

ALA: A. MATTI

Honorifics in Iraqi Arabic with Special Reference to English: A Sociopragmatic Study

Abstrakt (Wyrażenia honoryfikatywne w irackiej odmianie arabskiego odniesione do języka angielskiego: studium socjopragmatyczne). Artykuł dotyczy szeroko rozpowszechnionego w językach naturalnych zjawiska honoryfikatywności, pod względem formy bardziej zróżnicowanego i pomysłowo wykorzystywanego niż wcześniej sądzono. Przed podaniem definicji pojęcia honoryfikatywności należy najpierw wyróżnić językowe wyrażenia honoryfikatywne, będące tematem niniejszego artykułu, ponieważ szacunek może być okazywany nie tylko w mowie czy piśmie, ale także za pomocą gestów wyrażających uprzejmość, takich jak klękanie czy kiwnięcie głową.

Autor zwraca również uwagę na kwestię tworzenia wyrażenia honoryfikatywnych i rolę morfologii w formowaniu niektórych spośród nich. Ponadto przedstawia różne typy leksykalnych tytułów honoryfikatywnych. Formy honoryfikatywne zostają najpierw podzielone na dwie kategorie: wyrażenia religijne i niereligijne, a następnie jest pokazane, jak są one używane przez Irakijczyków w codziennych interakcjach. Autor podejmuje również próbę ustalenia tożsamości osoby honorującej i honorowanej. Artykuł ostatecznie wskazuje, że to religia i konwencja odgrywają istotną rolę w odnoszeniu tytułów honoryfikatywnych do symboli religijnych.

Abstract. This paper tackles the phenomenon of honorifics which is widespread in the world's languages, more various in form, and more creatively deployed, than was once supposed. Before moving to the definition of honorifics we have to specify linguistic honorifics, our concern in this paper, since deference may be conveyed in ways other than speaking and writing, such as kneeling or nodding to express courtesy.

Also, the study focuses on how honorifics are formed and the role of morphology in formulating some honorific items. It tries to show different types of lexical honorific titles as well. Then, honorifics are divided into two types: non-religious and religious ones and it is shown how they are employed by the Iraqi speakers in day-to-day interactions. It, also, attempts to uncover the identity of the honorer and the honoree. However, the study shows how religion and conventions have a vital role in directing honorific titles towards religious symbols.

Instruments and procedures

The data in this research paper have been partially collected by interviewing reliable native informants to get the required authentic data, because our study focuses on the honorifics which the Iraqis employ in real face-to-face interactions. Besides, some references have been used to complement those gathered from the informants and to provide a panoramic presentation of Iraqi honorifics. Accordingly, a reference has been made to instances from both standard and colloquial Arabic.

Why Honorifics

Linguistic honorifics are conventionalized forms which are used by the speakers of a community to indicate social deference. Brown and Levinson (1987: 179) stated that honorifics are “direct grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants and persons or things referred to in the communicative event”. All languages provide the means for speakers to express respect for other persons, but not all languages have the specially conventionalized forms we call honorifics.

Irvine (1995: 2–22) supported the idea that we have to make a distinction between honorification and politeness: honorification is a convention of linguistic form and belongs to sentence-meaning, for example one addressing a king should use a certain linguistic form of honorification. Politeness is a communicative effect, for example one addressing an ordinary person may or may not use polite expressions, depending on person's compartments, in that particular social interaction, which indicates that politeness belongs to utterance-meaning. However, this study is going to focus on honorifics when used to show politeness and/or honorification.

Some languages include a system of pejoratives (derogatory forms) while other languages have no conventional pejorative system other than the derogation implied in the absence of honorifics. This point will not be explained in this paper because our focus is honorific titles.

Honorifics, like other deictic forms, show aspects of an interactional arena, i.e. the social forces and speakers' interpretation of such forces, in addition to the social positions to which they may aspire, formulate the speakers' selectivity of a particular honorific system for the arena in question (Irvine 1995: 2–22). It is clear that honorific systems inhabit many different kinds of societies and participate in different kinds of social dynamics.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 180) suggested that there are three main types of honorifics depending on the axes on which the systems are built: the speaker-addressee axis, the speaker-referent axis, and the speaker-bystander axis. Here, we are going to focus on referent honorifics which convey respect to things or persons actually referred to (i.e. with direct reference to them), but not addressee honorifics which convey respect to the addressees by selecting certain linguistic items, without directly referring

to them (Sifianou 1992). Shibatani (2006: 381–390) showed that “referent honorifics, the most widely used grammatical form of honorifics, are used to show deference toward the nominal referents”. Sometimes there is a kind of convergence between the reference honorific function and the addressee honorific function, but certain languages such as Tagalog and Thai have special addressee-oriented honorific forms.

Comparing honorific forms

Linguistic honorific forms vary according to the different sociological systems in the world. Some languages utilize particular honorific titles and terms; other languages recruit only personal pronouns; other systems have repertoires, large or small, of lexical honorifics; still other systems have honorific particles or affixes; and some systems present combinations of these types. In Arabic, honorifics are coined either morphologically (by pronouns, nouns, and verbs) or lexically (by conventionalized honorific titles). These various types of honorification will be presented as follows:

1. Standard Arabic recruits pronouns to achieve honorification, that is second person plural pronoun which functions as honorific singular pronoun though it is plural, e.g. *antum* → you (male/pl.). Here, this pronoun is usually used to address a king, minister, pope, patriarch or an official, etc. especially in interviews; therefore this pronoun is context-bound honorific item. The other point is that this pronoun is not gender-bound that is to say it can be used interchangeably when addressing kings or queens, male-ministers or female-ministers and so forth; though there is a gender-specific pronoun in Arabic used to refer to females and differ (phonologically and morphologically) from that used to refer to males, e.g. *antunna* → you (female/pl.). The other pronoun recruited here is not the first person singular *ana* → I (male + female) but the first person plural *nahnu* → we (male + female) which is not gender-specific. The scheme bellow illustrates this:

<i>nahnu</i>	→ we (male + female) [sg.] honorific usage
<i>nahnu</i>	→ we (male + female) [pl.] ordinary usage

Seemingly, Arabic has no system of honorific affixes, i.e. Arabic does not rely heavily on morphology to express honorification, though, the second person plural pronoun *antum* is derived from the second person singular pronoun /anta/ by adding the pluralization morpheme (m). Such affix cannot be considered as a system of honorific affixes because:

– The same pronoun *antum* is used to indicate both honorification and familiarity;

– Affixes do not always indicate honorification. To put this another way, the pluralization morpheme does not always provide an indication of honorifics, because in case of the second person plural pronoun (female) *antunna* - which is derived from the singular pronoun *anti*: by adding the pluralization morpheme /n/ - no honorification

is achieved because this pronoun cannot be used when addressing a queen, female-minister, etc.;

– The first person plural pronoun *nahnu* indicates honorifics without the aid of morphology.

2. Not only plural pronouns are used to indicate honorification but also verbs in certain contexts (i.e. addressing a king, a queen, a superior, etc). They are pluralized by adding the plural morpheme /u/ to indicate present tense and the morpheme /m/ to indicate past tense. Notice the examples below:

	Ordinary	Honorific	Tense
Have a look at	<i>taṭṭali'ū</i>	<i>taṭṭali'ū</i>	present
Had a look at	<i>iṭṭala'tum</i>	<i>iṭṭala'tum</i>	past

Again, the plural form of the verb can be used to indicate honorification or familiarity depending on the situation in which the utterance is uttered. However, the honorific plural verbs can be used in formulating questions and requests as the examples below illustrate:

<i>hal ta'malūna laylan</i>	→ Do you work at night? (standard)
<i>halla zurtum baladana</i>	→ Would you visit our country! (standard)

So far we have discussed honorific pronouns in Arabic. Now we turn to another point which is the lexical items or honorific titles. These can be divided into two subsets: non-religious and religious.

Non-religious honorifics

Honorific titles which are used for such honorification are used before titles indicating profession when addressing superiors (a manager, a principal, etc.), but such titles can also be used in everyday life when addressing people of the same social status. They are more familiar in written language than spoken. The use of the same honorific title in both cases shows that it is a double-duty title (i.e. it can convey both messages: formal and informal). Here, the widely used honorific title is *ḥaḥra* which originally meant 'closeness', 'presence' or 'yard' (an area outside a building) and due to language change it has gained a different semantic value. Consequently, it has become an honorific title used of someone who has attendees at his home regularly because of his eminence (Ar-Rāzī 1981). Concisely, it is culture-specific and thus has no English counterpart. Therefore, we are going to use approximate English titles where possible and keep the Arabic title where necessary. Consider the following examples:

<i>ḥaḥrat al-mudī:r</i>	→ Mr. manager (Standard & sub-standard)
<i>ḥaḥrat al-'aḥ al-muḥtaram</i>	→ Respected brother (Standard & sub-standard)

Al-Basha (1957: 262) stated that this honorific title was formerly used in the 4th century when addressing the Muslim caliphs and judges. It was also used to indicate

religious honorification (in standard Arabic) whether by Muslims or Christians. Furthermore, this honorific title was used to indicate different degrees of honorification when referring to Christian kings, for example:

<i>‘al-ḥaḍra al-’āliya</i>	→ The High
<i>al-ḥaḍra as-sāmiya</i>	→ The Sublime
<i>al-ḥaḍra al mukarrama</i>	→ The Venerated
<i>al-ḥaḍra al-muwaqqara’</i>	→ The Revered

However, no such degrees were used when writing to Muslim caliphs i.e. they were used interchangeably according to various countries.

<i>‘al-ḥaḍra al-mu’azzama</i>	→ The Supreme
<i>al-ḥaḍra al-mukarrama</i>	→ The Venerated
<i>al-ḥaḍra al-imamiyya</i>	→ The Imam
<i>al-ḥaḍra aš-šari:fa’</i>	→ The Honourable

The scalability of Arabic standard titles is shown again in the following examples depending on the adjective following the honorific title. Again, *ḡanāb* has deviated from its original meaning and got an honorific usage. It has originally meant ‘the side’ (Al-Adā’ 1997) or ‘the yard’ (Ar-Rāzī 1981):

<i>al-ḡanāb aš-šarīf al-’ālī</i>	→ The High Honorable
<i>al-ḡanāb al-karīm al-’ālī</i>	→ The High Generous
<i>al-ḡanāb al-’ālī</i>	→ The High

Nowadays, this honorific title is not followed by an adjective, but morphology interferes again, i.e. the first person singular pronoun /k/ is added and the pluralization morpheme /m/ can be added, but still can be treated as singular to show a higher degree of deference:

<i>ḡanābak</i> (sg.)	→ honorific (sub-standard)
<i>ḡanābakum</i> (sg.– pl.)	→ honorific (sub-standard)

It is worth noting that the honorific title *mawlāy*, which was formerly used to address a caliph or a king, is nowadays obsolete. However, it is still informally utilized by Shiite in-group when addressing each other, irrespective of social rank, to show politeness. Also, it can be used to refer to females by adding the feminine morpheme /tī/ and thus having *mawlātī*.

There are other honorific titles which were used by Arabs hundreds of years ago and some of them are still in use. Etymologically, *sayyid* is an Arabic title of honorific and is restricted to the members of Prophet Muhammad’s clan. Its connotation differs from its homonym - the non-religious title used in day-to-day interactions. As we will see below, the religious title, which is widely used by the Shiites to honour or talk of their clerics, can stand alone or can be followed or preceded by a noun unlike the non-religious one which cannot stand alone. Notice the examples below:

<i>as-sayyid ar-ra’īs</i> or <i>siyādat ar-ra’īs</i>	→ Mr. President (standard)
<i>as-sayyid al-wazīr</i>	→ Mr. Minister (standard)

In modern Arabic this honorific title is changed into *sayyidī* → Sir and *sayyidatī* → Madam (standard) and it is used when addressing presidents or military leaders. The former unlike the latter can be used alone when the plural pronoun /na/ is added and thus we get *sayyidna* or *sayyidna as-sulṭān* (sub-standard). As a result, an element of overlap between religious and non-religious honorifics emerges as far as morphology is concerned. Besides, *as-sayyid* → Mr. can be used to talk to or of superiors and is followed by the name of the honoree. In case of *sayyidatī*, the honoree is not necessarily a queen or a military leader because the honorer can utilize it when talking to or of a woman of high social rank. Also, we have other honorific titles which are used only to address kings and presidents. These honorific titles are employed in standard Arabic and vary according to the country in which they are used, for instance:

<i>siyādat ar-ra'īs</i>	→ Mr. President (addressing a president)
<i>ṣāhib al-ḡalāla and ḡalālat al-malik</i>	→ His Majesty (addressing a king)
<i>ṣāhibati al-ḡalāla and ḡalālat al-malika</i>	→ Her Majesty (addressing a queen)
<i>ṣāhib as-sumūww al-malakiyy</i>	→ His Royal Highness (addressing a prince)
<i>ṣāhibati as-sumūww al-malakiyy</i>	→ Her Royal Highness' (addressing a princess)
<i>faḡāmat ar-ra'īs</i>	→ His Highness (addressing a king)
<i>faḡāmat ar-ra'īs</i>	→ Her highness (addressing a queen)

When addressing ambassadors, ambassadors, governors or officials a particular honorific title is used: *sa'ādat as-safīr, sa'ādat as-safīra* → His/Her Excellency (standard). Judges have also certain honorific titles by which they are addressed: *faḡīlat al-qāḡī* → His/Her Honour (standard). Undeniably, this honorific title is male-oriented in toto i.e. it is used even when the addressee is a female judge.

Apparently, Arabic non-religious honorific titles differ from their English counterparts in that they can stand alone depending on morphology. Thus, the word *ṣāhib* which indicates possessiveness can be deleted and what is left consists of a part of the *honorific title + third person singular pronoun* (i.e. which is again morphologically justified). Notice the following standard examples: *ḡalālatuhu, summuwwuhu, siyādatuhu, sa'ādatuhu*, etc. Some English honorific titles have no Arabic counterparts because they are culture specific, such as: Right Honorable is used when referring to members of the Privy Council and House of Lords, and The Noble Lord / My Noble Friend is utilized when talking to or of a member of the House of Lords (Rundell 2007: 1012). Also, The or My Honorable is used by Members of Parliament when talking to each other during a debate (Hornby 2004: 624).

Religious Honorifics

Here, we are going to elucidate how religion plays a significant role in honorific phenomenon cross-societal sects and castes. In Iraq, on the one hand, the minor Christian sect uses a different system of honorifics from that utilized by Muslims. On the other hand, the religious honorific titles utilized by the Christians have a different scale from that used by Muslims. The Christian hierarchy is of different levels

which range from the Pope or the Patriarch, who represent the top of the pyramid, down to priests and deacons. The hierarchy is shown below, and then scalability is easily decided. The Scalability is clearly shown (in the following standard instances) when addressing Patriarchs, Popes, or Bishops, etc., depending on the noun following the honorific title. For example: *ṣāhib al-qadāsa* → ‘Your Holiness’ is used to honour both the Pope and the Patriarch. Similarly, *al-ḥabr al-ʿaẓam* → ‘The Supreme Pontiff’ is equally used to address the Pope and the patriarch. Another honorific title *ṣāhib al-ḡibṭa* → ‘His Beatitude’ is also used to honour the Patriarch but not the Pope. However, this honorific title is more widely used in The Eastern than The Western Churches simply because this honorific title is used to honour the head of any of the autocephalous Eastern Churches (The Living Webster 1961). His Beatitude is formerly used as a title of Clergy of Orthodox Church of Patriarchal rank, but nowadays is used to honour the Pope as well. It is worth noting that *ṣāhib an-niyāfa* → ‘His Eminence’ is used to honour a cardinal or bishop. Moreover, *ṣāhib an-niyāfa* in Arabic is a hypernym since it covers the semantic space of two different lexemes. In other words, *ṣāhib an-niyāfa* is used to honour both a bishop and an archbishop whereas in English ‘Your Eminence’ is used as a title of a bishop and ‘Your Grace’ is used as an honorific title when speaking to or of an archbishop. It is clear that ‘Your Eminence’ and *ṣāhib an-niyāfa* are solely used in a religious context but ‘Your Grace’ is used religiously and secularly when talking to a Duke or Duchess.

Muslims (Sunnis and Shiites) have a different system of honorific titles in which scalability is clearly shown in the following standard examples. The honorific title *āyatu al-lāhi al-ʿuẓma* → ‘Great Sign of God’ is used by the Shiites to refer to the senior Muslim religious leader who is usually one in Iraq. It should be made clear here that the religious honorific titles used by Iraqi Shiites are similar to those used in Iran due to the shared creed. The next lower clerical rank is *āyatu-l-lāh* → ‘Sign of God’ and is used to refer to those who are experts in Islamic studies such as jurisprudence, ethics, philosophy, etc. After that, we have *ḥuġġatu al-islām* → ‘Proof of Islam’ or ‘Authority on Islam’ which is given to middle-ranking clerics of Shiites. Sometimes a kind of overlap is noticed when one honorific title is used to honour two different Islamic officials; hence the title *faḍīlat* is utilized when talking to or of both Mufti and Sheikh. In the past, Muslims depended heavily on Mufti, who was a legal authority, later recognized by Sunnis only, to provide them with a formal legal opinion (fatwā) which would answer their inquiries. However, “The development of civil codes in most Islamic countries, however, has tended to restrict the authority of mufti to cases involving personal status, such as inheritance, marriage, and divorce; and even in this area, the prerogatives of the mufti are in some cases circumscribed by modern legislation” (The New Encyclopedia Britannica 2003: 349). Then, *samāḥat al-imām* → ‘His Eminence’ is another honorific title used to refer to those versed in canon law or leaders of prayers in the mosques (i.e. imam). Likewise, *faḍīlat aš-šeyḥ* → ‘His Honour’ is used to honour Islamic theologians and anyone who has memorized the whole Qur’an, however young he might be. It is so important to explain the fact that some honorific titles are interchangeably used, for example: *samāḥat as-sayyid* →

'His Eminence' is utilized to honour a Shiite religious chief or leader. Besides, 'Mullah', who has also studied the Islamic religious law and doctrine, is usually honored by using the honorific title *mawlānā* → 'Our Master' (sub-standard).

Both Christians and Muslims share a feature of morphological relevance i.e. a feature utilized by both. This device cannot be added to the previous devices of forming honorifics because Christians and Muslims are incompatible when using the morphological device. This title of honorification is formed by adding the pronoun /na/ to the end of the honorific title in question. Further, this pronoun shows plurality and that the honoree has supremacy over us. For example, the honorific title *sayyidna* can be used (alone or accompanied by a noun) to honour the Pope, the Patriarch, Archbishop and Bishop, viz. *sayyidna al-pāpā* → 'Our master the Pope' (sub-standard). Muslims apply the same technique when the honored person is 'Mullah' as explained above. Noteworthy, there is no one-to-one correspondence between English and Arabic as far as some religious honorific titles are concerned due to the cultural variance. Also, Christians use a special honorific title to honour a priest, i.e. adding the pronoun (na) which shows plurality and possessiveness to the noun *abun* → Father and *ābun* → Father of the Church, and thus having *abūna al-qass* → 'Our Father priest' (sub-standard) in which *alqass* → 'priest' is an optional element as the case is with *mawlāna* and *sayyidna*. However, having optional element in such honorific structures (utilized by Christians and Muslims) is an Arabic-specific feature that would help the listener infer the meaning from the context in which it occurs. In English, the priest is honoured by using the honorific title 'the Reverend', but this title is not used to honour the priest only. It is used to achieve honorification on different levels depending on the item which precedes and/or follows it. Accordingly, the *most* Reverend is an honorific title used of an archbishop, the *right* Reverend is used of a bishop, the Reverend *Father* is used of a Roman Catholic priest, and Reverend *Mother* is used to honour a Mother superior of a convent. Consequently, Unlike English, Arabic is biased towards men as far as religious honorifics are concerned.

Some honorific items can be used sarcastically, i.e. uses whose purpose may be quite the opposite of polite ones. Although some signal of deference is necessarily 'in play' when an honorific form is deployed, that signal can be framed in ways that displace from the speaker's comportment, and make it not actually count as deference in the interaction at hand. Such pejoratives are context bound, for example:

<i>ḥaḥratuka kunta gā'iban</i>	→ You were absent (standard).
<i>ḡanābak kunt ḡiyāb</i>	→ You were absent (sub-standard).
<i>ḥaḥrat ḡanābak kunt ḡiyāb</i>	→ You were absent (sub-standard).

Linguistic Borrowing

The other kind of honorific items is linguistic borrowing which is of two types either lexical or phonological. In case of Arabic language we can only find examples

of lexical borrowing from various sources, for example: *bēk/g/* which is of Turkish origin meaning ‘Lord’ (Moin 2003: 439). Due to the never-ending process of language change this honorific title has acquired additional meaning like ‘king’ or ‘prince’. In addition, *ḥātūn* is another Turkish loan word used to address a princess. Nowadays, this borrowed honorific title is sarcastically used to address a lazy girl. Also, *ḥānim* is a loan word borrowed from Turkish as well and is used to address a woman of high social rank” (Ibid., 982). Conspicuously, this borrowed title is still utilized by Kurdish speaking community when talking to or of a married or single girl. Interestingly, this honorific title does not reflect the social rank of the addressee and it is utilized in written language only, though it is sometimes sarcastically used when talking to or of a girl who is vain or lazy. However, Kurds utilize *ḥān* which is an abbreviated form of the original *ḥānim* when addressing a female in spoken language. Nowadays, the aforementioned honorific titles are no longer used in the Iraqi community except sarcastically in some informal contexts.

Honorification role and participants’ roles

Honorification implies a role structure in which we have the honorer (deference giver) and the honoree (deference recipient). The interlocutor toward whom deference is directed may be termed the focus of honorification. This role structure must be mapped onto the social situation in which the act of speaking occurs. Usually, the honorer is the speaker who shows deference to someone else, but other mappings are also possible, such as when a speaker temporarily takes on someone else’s point of view (i.e. performing the deference someone else owes) (Irvine 1995: 11).

Concerning the focus of honorification, sociolinguistic systems differ as to how it is normally mapped onto a speech situation. The focus is either the referent of the honorific expression or the addressee. In Arabic, the honorific system focuses on the honoree i.e. neither the referent nor the bystander. It is clear that when using the royal ‘we’, the speaker automatically becomes the focus of honorification, but the accumulated respect to the speaker of honorifics is not explicit but indirect, as a byproduct of usage. An Arabic speaker when uses the royal pronoun ‘we’ is able to display his/her own refinement through this delicacy of comportment and knowledge of special linguistic forms.

Deployment of Honorifics

What are the kinds of communities and social relations in which honorific systems occur? Honorific system is not haphazardly deployed, because certain honorific titles are court-bound others could be used by those who have the highest social status and commoners as well. Succinctly, religious honorifics, for example, are widely used by Shiite Muslims. In short, there are no restrictions as to who uses a certain

honorific title, though eulogistic system has to do more with men than women. It is not a prerequisite that honorific titles are to be found in hierarchical societies, aristocracies, or triggered by the social dynamics of royal courts, for example: the plural pronoun (you) can be used in day-to-day interactions to show respect and distance. In addition, the pluralization suffix can be used to indicate that linguistic honorifics are not limited to complex or stratified societies but also occurs in egalitarian contexts.

Honorifics, like other deictic forms, show aspects of an interaction arena, i.e. the social forces and speakers' interpretation of such forces, in addition to the social positions to which they may aspire, formulate the speakers' selectivity of a particular honorific system for the arena in question. It is clear that honorific systems inhabit many different kinds of societies and participate in different kinds of social dynamics.

Conclusion

In Arabic language, traditions have an important role to play in achieving honorific system, because the speaker's deferential attitude toward a particular addressee or referent obliges him to invoke respectful behaviour. This is already justified because traditions oblige the Iraqis, just like any other Arab speaking community, to use certain honorific titles when addressing a king, judge, superiors, etc. as an expression of deference and social distance. Further, religious honorifics are male-oriented, but no such orientation is noticed when the religious factor is excluded, viz. males and females share almost the same ratio of honorification. We have noticed that Arabic has no independent system of affixes or pronouns, though morphology has a key function in forming some honorific items. Arabic is characterized by having a number of lexical honorific expressions which varies from one place to another and which is used differently by different speakers of the society. Also, we have noticed how religious honorifics are male-oriented (i.e. patriarchal) whereas the non-religious ones are to some extent both male and female-oriented.

To achieve deference and social distance people use special honorific titles which, in this case, differ from religious and non-religious ones which are used by inferiors when addressing or talking of superiors but not vice versa, or by people from the same social stratum to achieve politeness. On the one hand, some honorific titles, such as: *ḥaḍrat al-aḥ al-muḥtaram*, are used informally in spoken or written language among people from the same stratum. On the other hand, *ḥaḍrat as-sayyed ra'īs al-ḡalsa*, for example, can be used formally among officials.

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