2016-0008.

[13] Ridealgh and Junker, “Late Egyptian,” 56.

the difference between speaker and addressee, particularly their power or authority.[14]

In analysing Ps 7, therefore, we should be mindful of the distinction of power between the psalmist and the addressee (God). What is more, we will be attentive to how the language of the psalmist might be mandatory in some way. In doing so, we would do well to recognise that the addressee is in fact a deity and not simply another human person. This reality, that is, speaking of/to a deity, rarely appears in politeness studies, but this is not for an undue reason. Kim Ridealgh, writing specifically on ancient Egyptian politeness, makes an apt observation that "human/divine relationship... does not easily fit into existing politeness research."[15] However, as a leading expert in historical linguistic politeness, she has paved the way for us to explore divine and human communication in Ps 7. Ridealgh gives us methodological means to consider how to conduct the present study differently, given that Ps 7 is addressed foremost to YHWH.

Holding on to the best of Brown and Levinson's theory, Ridealgh demonstrates the interconnection of *face-work* and *discernment* in the stark status differential between deity and speaker.[16] Unlike Egyptian literature cited by Ridealgh, however, the Hebrew Bible has a number of cases where the subordinate speaker criticises the deity.[17] Thus, while we can find analogy to her program, we must keep in mind the fact that ancient Egyptian hierarchy is not the same as ancient Hebrew's.

3 Linguistic Ritual

Making use of multiple tools, Ridealgh also incorporates *linguistic ritual* in her analysis.[18] *Linguistic ritual* is a "recurrent action" and "re-enacts ideologies or

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[14] Ridealgh and Junker, 57. Such *mere acknowledgement* would seem to be difficult to defend, as if that is all that is going on but each instance would best be taken individually, rather than be painted with too broad a brush.

[15] Kim Ridealgh, "Talking to God: Conceptualizing an Alternative Politeness Approach for the Human/Divine Relationship," *Journal of Politeness Research* 17 (2021): 61, https://doi.org/10.1515/pr-2020-0027. The reason this is so has to do with the different status and expectations involved with divine-human relations, as opposed to human-to-human relations.

[16] Kim Ridealgh, 67. See also Ridealgh and Junker, "Late Egyptian."

[17] Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 67. See, for example, Pss 13; 89.

[18] In fact, *linguistic ritual* is now becoming an "essential pillar" in linguistic politeness research; Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 68.

ethos of relational network."[19] Relevant for our study here is *in-group ritual*. This ritual, contra convention, includes a specific group in a social interaction and generates a response.[20] Moreover and in line with our interest, *linguistic ritual* can incite "intense emotions and affect," which in turn promote social connections.[21] A religious example would be that in the history of Christianity, the Eucharist is an event of *re-enactment of ethos*, participating in the history of Jesus' disciples, *awareness of sin*, *forgiveness* and more. However, this event could well be *convention* for others and as such, no particular emotional response would be anticipated on the part of an observer.

Ridealgh, bringing out the best of facework as well as linguistic ritual, augments methodological deficiencies with her *community embedded* approach.[22] She rightly picks up Fuist's observation that prayer, no matter individual or collective, is in fact "inherently social."[23] Collective prayer helps maintain boundaries, identities and emotions.[24] Crucially, for our study of Ps 7, Ridealgh recognises that the actors are not always explicit, "but are implied because of the context in which the request appears."[25] In the study of Egyptian letters, it means all parties are 'ratified' members, even though not all 'speak.'[26] One notable absence in traditional facework study and one that *linguistic ritual* helps correct is the consideration of *face-enhancing* activities, as opposed to mere *face-maintenance*. These acts are rightly seen as significant in the ancient

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19 Marina Terkourafi and Dániel Kádár, "Convention and Ritual (Im)politeness," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness* (ed. Michael Haugh and Dániel Kádár; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 172.

20 Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 70.

21 Terkourafi and Kadar 2017, "Convention and Ritual (Im)politeness," 172.

22 Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 72. Her *community embedded* approach is one way in which she attempts to move away from what she calls the traditional two-dimensional, predominantly Western academic study of divine communication (Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 62).

23 Todd Fuist, "Talking to God among a Cloud of Witnesses: Collective Prayer as a Meaningful Performance," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54 (2015): 523, https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12209.

24 Fuist, 526.

25 Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 73.

26 Ibid., 75. In terms of linguistic ritual, we bear in mind the 'context of situation,' which includes terms of address, honorifics and politeness markers (Dániel Kádár and Juliane House, "Ritual Frames: A Contrastive Pragmatic Approach," *Pragmatics* 30 [2020]: 144). Dániel Kádár and Juliane House, "'Politeness Markers' Revisited: A Contrastive Pragmatic Perspective," *Journal of Politeness Research* 17 (2021): 82, 90, apply ritual frame to politeness and the like. They understand ritual frame as situations, such as institutional with and without power, that pertain to rights and obligations. One participates here in order to maintain sacred face.

world.[27] *Linguistic ritual*—these *face-enhancing* practices—includes acts such as statements of offerings and the pronouncement of a divine name.[28]

4 Emotion

In the final feature of linguistic politeness, we take note of *emotion*. In reading the Psalms, the concept of emotion stays close at hand. Much like the topic of politeness, emotion is "fundamental to everyday interaction," yet the taxonomy of emotion remains amorphous.[29] In research on the ancient Near East, for example, "there is no consensus when defining the term 'emotion.'"[30] Nonetheless, in biblical studies in particular, scholars have renewed attention to the subject, correcting previous misconceptions that emotions are opposite of the rational.[31] As is well-known, in working on emotions cross-culturally, we must be quite careful not to mis-read. We can all too easily take our own cultural assumptions as 'common-sense' and read incorrectly an act or event, whether ancient or modern.[32] To help mitigate cultural solecism, Longlotz and Locher

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[27] Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 65.

[28] In this inclusion, Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 63, emphasises the communication within the historical data, rather than the "mechanisms of religion itself."

[29] Alec Basson, "A Few Metaphorical Source Domains for Emotions in the Old Testament," *Scriptura* 100 (2009): 121.

[30] Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 128.

[31] See Paul A. Kruger, "Depression in the Hebrew Bible: An Update," *JNES* 64 (2005): 187, https://doi.org/10.1086/491574, cited in Basson, "A Few Metaphorical Source Domains," 121. A partial corrective to this is Schlimm's argument that emotions in the Bible necessitate our attention because the Bible "portrays God in emotional terms" and does so using a variety of emotions; Matthew Schlimm, "The Central Role of Emotions in Biblical Theology, Biblical Ethics, and Popular Conceptions of the Bible," in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature* (ed. F. Scott Spencer; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 44, 48. Most discussions of emotions in the Old Testament emphasise fear, love, anger; e.g. Schlimm, "The Central Role"; Ellen van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblic. Interp.* 16 (2008): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851508X247602.). See the addition of shame, guilt and depression in e.g. Paul A. Kruger, "On Emotions and the Expression of Emotions in the Old Testament: A Few Introductory Remarks," *BZ* 48 (2004): 213–228, https://doi.org/10.30965/25890468-048-02-90000004.

[32] For a personal example, I would like to mention events in the city to which I have recently moved—New Orleans, LA. Within the month, I witnessed my first New Orleans street funeral. The event included white suits, marching, trumpets, drums and lots of smiling and laughing. Having had led a funeral service within the last few months myself, these expressions in New Orleans (clothes, physical language, etc.) could hardly differ more from my so-called 'common sense.' Thus, the marching New

have produced a *relational framework* that aids us in travelling cross-culturally and taking stock of emotion.[33] Most relevant from their program for linguistic politeness is that: (1) interpretation of relationship is based on linguistic cues, (2) enhancing or reducing sense of relationship through emotional communication is noted and (3) emotional sanctioning is in proportion to moral and interactional norms.[34]

Ridealgh has recently taken these insights and applied them to ancient Egyptian.[35] The focus for her—as well as us here—is *not* on particular 'emotion' words, but "linguistic displays and cues."[36] These linguistic displays are framed with the interpersonal and relational, looking specifically at possible "violation" or "adherence to expectations."[37] Within this interpersonal pragmatics, there are a number of discourse elements that warrant inspection—interjections, metaphors, apologies, blessing, pleading and shared history.[38] Bringing emotion into politeness research of Egyptian, Ridelagh claims emotive language is "face-saving."[39] Thus, we see that, "facework, interpersonal pragmatics, and emotive-language are very much connected."[40] Broadly speaking, emotions are linguistically signalled by *grammatical features, discourse structures, themes and level of affect*. These, we recognise, can help curb our modern emotional cues being conflated with the ancient speaker's.[41]

C (IM)POLITENESS and PS 7

Psalm 7 is at once a plea for protection and a defence of innocence. In terms of genre, the psalm is a lament, containing, for example, lament proper, petition, praise and/or trust. Thus far, it concerns basic labels, but we need to push to see the implications of the genre. Charney, for example, claims that "The familiar sections or elements of a lament (Address, Complaint, Petition, Confession)

Orleans funeral could easily be misinterpreted by me, had I not been made aware of the history and culture of New Orleans funerals.

33 Andreas Longlotz and Miriam A. Locher, "The Role of Emotions in Relational Work," *Journal of Pragmatics* 58 (2013): 87–107, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.05.014.

34 Longlotz and Locher, 99; Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 130–131.

35 Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan."

36 Ridealgh, 28.

37 Langlotz and Locher, "The Role of Emotions," 88. Cited in Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 129.

38 Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 133–134.

39 Ridealgh, 140.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

must be viewed with an eye to how they advance *the agenda of persuading God*, rather than how they affect/reflect the speaker's mental state."[42]

As is the norm in Psalms studies, scholars strive to uncover the precise situation that gives rise to a psalm.[43] There is, however, no confidence in any historical reconstructions of Ps 7.[44] In any case, we can observe that this psalm is a petition for YHWH to grant protection. Crucially, this protection seems to be a defence and declaration of the psalmist's lack of impropriety. Charney remarks that "Taking a public real-time judicial confrontation as the immediate rhetorical situation, or *kairos*, of Psalm 7 helps explain its shape and language."[45] With this confrontation, attention to *how* the psalmist speaks to YHWH should be quite telling.[46] Indeed, this is where politeness research can make a contribution, recognising the vivid colours present in the complex communication of the Psalms—colours that are otherwise muted in genre or rhetorical studies alone.

Psalm 7 begins with stated trust and common ground: "O YHWH, my God, in you I have sought refuge."[47] In this first line, we discover the stacking together of various kinds of *positive politeness* strategies. For example, the opening word is a vocative, יְהוָה, setting the rhetorical boundaries of how the

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[42] Davida Charney, "Maintaining Innocence Before a Divine Hearer: Deliberative Rhetoric in Psalm 22, Psalm 17, and Psalm 7," *Biblic. Interp.* 21 (2013): 44, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-1041A0003.

[43] Yitzhak Berger, "The David–Benjaminite Conflict and the Intertextual Field of Psalm 7," *JSOT* 38 (2014): 279–296, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089214527206; Peter Cragie, *Psalms 1–50* (2nd ed.; WBC 19; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 99–100.

[44] Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 109; John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41* (BCOTWP; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 146.

[45] Charney, "Maintaining Innocence," 57. Charney, "Maintaining Innocence," 57, adds that, "The speaker's situation must be so obvious and so well-understood by everyone that details of the case and even the standard opening moves are reduced to shorthand."

[46] Franz J. Backhaus, "'JHWH, mein Gott, rette mich!' Menschliche Gewalt und göttliche Gerechtigkeit in Psalm 7," *BK* 66 (2011): 152, rightly notes that "Inhaltlich geht es in diesem Psalm um die Rechtfertigung des Gerechten... da die menschliche Gerechtigkeit... in enger Beziehung zur göttlichen Gerechtigkeit (v. 18) steht." Once more, Charney, "Maintaining Innocence," 62–63. writes, "Finally, the speaker in Psalm 7 takes a daring chance that God will reveal his or her true character." Ellen T. Charry observes, "What matters [in Ps 7] is that God is awake and aware of the need to vindicate the integrity of one against the dishonesty of another"; Ellen T. Charry, *Psalms 1–50: Sighs and Songs of Israel* (BTCB, Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 36. See further, Robert Hubbard, "Dynamistic and Legal Processes in Psalm 7," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 273, https://doi.org/10.1515/zatw.1982.94.2.267)."

[47] All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

psalmist envisions himself, his prayer and his deity. This social index is further clarified by the apposition of "my God" (אֱלֹהַי). While the address of the divine could be viewed as obligatory (to some degree), the vocative and appositive nonetheless note the relational aspect of prayer. Everything that proceeds in the poem must be viewed in this light.

The prepositional phrase "in you" (בְּךָ) precedes the finite verb in the A line. This syntactical fronting should best be considered pragmatic focus—"in *you*," that is, *not in anyone/anything else* have I taken refuge.[48] Thus, in just one verse, the psalmist employs *positive politeness* strategies of in-group markers (*my* God), asserting common ground (*in you* have taken refuge), intensifying the addressee's interest and even an assumption of reciprocity (*I've sought refuge; now protect me!)*. In terms of emotion, the *qatal* (חָסִיתִי) 'I have taken refuge' serves as an *affect intensifier* by highlighting the shared history and solidarity (*positive affect*).[49] We see, therefore, from the opening line of the prayer that the psalmist is by no means presumptive. Any plea or request that follows is to be understood in relation to the psalmist's trust of YHWH.

Notably, it is only after such polite framing that the psalmist petitions YHWH: "Deliver me! (הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי)."[50] Even here, though, the psalmist gives reason why YHWH should follow through: *the enemy will destroy him, there is no deliverer or rescuer* (v. 3). Providing a reason is a common way to communicate *positive politeness*. The potential destruction is imagined as a lion (כְּאַרְיֵה).

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[48] For more on the contentious and complicated topic of focus, see Geoffrey Khan and Christo H. J. van der Merwe, "Towards A Comprehensive Model for Interpreting Word Order in Classical Hebrew," *JSS* 65 (2020): 347–390, https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgaa025; Aaron Hornkohl, "Biblical Hebrew Tense-Aspect-Mood, Word Order and Pragmatics: Some Observations on Recent Approaches," in *Studies in Semitic Manuscripts: A Liber Discipulorum in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Khan* (ed. Nadia Vidro, Ronny Vollandt, Esther-Miriam Wagner and Judith Olszowy-Schlanger; Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2018), 27–56; Robert Holmstedt, "Word Order and Information Structure in Ruth and Jonah: A Generative-Typological Analysis," *JSS* 54 (2009): 111–139, https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgn042.

[49] Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 134.

[50] Jacobson, *Psalms*, 113, may be right to claim that the vocative (v. 2) and imperative 'deliver me!' (v. 2) are formulaic and stock language in the Psalter, respectively but that misses the force of the politeness and the pragmatics of how v. 2 is structured. Furthermore, Patrick and Diable are correct in stating that a majority of lament psalms begin with complaint or request but their listing of Ps 7 as one such psalm downplays the vocatives and expressed trust in v. 2a; Dale Patrick and Kenneth Diable, "Persuading the One and Only God to Intervene," in *"My Words Are Lovely": Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms* (ed. Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard, Jr.; New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 27.

Certainly, the lion imagery would qualify as one of the "arresting similes" that "ensure that minimal wording would carry maximal meaning."[51] Such figurative language serves as a *lexicon element* of emotive language, language that has affect.[52] This linguistic cue makes sense, for the psalmist "knows that if God does not rescue him, no one can."[53] Which is to say, politeness and rhetoric have theological ends in this psalm.

However, we can further frame the rhetoric of the psalmist. The choice of metaphor and the explicit dependence on the addressee, YHWH, is likely meant to cull YHWH's sympathy (*positive politeness*). This, of course, is so that YHWH will act on behalf of the psalmist.[54]

The next section (vv. 4–6) begins the psalmist's "legal brief."[55] Once again, the psalmist frames his speech with the vocative, "O YHWH" and the personalised apposition, "my God" (אֱלֹהַי). As before, this is an in-group marker (*positive politeness*) and sets the scene for the relational communication, notably with the distinction in power between the psalmist and God (*discernment*). This brief consists of a hypothetical case to demonstrate his innocence (*positive politeness*). The psalmist belabours the point in v. 4 and v. 5a beginning with the conditional אִם 'if.'

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[51] J. Kenneth Kuntz, "Growling Dogs and Thirsty Deer: Uses of Animal Imagery in Psalms Rhetoric," in "*My Words Are Lovely": Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms.* (ed. Robert L. Foster and David M. Howard, Jr.; New York: T & T Clark, 2008), 62. See also Norbert Lohfink, "Ps 7,2–6: vom Löwen gejagt," in *Die Freude an Gott—unsere Kraft: Festschrift für Otto Bernhard Knoch zum 65 Geburtstag* (ed. J. J. Degenhardt; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 60–66. See further, Brent Strawn, *What Is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

[52] See Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 133

[53] Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Psalms 1–41* (KEL; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 279.

[54] A similar observation is made by Patrick and Diable, "Persuading the One and Only God to Intervene," 28, in that ancient Israel "expected YHWH to be sensitive to the just cause of the supplicant, to be subject to emotions like pity and guilt, defending his honor but not overly concerned with his majesty." Of course, such generalisations should be met with careful attention to the history of interpretation (here I have in mind Patristic studies and Christian dogmatics) but such is beyond the scope of the present study. I only wish to note here that theological reflections on God, such as the emotional life of God, is best done with consideration of the doctrine of God proper. This current article is meant only as an initial entry into an integration of linguistic politeness and the Psalms. I intend to engage the Psalms with close attention to the doctrine of God in future work.

[55] Bruce Waltke, James Houston, and Erika Moore, *Psalms of Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 41.

In such rhetorical stress, the point is made that his guilt (*if* he were to have it) would be worthy of death at the enemy's hand.[56] Here the language is more of an exaggeration for effect, fitting well within a *politeness* strategy.[57] What is more, this section includes an assumption of reciprocity of guilt and divine discipline (*positive politeness*), which the psalmist argues is not applicable. Which is to say, had he done these things, his plight would well be deserved (vv. 3–6). The psalmist's pleading with YHWH and lamenting the situation are markers of *discourse structures* that have emotive affect.[58] As such, the psalmist demonstrates by way of positive politeness his connection to and dependence on YHWH in an effort to gain a favourable hearing from the divine.

The psalmist eventually returns to his plea; they call for YHWH to rise (קוּמָה), be lifted up (הִנָּשֵׂא) and awake (וְעוּרָה) (v. 7).[59] The imperatives in the A and C lines are intriguingly long (i.e. with *qamets-heh*).[60] This lengthening seems to be a softening of the directive or perhaps some marker of politeness.[61]

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[56] This is seen especially in v. 6.

[57] Charry, *Psalms 1-50*, 36; or as Ross, *Psalms 1–41*, 280, puts it, the psalmist's "protestation of innocence is compelling because he invokes death by his enemy's hand if he is guilty." Hieke notes that: "In einer Deklaration beteuert der Beter seine Unschuld, und das Eintreten Gottes für den /die Gerechten wird gleichsam geschwörend 'festgestellt.' Diese Sprechweise vereinigt Wunschdenken und Selbstvergewisserung, so dass die sprachliche Macht des Gebets hier greifbar wird." Thomas Hieke, "Psalm 7," in *"Erforsche mich, Gott, und erkenne mein Herz!" Beiträge zur Syntax, Sprechaktanalyse und Metaphorik im Alten Testament, Schülerfestschrift für Hubert Irsigler zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. C. Diller, M. Mulzer, K. Ólason; St. Ottilien: EOS, 2005), 59.

[58] Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 133–134.

[59] Backhaus, "JHWH, mein Gott, rette mich!"," 154, writes, "Das Motiv des Zorns rahmt den Abschnitt 7,7 -12, der JHWHs Richtertätigkeit (v. 7b.8.9.12a) und seine Gerechtigkeit (V.IO.12a) thematisiert."

[60] Stephen E. Fassberg, "The Lengthened Imperative קָטְלָה in Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 40 (1999), 7, notes that the lengthened imperative is often weak verbs in the *qal binyan*. This is certainly true for our psalm: קום and עור. The former occurs in short and long form but the latter occurs only in the long form; Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 143.

[61] Fassberg, "Lengthened Imperative," 10, observes that the imperative is long when action of the verb is directed toward speaker (usually motion towards speaker), whereas with the regular form the action is directed "elsewhere." He recognises that a number of the examples of long forms petition God, but it should not be missed that the petition is "for the benefit of the speaker or his people"; Fassberg, "Lengthened Imperative," 11. Fassberg ultimately dismisses the idea that the long form is polite by noting that human beings use lengthened forms to lower status. However, in terms of politeness theory such an observation should not actually dismiss the possibility of the form being polite. Noting the polite function of long imperative, Hélène Dallaire, brings in Stephen A. Kaufman, "An Emphatic Plea for Please," *MAARAV* 7 (1991): 195–198 and

I suggest this is evidence of deference and deference belongs to a *negative politeness* strategy,[62] which is to say, the plea is intended not to be heard by YHWH as an imposition. Such an observation serves as further evidence of a theology of prayer.

The A and B lines of v. 7 (*Arise, YHWH, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies*) bespeak *positive politeness* in the common ground and reciprocity of anger towards the psalmist's enemies. That is, YHWH is the psalmist's God and, therefore, the attacks of the enemies should be stopped.[63] "Words like 'arise' and 'awake' [v7], as elsewhere, suggest divine aid

Lambert, *Traité de grammaire hébraïque* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1946), 255–257, to claim that the form softens rather than strengthens; Dallaire, *The Syntax of Volitives in Biblical Hebrew and Amarna Canaanite Prose* (Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic 9; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 71). She intends to dismiss Fassberg and Shulman's idea of 'to, for, or toward the speaker' by observing, among other things, that commands are generally given with the interest of the speaker in mind, though specific interest may occur with ethical dative. Dallaire, *Syntax of Volitives*, 71, rightly claims that when a greater addresses a lesser with long form there is still an element of respect or politeness for "Expressions of politeness with the Long Imperative are not restricted to one type of social dynamic (lesser > greater) but are possible in all contexts and are used by kings, prophets, leaders of the community, officials, common men, and women." Similarly, Jenni emphasises the *pragmatic* function of the long imperative in comparison with the short imperative, not the *semantic* function; Ernst Jenni, "Presidential Address: Höfliche Bitte im Alten Testament," in *Studien zur Sprachwelt des Alten Testaments II* (ed. J. Luchsinger, H.-P. Mathys and M. Saur; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 157. Ultimately, "kein schlüssiges Ergebnis erzielen konnten" concerning the claims of emphasis or softening, but instead "stand hauptsächliche der Wille des *Sprechers* im Mittelpunkt"; Jenni, "Presidential Address," 158. To distinguish between the pragmatics of the long and short imperative, Jenni studies the reaction of the addressee.

[62] Jenni, "Presidential Address," 159, for example, writes "Diese als bedingt erfüllbar gekennzeichnete Bitte muss nicht, aber kann im Deutschen mit 'bitte!', im Englischen mit 'please', im Französischen besonders schön mit dem Wenn-Satz 's'il te plaît' ausgedrückt werden." With respect to the short imperative in the Psalter, Jenni "Presidential Address," 160, helpfully notes that it is used "wenn der Sprecher annehmen kann, dass die Erfüllung der Bitte dem bekannten Wesen und Willen Gottes entspricht, wenn dessen Motivation zur Erfüllung einder Bitte allgemein vorausgesetzt werden kann. Mit der Langform dagegen will man zeigen, dass die Erhörung in dem aktuellen Fall nicht als selbstverständlich angesehen wird, sondern als sein spezielles Entgegenkommen gilt." On נְשָׂא, consider what YHWH says of himself in Isa 33:10 and in Ps 94:2 (spoken to YHWH). Perhaps the expectation could be קוּם עֲלֵה, so 2 Kgs 1:3; Gen 35:1. Cf. the interesting use of collocations in Ps 10:12. One could envision the use of רוּמָה as a similar though still deferential way to speaking to and admonishing YHWH (see Ps 108:6).

[63] Politeness in this case carries rhetorical freight, for Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 147 recognises that if the speaker "is an ordinary individual, the conviction that it is possible to arouse YHWH to act on an individual's behalf is striking."

that is not automatic but comes in response to prayer.”[64] It is the non-mechanical nature of prayer that brings linguistic politeness into greater relief.

In between these lengthened imperatives, the psalmist gives another imperative—one that is curiously in the *niphal binyan* (הִנָּשֵׂא). Most English translations render the *niphal* as reflexive “lift *yourself* up” (NRSV, ESV, NASB).[65] The choice of the *niphal*—rather than an active *binyan*—could well be deferential “be lifted up” and not “raise *yourself*!,” thus employing *negative politeness*.[66] Given the possibility of deference, these directives would seem to be based on common ground shared by the psalmist and YHWH —that both know the situation and that both, perhaps especially YHWH, are angered by it (*positive politeness*).[67]

Further, in v. 9, the psalmist issues a direct (short) imperative, “Judge me!” (שָׁפְטֵנִי). Here he seems to narrow the scope of judgment and perhaps mitigate the directness somewhat with the adjunct “according to *my* righteousness.” The linguistic politeness continues in v. 10 with an initial jussive (יִגְמָר) + נָא in the A line and another jussive in the B line (וּתְכוֹנֵן). [68] Our attention

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[64] Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Psalms* (THOTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 51.

[65] For recent linguistic studies of the *niphal binyan*, see, for example, Ethan C. Jones, “The Middle and Passive Voice: Semantic Distinctions of the Niphal in Biblical Hebrew,” *ZAW* 132 (2020): 427–448, https://doi.org/10.1515/zaw-2020-3004; Ethan C. Jones, “Hearing the Voice of the Niphal: A Response to Ellen van Wolde,” *JSOT* 45 (2021): 291–308, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089220916506; Ellen van Wolde, “The Niphal as Middle Voice and Its Consequence for Meaning,” *JSOT* 43 (2019): 453–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089217743160; W. Randall Garr, “Reflexivity: The Cases of the *Niphal* and *Hithpael*,” *JNES* 80 (2021): 341–356, https://doi.org/10.1086/715888.

[66] This lexeme in the *niphal* is often middle with an inanimate subject ‘to rise’: Isa 40:4 (valley); Jer 51:9 (judgment); Ezek 1:20 (wheels). My primary concern, however, is not the translation of this particular *niphal*.

[67] Cf. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 147. It is not exceptional that a speaker blends positive and negative politeness within a speech (as here, prayer). These are merely two different strategies for engaging the ‘face’ of the addressee—strategies, which I suggest here, are complementary.

[68] Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 148, for example, notes the “polite verbs” in the A and B lines as well. Noteworthy is that forms themselves would tend to be more ritual and only a “casual relationship with linguistic politeness”; Kádár and House, “Ritual Frames,” 145. Kádár and House, “Ritual Frames,” 146, focus on the situation not the form as a starting point. The idea of association between form and politeness has been heavily debated. To move scholarship forward, Kádár and House, “‘Politeness Markers’ Revisited,” 80, take a bottom-up, corpus based contrastive approach to capture the so-called operation of ‘politeness marker.’ For recent linguistic study of this section of the Hebrew verbal system, see Tania Notarius, “The Imperative-

is not on the translation of נָא, only that it is reasonable that the form, especially in this context, is marked for deference.[69] Such indirectness would be *negative politeness*, in contrast with direct imperatives elsewhere.[70] The language of vv. 10–12 shows that God and the psalmist are in solidarity (God *is his shield*, God *is a righteous judge*, as the psalmist has his own righteousness and more). As a matter of course, there is continual distancing between the righteous psalmist and wicked enemies (*positive politeness*).[71] This particular use of politeness corresponds to what Brueggemann and Bellinger observe, namely, that the psalm "reflects the sociological reality of 'insiders and outsiders' in a community under Torah commitments."[72]

Hortative Paradigm in Biblical Hebrew in Typological and Diachronic View," *Brill's Journal of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics* 13 (2021): 75–100, https://doi.org/10.1163/18776930-20210002.

[69] Jenni, "Presidential Address: Höfliche Bitte im Alten Testament," 162, explains that נָא does not so much modify the content of the speech act but instead presents the estimation of the anticipated reaction. In sum, Jenni finds that the speaker is directing the addressee to hear the message according to the speaker's intention or desire.

[70] On נָא, Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 349–350, 578–580, find the sense to have a weakening nuance, similar to 'please!' Kaufman, "An Emphatic Plea for Please," 195–198, sees all uses of נָא as 'please,' while Shulman sees it as polite, personal or emotional; Ahouva Shulman, "The Particle נָא in Biblical Hebrew Prose," *HS* 40 (1999): 57–82, https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.1999.0026. Christiansen adds that it marks politeness with an imperative but also signals "proposed course of action with cohortative and jussive (which is applicable to my psalm); Bent Christiansen, "A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Hebrew Particle *nā'*: A Test Case," *VT* 59 (2009): 379–393, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853309X435459). Cf. Zewi's comments on *n'* as deontic modality of appeal or plea Tamar Zewi, *Parenthesis in Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Tamar Zewi, *A Syntactical Study of Verbal Forms Affixed by -n(n) Endings in Classical Arabic, Biblical Hebrew, El-Amarna Akkadian and Ugaritic* (AOAT 260; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1999). With נָא, Dallaire, *Syntax of Volitives*, 63–64, finds the senses of plea of desperation; urgency; nonurgent request; politeness (Gen 27:19); strong petition. Concerning the long imperative, Dallaire, *Syntax of Volitives*, 63–64, claims the origin is from *yaqtulan(na);* so Kaufman, "An Emphatic Plea for Please," 195–198. For more on the translation history of the particle, see Peter Juhás, *Die biblisch-hebräische Partikel נָא im Lichte der antiken Bibelübersetzungen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer vermuteten Höflichkeitsfunktion* (SSN 67; Amsterdam: Brill, 2017). Analysing Ps 7 as a speech act, Hieke, "Psalm 7," 48–49, labels vv.10a-b as "expressive-volitiv" in comparison with "direktiv-positiv" in v.2bc; v.7a–c; v.8b; v.9b.

[71] As Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 145, comments on vv. 4–6, "The world can be divided into the faithful and the faithless, and the suppliant claims to belong to the former group."

[72] Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger, *Psalms* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 54.

In vv. 11–12, the psalmist is not only rehearsing trust but asserting common ground between the one praying and addressee, that is, YHWH. This is *positive politeness*. The psalmist's protection is with God, the God who is the deliverer of the upright of heart (v. 11). Such statements are not merely indicative but entail emotive affect, as the *discourse structure* of praise and compliment.[73] This discourse structure intersects with the call for YHWH to judge the psalmist according to the *psalmist's* righteousness (v. 9), evoking the addressee's interest, in-group identity and likely an assumption of reciprocity. All these strategies are *positive politeness*.[74] Like most laments, the psalmist concludes by promising to give thanks (אוֹדֶה) to YHWH and make melody in the name of YHWH, most high (v. 18). A conclusion of giving gifts of thanks is yet another *positive politeness* strategy. The confidence of "God's pardon which will be manifest in praise and renewed participation in liturgy" proves all the more interesting when taken together with linguistic politeness.[75]

The form of politeness in Ps 7 gives insight into the theological reality of prayer in the Old Testament. Certainly, Ps 7 is but one example and one should not draw too much from one psalm. Nonetheless, *what* is said, what is *not* said, as well as *how* it is said by all means says something theologically about prayer.

D CONCLUSION

John Goldingay claims that Ps 7 "asserts both that YHWH is involved in the world in active ways, and that the world is a place into whose working a moral order is written—though one may sometimes need to urge YHWH to make sure that this order does work itself out."[76] Peering in on the politeness strategies above, we have seen more clearly *how* one would "urge YHWH" to maintain a

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73 Ridealgh, "Without You I Am an Orphan," 135–136.

74 While we can say with confidence that the enemy is the subject of v. 15 "he is pregnant with iniquity and conceives," there is less certainty regarding the vv. 13–14 and vv. 16–17. On the birth imagery here, see Marianne Grohmann, "Ambivalent Images of Birth in Psalm vii 15," *VT* 55 (2005): 439–449, https://doi.org/10.1163/156853305774652049. Jacobson, *Psalms*, 117, is right to say that "In Psalm 7, as in many psalms, the agency of God and the agency of the wicked are blurred—it is not precisely clear who is responsible for the pending judgment of the wicked." In addition, the psalmist will conclude with a vocalisation according to the content and measure YHWH's righteousness (v.18).

75 Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (BO; Collegeville: Liturgical, 2001), 22.

76 Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 152.

moral order. In other words, the politeness strategies are *how* the psalmist seeks to plead to God "to do the right thing."[77]

While there are several emendations in the latter portion of the psalm (vv. 8–17), what remains clear is that the community is both a hearer and a character of the communication. Charney notes that "From among the available means of persuasion, the speaker has chosen to rely on one and only one means to prove his or her innocence: the willingness to avow it in public."[78] As such, the psalmist is attempting to enhance his 'face' both to YHWH and the community. The witnesses, for example, in v. 8 are 'ratified' members serving not only as observers of the psalmist's potential vindication, but as sources of validation for the innocence of the psalmist. The certain outcome for the wicked (vv. 13–17) further highlights that the psalmist and the congregation (v. 8) agree on the fundamental and substantive distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Moreover and, more important, the message throughout the psalm is that the speaker is assuredly *not* part of the cohort of the wicked. The poem stands as an attempt to plead with YHWH for the vindication of the righteous:

> The speaker of Psalm 7, having been slandered, knows that God will not tolerate such treatment, and so the plea of psalmist is theologically suggestive in several ways, but especially in that presumption is absent and harsh demands are not made.[79]

This article has demonstrated that politeness and rhetoric should not be kept separate, as if one can ascertain the latter without the former. Our understanding of the Psalms, especially lament, has deepened, for laments, after all, "have as a primary function the effort to persuade and motivate God to act in behalf of the petitioner who is in trouble and needs God's help."[80] For Ps 7 in particular, we have found that the psalmist effectively showed common ground and highlighted solidarity (*positive politeness*), all the while striving not to threaten YHWH's face (*negative politeness*), but instead to enhance YHWH's face

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77 Patrick and Diable, "Persuading the One and Only God," 31.

78 Charney, "Maintaining Innocence," 58.

79 Charry, *Psalms 1–50*, 39.

80 Patrick D. Miller, "Prayer as Persuasion: The Rhetoric and Intention of Prayer," in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theological: Collected Essays* (ed. Patrick D. Miller JSOTSup 267; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 337. It is also worth noting with Ridealgh, "Talking to God," 76, "Viewing the relationship dynamic through the lens of the ancient world distances the secularism in modern academia perpetuated by predominately Western scholarship."

through *emotive* linguistic acts. All these linguistic acts centre on YHWH as the only one who can respond to and act on behalf of the psalmist.[81]

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[81] It is hoped that scholarship will focus more on linguistic politeness and the Psalms in the future.

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