

## Supplication in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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### ABSTRACT

From a religious standpoint, supplication is an act of worship that enables man to enrich his relationship with his Creator, the Almighty Allah. The essence of supplication is to revive Allah's remembrance inside man's heart. Moreover, supplication makes clear the fact that man is imperfect, poor and needy to his Lord, the Perfect, the Rich, and the One Who needs nobody at all (Al-Ameedi and Mahdi, 2014: 23). Linguistically, to *supplicate*, Vanderveken (1990:192) states, is to beg in a very humble manner usually from a superior or someone in power. Accordingly, the present paper aims to find out the syntactic components that constitute the syntactic structure of the act of supplication in English and Arabic highlighting the similarities and differences between the two languages in this regard. Hence, the paper hypothesizes that: (1) the vocative, the imperative, and parallelism constitute the basic syntactic components in English and Arabic supplication; (2) Arabic is more explicit than English in the linguistic realization of the act under scrutiny. Findings of the analysis verify the above mentioned hypotheses.

**Key Words:** supplication, prayer, syntactic, vocative, imperative, parallelism.

### INTRODUCTION

Supplication can be viewed as the act of entreating the Divine Mercy for the pardon of guilt and the imploring of the Divine Power for the liberation from the sin's bondage. It is offered by a person who is filled with disgust at the ugliness of sin and who is fixed in his intention to flee from its control. A *supplication* may not differ from a *petition* except in the intensity of its meaning because the request in a supplication may deepen into entreaty (Palmer, 1894: 10-8). Thus, the present study aims to find out the syntactic constituents that make up the syntactic structure of the act of supplication in English and Arabic highlighting the similarities and differences between the two languages in this regard. Consequently, the paper hypothesizes that:

1. The vocative, the imperative, and parallelism constitute the basic syntactic components in English and Arabic supplication.
2. Arabic is more explicit than English in the realization of the act of supplication.

To achieve the aims of the paper and test the validity of its hypotheses, the following procedures will be adopted:

1. Reviewing the literature written about the act of supplication in English and Arabic.
2. Investigating the grammatical devices used in supplication in the two languages.
3. Contrasting the two languages in this area highlighting the similarities and differences between them in this regard.

## SUPPLICATION IN ENGLISH

### Supplication: The Concept

The concept of supplication has been investigated from different linguistic perspectives by different writers.

Palmer (1894: 10-8) defines supplication as entreating the divine mercy for the pardon of guilt and the imploring of the divine power for the liberation from the sin's bondage. It is offered by a person who is filled with disgust at the ugliness of sin and who is fixed in his intention to flee from its control. A *supplication* may not differ from a *petition* except in the intensity of its meaning because the request in a supplication may deepen into entreaty.

Etymologically speaking, the word "supplication" has its root in a Latin word "supplex" which means "bowed to one's knees"; yet it is also conveniently said to have originated from the Latin word "supplicar" which means "to kneel before someone in entreaty" (Partridge, 1966: 2469). Palmer (1894: 18) points out that the etymology of the word "supplication" indicates at once the humility and intensity of the act being derived from the posture of the supplicant when he pours forth his entreaties at the feet of his Master.

Semantically, Cassianus (1985: 108) defines supplication as a "plea or petition made on account of present and past sin by someone who is moved by contrition to seek pardon." According to Vanderveken (1990: 192), *to supplicate* is to beg very humbly, usually from a superior or someone in power. We can, for instance, supplicate a person in such a powerful role to spare the life of a prisoner, or someone else threatened. Moreover, Sykes (2004:143) considers supplication as a kind of prayer that is offered with pleading, by someone who is lacking something, so that it might be obtained.

In the Bible, we read "*Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you*" Matthew (7:7). This is the very essence of supplication. An example of supplication is presented by David in Psalm (55):

(1) *Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication.* (2) *Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise.*

### Supplication: A Syntactic Perspective

#### **Vocative**

The vocative is one of the basic syntactic components of supplication in the sense that it is less likely to find a supplication without a vocative form.

Quirk et al. (1985: 773) define the vocative as "an optional element, usually a noun phrase, denoting the one or more persons to whom the sentence is addressed."

**John**, dinner is ready (Ibid.).

**Ladies and Gentlemen**, thank you for that warm welcome (Nelson, 2001: 24).

As for their position in clause structure, Gramley and Pätzold (1992: 288) point out that vocatives are not integrated into the structure of the clause and hence they may precede, follow, or interrupt a clause.

*Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, **O LORD**.*

***Lord**, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice  
of my supplications.*

*If thou, **LORD**, shouldest mark iniquities, **O Lord**, who shall stand?*

The Bible ( Psalm 130: 1-3)

Gramley and Pätzold (1992: 291) illustrate that vocative forms can be used *reciprocally* or *non-reciprocally*. *Reciprocal forms* indicate some kind of equality between the speaker and the addressee, like forms of address used among friends or fellow workers. *Non-reciprocal forms*, on the other hand, indicate an imbalance in power or prestige, for example parent-child or teacher-student relationships. Forms of address used in supplication indicate a non-reciprocal relationship since a human being, who is low in status is addressing a supreme being who is Almighty Allah. So, when addressing Almighty Allah in supplication, human beings should use forms of address that express total respect and exaltation praising Allah and glorifying His Name. Forms of addressing Almighty Allah in supplication may include: (O) God, (O) Lord, Heavenly Lord, Almighty God, Eternal God, God of All Mercy, Creator of the Heavens, Generous God, God of Holiness.

### **Imperative**

Another important syntactic device that is extensively used in supplication is the imperative sentence. An imperative sentence is a sentence type which differs from a declarative sentence in that "it generally has no subject" but it has "either a main verb in the base form or "less commonly an auxiliary in the base form followed by the appropriate form of the main verb" (Quirk et al. 1985:827).

14- **Put** the flowers on the table. (Ibid.)

15- **Be** reasonable. (Ibid.)

16- "**Teach** me thy way, O LORD, and **lead** me in a plain path, because of mine enemies." The Bible (Psalm 27: 11)

Biber et al. (1999:219) point out that the subject in the imperative sentence is usually omitted yet it is often understood to refer to the addressee. Imperatives typically urge the addressee to do something after the moment of speaking; hence there is no need for tense, aspect, or modal specification.

As for negative imperatives, Collins (2006: 188) clarifies that a "distinctive structural property of imperatives is the categorical requirement of the dummy auxiliary **do** in negatives (specifically, those where it is the verb that is negated)" [My Bold].

**Don't** admit anything;  
rather than,  
Admit nothing.

### **Parallelism**

Parallelism is another key syntactic component of supplication. Aziz (2012: 356) finds out that parallelism is a predominant characteristic of supplication in both English and Arabic.

De Beaugrande (1984: 170) defines parallelism as a repetition of the same grammatical structure in two or more sentences:

- He has **plundered our seas, ravaged our coasts, and burnt our towns.**

In this example, a series of similar thoughts are expressed in parallel clauses, the parallel structure being:

*(verb with (ed) + possessive pronoun + direct object )*

According to Quirk et al. (1985: 1427) parallelism is maintained when neighbouring sentences share the same grammatical features of tense, aspect, clause structure, or word order giving a strong impression of being connected. Besides, parallelism in structure often indicates a similar balance in meaning:

- **The baseball game was cancelled in New Haven and the hockey match was postponed in Hartford.**

(The X was Ved in Y and the X was Ved in Y)

Parallel structures can be achieved through a number of constructions (Web Resource):

1. Coordinating conjunctions (e.g. and, but, or, for, so).
  2. Correlative conjunctions (e.g. either... or, neither... nor, not only... but also, whether... or).
  3. Comparative Constructions with (as) and (than):
- It is better for civilization **to be going down the drain** than **to be coming up it.**

Besides, Corbett (1965: 429) points out that in parallel structures, nouns must be coordinated with nouns, prepositional phrases with prepositional phrases, adverb clauses with adverb clauses and the like.

There are two levels of parallelism: syntactic and semantic. Syntactic parallelism occurs when the syntax of two adjacent phrases, clauses, or sentences is identical (Berlin, 1985: 18). Semantic parallelism, on the other hand, occurs when the meaning of one line in a text is parallel to the meaning of another line (Ibid.: 64). Moreover, it is often argued that readers when coming across parallel structures, they usually attempt to find out some lexical relations between the parallel parts, that is, if two structures share the same linguistic forms; these structures must share some common meanings (Short, 1996: 68).

According to Vivian and Jackson (1961: 171), parallelism performs a number of functions. It is a means of creating symmetry, balance, and harmony in the text. More than that, it increases the clarity, unity, and continuity of a text making it more cohesive and coherent. It makes the text not only more fluent and easier to follow but also more pleasing aesthetically.

In supplication, parallelism serves several functions. It creates cohesive texts reinforcing the compelling power of the supplication. It also serves as a "mnemonic device" making the supplication easier to remember. Besides, parallelism makes the words uttered more effective and attracts the listeners attention to what is being said by the speaker. Furthermore, parallelism has an aesthetic value expressed by the rhythm it adds to the text (Aziz, 2012: 356). An example of parallelism is found in Matthew (7:7):

**"Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you"**  
In both clauses, the structure is: *imperative+conjunction+2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun+will+infinitive verb*.

## SUPPLICATION IN ARABIC

### Supplication: The Concept

Supplication in Arabic is called (دعاء) "Du'a". The word "Du'a" in Arabic means "calling out to someone". So, when we supplicate we call out to Almighty Allah, our Creator, our Lord, the All Knowing and the All Powerful. Morgan (2010: 67) points out that Du'a is a spontaneous conversation with Almighty Allah and a private non-formal prayer as opposed to (صلاة) "Salat" which is a ritualized, prescribed formal prayer. Asifi (2008: 17) defines Du'a as the asking of a servant for his needs from Almighty Allah. As such, supplication can be reduced to the following elements:

1. The One called upon i.e. Almighty Allah.
2. The supplicant i.e. a human being.
3. The object of supplication, i.e. the need which one presents before Almighty Allah by means of supplication.

Al-Ameedi and Mahdi (2014: 26) point out that the soul of every act of worship is remembrance of Almighty Allah within man's heart. Allah says in the Glorious Quran:

(الرعد: 28) "أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ"

*Now surely by Allah's remembrance are the hearts set at rest.* (Shakir, 1999: 113)

Supplication for sure serves to revive Almighty Allah's remembrance within man's heart and hence it is very important. Moreover, to stress the importance of du'a, Almighty Allah says in the Glorious Quran:

(77) دُعَاؤُكُمْ (الفرقان: 77) "قُلْ مَا يَعْجَبُ بِكُمْ رَبِّي لَوْلَا"

*Say My Lord would not care for you were it not for your prayer* (Shakir, 1999: 172)

"وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمْ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِي سَيَدْخُلُونَ جَهَنَّمَ دَاخِرِينَ" (غافر: 60)

*And your Lord says: Call upon Me; I will answer you; surely those who are too proud for My service shall soon enter hell abased .*

(Shakir, 1999: 230)

Furthermore, being able to supplicate is a great bounty and we should thank Almighty Allah for giving us the permission to ask Him. In this respect, Imam As-Sajjad says :

بِدُعَائِكَ " وَإِنَّكَ لَنَا ، وَمِنْ أَعْظَمِ النِّعَمِ عَلَيْنَا جَزَائُنَ ذِكْرِكَ عَلَى أَلْسِنَتِنَا"

(الامام السجاد , 2013: 213)

*Among Thy greatest favours to us is the running of Thy remembrance across our tongues and Thy permission to us to supplicate.*

(Chittick, 1988: 447)

Depending on different criteria, writers present different classifications of supplication in Arabic. Mamdouhi (2003: 20-2) classifies supplication into: *Verbal supplication*, *Content supplication*, and *Supplication by the heart*. He defines *Verbal supplication* as that type in which

the tongue of the supplicant is not in harmony with his heart. It does not convey the true sense of supplication. Philosophically, a true representative of a class of phenomena is the one in which *form* and *meaning* coincide with each other. As for *Content supplication*, it is the kind of supplication in which the tongue of the supplicant is in harmony with his heart when uttering the supplication. So here, the tongue is the interpreter of the heart. This is a genuine sample of supplication and is very likely to be responded to. Mamdouhi defines *supplication by the heart* as the type of supplication in which words are not used; rather only the heart turns towards Almighty Allah. This innate and genuine relation between Almighty Allah and His servants represents the truth behind supplication and it is assumed to be the best state in man's life.

For مطهري (2004: 14), there are two types of supplication: *Urgent* and *Volitional*. *Urgent supplication* refers to the supplication uttered by a person who is in urgent need for Allah's help and guidance. *Volitional supplication* is the type of supplication uttered by a person who is comfortable and lives in a state of peace of mind. He supplicates only to thank Allah and praise Him because of His previous bounties.

### Supplication: A Syntactic Perspective

#### Vocative

In Arabic, grammarians state that the vocative (النداء) refers to calling the addressee by using one of the particles of the vocative (حروف النداء) such as (يا, ايا, هيا, اي, آ, وا, الهمزة) (هارون, 1979: 136; الفضلي, 1980: 200; 1988: 217; العاكوب و الشتيوي, 1993: 287; and ضنّاوي, 1999: 71). Abdul-Raof (2006: 119) states that (اي and الهمزة) are employed for addressing someone close to the speaker; whereas (يا, ايا, هيا, وا) are used to address someone far away. The most common vocative forms that are used to address Almighty Allah in Arabic supplication may include: (يا الهي, اللهم يا الله) (يا) as well as addressing Allah by His Good Names and Attributes like: (يا رحمن يا ذا الجلال و الاكرام, يا عليماً بما في السر يا جميل الستر, يا ذا القوة يا ذا العزة, يا سلام يا قدوس يا حي يا قيوم, يا سميع يا مجيب, يا كريم يا محسن يا نور, رحيم يا ارحم الراحمين).

28"رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ" (نوح:

*My Lord! forgive me and my parents and him who enters my house believing, and the believing men and the believing women.* (Shakir, 1999: 286)

#### Imperative

The imperative (الأمر) in Arabic is defined as a request for doing something issued from a superior to an inferior (الفضلي, 1980: 190 and العاكوب و الشتيوي, 1993: 251).

12"يَا يَحْيَى خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ" (مريم:

*O Yahya! take hold of the Book with strength* (Shakir, 1999: 140)

According to Abdul-Raof (2006: 26), when the imperative is issued from a superior to an inferior, it is referred to as *real imperative* (أمر حقيقي); otherwise it is called *unreal* or *rhetorical imperative* (أمر مجازي or غير حقيقي). In supplication (الدعاء), for instance, the imperative is issued from an inferior to a superior, and hence it is an unreal imperative:

19"رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ وَعَلَى وَالِدَيَّ" (النمل:

*My Lord! grant me that I should be grateful for Thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents* (Shakir, 1999: 180)

In addition to positive imperative, supplication in Arabic may also make use of negative imperative which is called in Arabic (النهْي 'prohibition'). الفضلي (1980: 192) states that النهي means

asking the addressee not to do something. Wightwick and Gaatar (2008: 75), in this regard, remark that النهي is formed by using the imperfect verb in the jussive mood associated with the particle (لا) to mean (do not).

"هَدَيْتَنَا إِذْ بَعَدَ قُلُوبُنَا تَرْغَ لَا رَبَّنَا" (آل عمران: 8)

*Our Lord! make not our hearts to deviate after Thou hast guided us aright.* (Shakir, 1999: 22)

### Parallelism

Parallelism is a common linguistic phenomenon in Arabic called "التوازي" or "الموازنة" utilized especially in religious and literary texts. Syntactic parallelism is maintained in Arabic where there is a repetition of sentence, clause, or phrase structure (Ibid.: 361). The following is an example of parallelism in supplication:

2013: 195-196, يا جَمِيلَ السِّتْرِ، اسْتَشْفَعْتُ بِجُودِكَ وَكَرَمِكَ إِلَيْكَ وَتَوَسَّلْتُ بِجَنَابِكَ وَتَرَحُّمِكَ لَدَيْكَ فَاسْتَجِبْ دُعَائِي، وَلَا تُخَيِّبْ فِيكَ رَجَائِي. (الامام السجاد (ع))

*O Beautiful through covering over! I seek Thy munificence and Thy generosity to intercede with Thee, I seek Thy side and Thy showing mercy to mediate with Thee, so grant my supplication, disappoint not my hope in Thee* (Chittick, 1988: 424).

### THE CONTRAST

1. In both English and Arabic, supplication is a recognized act of worship practiced to venerate the Creator, Almighty Allah, getting nearer to Him, glorifying him, and asking Him to help and forgive His wrongdoing creatures.
2. In English, supplication is regarded as a kind of prayer; whereas in Arabic it is a distinct act of worship distinguished from the formal prescribed prayer called (صلاة).
3. Syntactically, both languages utilize three grammatical devices, namely, the vocative, the imperative, and parallelism in supplication.
4. It has been observed that Arabic is more explicit than English in the manifestation and realization of the act of supplication.

### CONCLUSIONS

This paper has come up with the following conclusions:

1. The first hypothesis which reads: *the vocative, the imperative, and parallelism constitute the basic syntactic components in English and Arabic supplication* has been validated since the above mentioned grammatical devices are the basic syntactic components in the two languages.
2. Arabic has been profoundly seen to be more explicit in the realization and manifestation of the act of supplication than English. This clearly validates the second hypothesis which states that *Arabic is more explicit than English in the realization of the act of supplication*.

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