Speech Act Theory Between Arabic Heritage and Western Studies: An Applied Study on Quranic Verses

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***Abstract*—When a speaker utters words, they are performing an act—a speech act. This is how linguists view language when studying it in actual use and within both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, taking into account the crucial role these contexts play in the success of communication. Arab scholars also addressed this concept, particularly in their discussions of declarative and performative speech, with a focus on Maqām (context) and the speaker's intent.**

The Holy Qur'an represents the most exemplary corpus in which speech acts are manifested. Therefore, this research, titled "The Theory of Speech Acts Between Arab Tradition and Western Studies: An Applied Study on Qur'anic Verses," aims to answer several key questions:What is the theory of speech acts? Was this theory known—explicitly or implicitl —in classical Arab linguistic thought? How is the theory conceptualized in Western linguistic studies, and who are its main proponents? Can this theory be applied to the Qur'anic text?

Keywords—Speech acts; language; tradition Arabic; Western studies; Qur'an

I. INTRODUCTION:

Praise be to Allah, who created mankind and taught them speech, and may peace and blessings be upon the noble Prophet, his family, companions, and all those who follow them in righteousness.

After that: Language is a human, intellectual, and social phenomenon. It is a means of communication among members of a linguistic community, which is why it has been the focus of many academic disciplines and scientific inquiries. Linguistics, in particular, has approached the study of language and its rules from two main perspectives.

The first approach views language as a closed system, isolated from external contexts, focusing on the internal relationships between linguistic elements. This is embodied in structural linguistics, founded by Ferdinand de Saussure and developed by his followers.

The second approach examines language in use, within both linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, emphasizing the role of these contexts in successful communication.

This approach considers the relationship between the speaker and the listener and is represented by sociolinguistics and pragmatics. It is within the field of pragmatics that our research is situated, particularly focusing on one of its fundamental concepts: Speech Act Theory, introduced by John Langshaw Austin and further developed by his student John Searle.

Proponents of this theory argue that when a speaker utters a statement, they perform a speech act. Interestingly, classical Arab scholars had already touched upon this concept through the distinction between informative (khabar) and performative (insha') statements, particularly concerning the speaker's intent and the communicative context.

The Holy Qur'an is considered one of the richest texts in which speech acts are clearly manifested. Through this study titled "Speech Act Theory Between Arabic Tradition and Western Studies – An Applied Study on Qur'anic Verses", we seek to address key questions such as: What is Speech Act Theory? Was it known in classical Arabic linguistic thought? How is it understood in Western linguistic theory? Who are its key figures? Can it be applied to the Qur'an?

The aims of this research include: distinguishing the pragmatic approach in linguistics through the study of speech acts, exploring key issues related to speech acts in modern linguistic studies, identifying equivalents and applications of speech act concepts in Arabic linguistic heritage, and examining the diverse forms of speech acts in the Qur'an.

To achieve these goals, we adopted a descriptive method complemented by a historical approach and analytical tools. The Qur'an serves as our corpus for the practical application and analysis of speech act manifestations.

The structure of this study begins with an introduction, followed by three main sections and a conclusion. While the

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study faced some minor challenges, they did not amount to serious difficulties. Among them were inconsistencies across sources in establishing the foundations of Speech Act Theory in modern linguistics, and the abundance of terms with overlapping meanings due to translation from foreign languages, which required considerable time and effort to clarify.

Our research relied on a wide range of sources and references, including: Al-Taʿrīfāt by Al-Jurjānī, Austin's How to Do Things with Words, Searle's Mind, Language and Society, Constructs of Insha' in Arabic by Khaled Milad, Context and Poetic Text by Ali Ayat Ouchan, and Pragmatics in Arab Thought by Massoud Sahraoui.

A. First Section: The Theory of Speech Acts

The theory of speech acts was founded by Wittgenstein and further developed by Austin and Searle, as well as Leech, and continued to evolve through the contributions of other theorists such as Sperber and Wilson.

It is also referred to as the "speech event theory," which is a translation of the English term Speech Act Theory. This theory has various other translations in Arabic, such as: "the theory of linguistic events," "the performative theory," and "the theory of speech actions," among other formulations. It is considered a part of pragmatic linguistics (Naaman Boukra, 2006, p.169).

Speech acts are uttered actions, based on a formal system with semantic significance through which we perform an action that affects the listener. It is also a physical activity that relies on verbal acts to achieve performative purposes such as requesting, commanding, promising, and threatening, as well as influencing goals concerning the listener's reactions, such as acceptance or refusal. Thus, it is an influential act, meaning it has a social effect on the addressee. The influential act refers to the impact that the performative act has on the listener.

B. Subsection One: The Concept of the Speech Act

The speech act is considered one of the most important concepts upon which pragmatics is built. It occupies a fundamental position within this field and forms one of its main pillars. It is a concept that emerged within the framework of the speech act theory introduced by Austin and his student Searle. The credit for its emergence goes back to analytical philosophy, particularly the ordinary language philosophy movement.

Dr. Masoud Sahraoui defined it in his book Pragmatics According to Arab Scholars as follows: "A speech act means a social or institutional act or behavior performed by a person through speech." (Masoud Sahraoui, 2008, p. 8).

Accordingly, it refers to the accomplishment the speaker achieves merely by uttering specific expressions.

Françoise Armengaud defines it as: "Acts that a person performs merely by speaking in an appropriate context; uttering a discourse is not simply a phonetic act, but a linguistic act. There are actions that can only be performed through language." (Françoise Armengaud, 1987, p. 60).

Other definitions hardly diverge from this concept.

C. Subsection Two: Speech Acts in Traditional Arab Linguistic Thought

The relationship between Arab heritage and modern sciences is hardly hidden from anyone. Though the degree of this relationship may vary from one science to another, it remains present nonetheless. Linguistics is perhaps one of the most prominent fields still grappling with this connection today. Many scholars and researchers have addressed this topic, including Dr. Abdelrahman Al-Haj Saleh, Dr. Mohamed El-Saghir Bennani, Dr. Taha Abdelrahman, Dr. Hashem Al-Tabatabai, Dr. Massoud Sahraoui, and others.

Whether concerning scholars of rhetoric or grammar in classical Arabic studies, the theory of speech acts was specifically classified under the stylistic phenomenon titled "statement (khabar) and non-statement (inshā')," along with related issues, branches, and applications. Therefore, from a cognitive perspective, the theory of khabar and inshā' is equivalent to the concept of speech acts in modern theory. (Massoud Sahraoui, 2008, p. 49).

This confirms and affirms the presence of the phenomenon of speech acts—understood in their modern sense—in classical Arabic linguistic studies. It intersects with Austin's theory of speech, in which he classified utterances into constative (descriptive) and performative (operative). (Anne Reboul & Jacques Moeschler, 2003, p. 272).

What is particularly notable is that books on grammar and semantics did not pay much attention to the linguistic formulas used in contracts and treaties. The primary sources for investigating this significant performative category are books of Islamic jurisprudence and its principles, due to their abundance in discussions on transactions among people —such as marriage and sales.

Thus, the theory of speech acts in Arabic linguistic studies is manifested in two key areas of ʿIlm al-Maʿānī (the science of meaning): the declarative (khabari) style and the performative (inshāʾi) style. This is confirmed by the author of Pragmatics among the Arabs, who stated: "The phenomenon of speech acts specifically falls under the stylistic phenomenon referred to as khabar and inshāʾ among Arabs, and from a cognitive perspective, it is equivalent to the modern concept of speech acts." (Massoud Sahraoui, 2008, p. 49).

D. 1-The Declarative Style (al-uslūb al-khabarī)

Scholars have disagreed on how to define and delineate the concept of khabar (declarative utterance). Some have confined it to the binary of truth and falsehood, based on the speaker's belief. Others have rejected this limitation, arguing that what matters is the speaker's belief or assumption—even if the khabar contradicts reality, the speaker should not be accused of lying if they sincerely believed it. A third group combined both conditions, arguing that a khabar is either: True, if it corresponds to reality and the speaker believes it to be true, or False, if it does not correspond to reality and the speaker believes it to be false, even if proven otherwise.

Al-khabar has been categorized based on the strength or weakness of its semantic force into three types, as agreed upon by scholars (al-Sakkākī, 2000):

E. The Initial Declarative (al-khabar al-ibtidāʾī):

This is the type of khabar that does not require emphasis, and no affirming particles are needed, because the listener is assumed to be completely unaware of the information.

Al-Sakkākī explains:"If a speaker begins an utterance with a declarative statement, intending to assign a predicate to its subject and to inform the addressee, he must consider the degree of the listener's need for clarity. If the utterance is directed at someone who is mentally unprepared for the content, simply delivering the statement is sufficient to establish the intended judgment. Because the listener is uninformed, the sentence needs no confirming elements. This type of khabar is called 'initial declarative' (ibtidāʾī)."(al-Sakkākī, 2000, p. 258)

Example: When you say to someone: "ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is a diligent student,"you are informing them about ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's diligence. The listener is completely unaware of this information, and thus no emphasis is needed.

F. The Request-Based Declarative (al-khabar al-ṭalabī):

This is the khabar that requires emphasis through the use of particles such as "inna" or the emphatic "lām" because the listener is doubtful or hesitant.

Al-Sakkākī writes: "If the utterance is addressed to someone who is uncertain—knowing the subject and predicate but not their relation—then it is appropriate to strengthen the statement with an emphatic element, such as 'inna' or the emphatic 'lām.' For example: 'inna Zaydan ʿārif' (Indeed, Zayd is knowledgeable) or 'la-Zaydun ʿārif' (Zayd certainly is knowledgeable). This type of khabar is called 'request-based declarative' (ṭalabī)."(al-Sakkākī, 2000, p. 258)

Example: When you say: "Indeed, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is a diligent student,"

you are emphasizing his diligence to someone who is skeptical or unsure about it.

G. The Denied Declarative (al-khabar al-inkārī):

This type of khabar arises in contexts where the listener denies the information being conveyed, and thus the utterance requires emphatic reinforcement. Al-Sakkākī explains: "If the utterance is directed at someone who holds an opposing view, in order to bring him back to the speaker's judgment, it necessitates emphasis proportional to the denial embedded in the listener's belief." (al-Sakkākī, 2000, p. 258)

The degree of denial can vary—some may simply reject the statement, while others may strongly reject it. Each level of denial calls for specific linguistic tools of emphasis, which the speaker uses accordingly to eliminate doubt or refute denial entirely.

For someone who denies ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn's diligence, you would say: "Indeed, ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is certainly a diligent student" (ʾinna ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn la-ṭālib mujtahid), employing both the emphatic particle ʾinna and the emphatic lām (la-).

If the denial is even stronger, you might say: "By God, indeed ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is certainly a diligent student", using an oath (by God) along with the previous emphatic tools to maximize the assertion.

From all the above, we can observe that declarative sentences (jumal khabariyya) vary depending on the degree of the communicative purpose they aim to fulfill. Their meanings shift and diversify based on the context in which they are used. For instance, the sentence: "By God, indeed ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is certainly a diligent student" carries much more force than the simple: "ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn is a diligent student."

Furthermore, the khabar can carry additional implied meanings based on the surrounding context, such as wishful thinking, denial, amazement, and more.

H. 2-The Performative Style (al-uslūb al-inshāʾī)

Classical scholars disagreed on the usage of the term inshāʾ (performative). In some works, they used the alternative term "ṭalab" (request/command) instead.

Al-Sakkākī, for instance, wrote: (al-Sakkākī, 2000, p. 414).

Others clarified that ṭalab is one category within inshāʾ. This view was articulated by al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, who said: "Inshāʾ is of two types: ṭalab and non-ṭalab."

(al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, 2000, p. 107).

This categorization later became the standard framework adopted by subsequent scholars in Arabic rhetoric.

Inshāʾ (performative speech) refers to utterances that cannot be judged as either true or false. It is also defined as speech whose propositional content does not correspond to any external reality—that is, there is no objective state of affairs that can be said to either match or contradict the statement.

As ʿAlī al-Jurjānī explains: "It refers to speech for which there is no external correlation that either matches or does not match its propositional content".

(ʿAlī al-Jurjānī, 1992, p. 56)

In other words, inshāʾ is not meant to be evaluated against external truth but is rather concerned with effects or actions in reality that align with the utterance.

It has also been defined as: "Speech that, by its very nature, cannot be judged as true or false, and it is not valid to call its speaker truthful or lying—because its meaning does not exist externally unless it is uttered." (ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, 1981, p. 13)

Inshāʾ is typically divided into two main categories:

- Request-based (ṭalabī)

- Non-request-based (ghayr ṭalabī).

a) Request-Based Performative Speech (al-inshāʾ al-ṭalabī)

This refers to speech that requests something not yet realized at the time of the utterance (ʿAbd al-ʿAtīq ʿAzīz, 2009, p. 58).

This category encompasses a wide range of stylistic phenomena that vary depending on the linguistic forms (i.e., "speech acts") and the communicative purposes they serve. These styles and forms have been categorized into nine types:

Interrogation (istifhām)

Command (ʾamr)

Prohibition (nahy)

Wish (tamannī)

Hope (tarajjī)

Vocative (nidāʾ)

Supplication (duʿāʾ)

Offering (ʿarḍ)

Encouragement (taḥḍīḍ) (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Abū Sarīʿ, 1989, p. 10)

However, some scholars of rhetoric have grouped them into just five main categories, namely:

Command (ʾamr)

Prohibition (nahy)

Interrogation (istifhām)

Wish (tamannī)

Vocative (nidāʾ)

Researcher Abū Sarīʿ refers to these five categories, stating:

“The performative (request-based) styles are five: wish, interrogation, command, prohibition, and vocative—because each style either involves requesting something possible or not.” (ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Abū Sarīʿ, 1989, p. 14).

This classification is based on how certain subcategories are conceptually grouped:

Supplication (duʿāʾ) is considered a form of command.

Encouragement (taḥḍīḍ) and hope (tarajjī) are viewed as types of wish (tamannī).

Offering (ʿarḍ) is treated as a kind of interrogation.

I. B - Non-directive utterances:

These are utterances that do not request something not already existing at the time of speaking. They have various forms, including: expressions of praise and blame, exclamations, contractual formulas, expressions of hope, and oaths (Abd al-‘Ateeq Aziz, 2009, p. 54).

Subsection Three: The Theory of Speech Acts in Western Linguistic Thought

The first influence of the usage theory appeared in the Cambridge School, particularly in the works of Austin, and later in the works of the language philosopher John Searle, who developed the theory of speech acts. Through their efforts, linguistic philosophy transformed into a field that investigates problems related to language (Zawawi Baghoura, 2005, p. 104).

J. 1- Austin and Speech Acts

Austin identified a category of declarative sentences and presented a preliminary study of these statements based on a significant axis in philosophy and logic. He then expanded the concept he introduced to include all types of sentences, even those that are traditionally considered capable of being true or false. In doing so, he established a general philosophy of language that has important applications in linguistics.

Austin's theory is based on the idea of performative utterances, which posits that some utterances do not describe anything in the world and thus cannot be judged by the criteria of truth or falsehood. Instead, they perform actions, such as making a promise or issuing a warning, and are evaluated based on whether they successfully perform the intended act or fail to do so.

Austin distinguished between performative utterances and constative (descriptive) utterances, stating: “To say something in a certain way is to do it.” Among examples of constative utterances that express feelings are: "I apologize," "I'm sorry," etc. Meanwhile, performative utterances include expressions like: "I support an opinion," "I predict," "I expect," and so on. The condition for a performative utterance to be valid is its correspondence with reality (successful performance) (Austin, 1991, p. 10).

Austin classifies speech acts into three categories: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act (Abdulhadi Al-Shahiri, 2004, p. 155).

The first refers to the act that occurs upon the mere utterance of something.

The second is the action accomplished by saying something.

The third is the action brought about as a consequence of saying something.

For example, when a father says to his son, "Brush your teeth," he performs two simultaneous acts:

1. A locutionary act—uttering the sentence "Brush your teeth."

2. An illocutionary act—issuing a command to his son to brush his teeth.

When the son replies, "I'm not sleepy," he performs three acts:

The locutionary act occurs when the son utters the sentence “I’m not sleepy.”

The illocutionary act is represented by the assertion or declaration of his unwillingness to go to sleep.

Finally, the son performs a perlocutionary act, aiming to influence his father by persuading him to let him skip brushing his teeth, under the pretext that he is not yet sleepy (Jacques Moeschler, n.d., p. 32).

Later, Austin proposed five categories of speech acts:

1. Verdictives: These involve issuing a judgment and are based on evident reasoning or legitimate grounds related to a value or event. Examples include: acquitting, declaring, estimating, describing, appraising, etc.

2. Exercitives: These involve making a decision in favor of or against a course of action and cover a series of acts such as: ordering, advising, defending, requesting, apologizing, as well as appointing, declaring a session open, closing, warning, demanding, etc.

3. Commissives: These acts commit the speaker to a particular course of action. Examples include: promising, wishing, committing to a contract, guaranteeing, swearing, entering into a treaty, or joining a political party (Françoise Armenhco, n.d., p. 62).

4. Behabitives: These are acts that express reactions to the behavior of others, such as: apologizing, thanking, congratulating, sympathizing, criticizing, applauding, welcoming, hating, inciting, etc.

5. Expositives: These are acts related to presenting ideas or elaborating content, such as: asserting, denying, describing, correcting, rejecting, arguing, stating, interpreting, testifying, explaining, referring, etc. (Philippe Blanchet, 2007, p. 26).

K. 2-Searle and Speech Acts

The efforts of Austin served as a starting point for the establishment of Speech Act Theory, and it was John Searle who continued and expanded upon Austin's work and ideas. Searle refined the concept of the illocutionary act, which became a central concept in Speech Act Theory, and solidified the methodological foundations upon which the theory is based. Nonetheless, the original initiative is credited to Austin, even though he did not manage to formulate a fully integrated theory of speech acts.

Searle adopted many of Austin's proposals, emphasizing that an utterance cannot occur without illocutionary force. He also introduced modifications to Austin's classification of linguistic acts and gave special attention to meaning.

Searle broadly distinguishes between five major categories of speech acts (Mahmoud Nakhla, 2002, p. 4):

A. Assertives (Representatives):

The illocutionary purpose of these acts is to make the speaker responsible for the truth of the expressed proposition. All acts in this category are truth-evaluable (i.e., they can be either true or false). The direction of fit is words-to-world, meaning the language aims to reflect reality. The sincerity condition requires the speaker to believe in the truth of what is said. This category includes acts such as asserting, stating, and describing.

L. Directives:

These aim to get the hearer to do something. The direction of fit is world-to-words, meaning the speaker wants the world to align with what is said. The sincerity condition is a genuine desire or wish on the speaker's part for the hearer to perform the act. This category includes acts like ordering, commanding, requesting, forbidding, etc.

M. Commissives:

The illocutionary purpose of these acts is to commit the speaker to a future course of action. The direction of fit is world-to-words, as the speaker intends for reality to conform to what is being said. The sincerity condition here is intention, meaning the speaker genuinely intends to carry out the act. This category includes acts such as promising and certain declarative commitments.

N. Expressives:

These acts serve to express a psychological state. Unlike the other categories, there is no direction of fit between words and the world — that is, they do not aim to reflect or change reality. The sincerity condition is truthfulness, as the speaker must genuinely feel the expressed emotion. This group includes acts such as apologizing, congratulating, regretting, sympathizing, etc...

O. Declarations:

The illocutionary aim of these acts is to bring about a change in the external world simply by being uttered, typically within an institutional or conventional context. The direction of fit is both words-to-world and world-to-words—meaning the utterance simultaneously reflects and alters reality. These acts do not require a sincerity condition, as their effectiveness depends on institutional authority. This category includes acts such as declaring, announcing, appointing, naming, etc.

P. Section Two: Speech Acts in the Qur'an

This section addresses examples of speech acts in the Qur'an, following Searle's classification of speech acts into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

Q. Subsection One: Assertive Acts

Assertive speech acts refer to those that describe facts and events in the external world. Their illocutionary purpose is to faithfully convey those facts. If the transmission is faithful, the sincerity condition is fulfilled. Once the sincerity condition is fulfilled, the act is successfully or fully performed (Mahmoud Nakhla, 2002, p. 103).

Searle describes assertives or representatives as speech acts in which the speaker presents the proposition as a representation of a state of affairs in the world. Examples include declarative judgments, medical diagnoses, classifications, and interpretations (John Searle, n.d., p. 217).

Assertives are abundant in the Qur'an, including: assertions about previous nations, assertions about this nation, and assertions about the Day of Judgment.

Among the examples of assertive speech acts found in the Qur'an is the report of the steadfastness of previous nations in battle, as in the verse:

"And how many a prophet fought with him many religious scholars, but they never lost heart for what afflicted them in the cause of Allah, nor did they weaken or give in. And Allah loves the steadfast". (Āl ʿImrān: 146)

The context of this verse is that on the Day of Uhud, Satan shouted: "Muhammad has been killed," causing most of the Muslims to flee, except for a few. Then Allah revealed: "And how many a prophet was killed..."

The speech act is reflected in the different Qur'anic readings (qirāʾāt) of the verse. Ibn Kathīr read it as "kāʾin", and so did Abū Jaʿfar, but with a softened hamza and variation in elongation. The rest read it as "kaʾayyin", and all readers stop at the letter nūn, except for Abū ʿAmr and Yaʿqūb who stop at the yāʾ, while Ḥamza stops with a softened hamza (Jamal al-Dīn Muhammad Sharaf, 2004, p. 68). Both "kāʾin" and "kaʾayyin" are valid linguistic forms (ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Abū Zurʿa, n.d., p. 174).

As for the verb, Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, Abū ʿAmr, and Yaʿqūb read it as "qutila" (was killed), while the rest read it as "qātala" (fought) (Jamal al-Dīn Muhammad Sharaf, 2004, p. 68). Those who read "qutila" argue that it was revealed as a reproach to those who retreated from battle on the Day of Uhud, after someone cried out: "Muhammad has been killed," and when the fighters regrouped, they excused

themselves by saying: “We heard that Muhammad had been killed.”

The assertive act in the verse is manifested in informing the believers about the steadfastness of previous prophets and their followers, especially when the recitation “qutila” (was killed) is favored.

Subsection Two: Directive (Imperative) Speech Acts

Directive acts lie at the heart of interpretative efforts in understanding scriptural texts and are of particular importance to scholars of Islamic legal theory (uṣūlīs), especially in matters such as the implications of commands in linguistic convention and practical usage. These acts are requestive and directive in nature, aiming to influence the behavior of the listener. They include forms such as vocatives (calls), commands, prohibitions, and interrogatives, among others.

Let us take the vocative as an example. The vocative is a directive speech act because it prompts the listener to respond to the speaker. Its most prominent particle is “yā” (O), and it appears frequently in the Qur’anic text due to its close association with commands and prohibitions. The vocative is the first speech act a speaker performs in order to then define their intent. It appears in various forms and contexts in the Qur’an, such as: “Yā ayyuhā al-nās” (O mankind), “Yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū” (O you who believe), “Yā ayyuhā al-nabiyy” (O Prophet), “Yā Dāwūd” (O David), “Yā Zakariyyā” (O Zechariah), “Yā ʿĪsā” (O Jesus), “Yā Mūsā” (O Moses), “Yā ayyuhā al-insān” (O man), “Yā ahl al-kitāb” (O People of the Book), “Yā banī Isrā’īl” (O Children of Israel), “Yā ayyuhā al-kāfirūn” (O disbelievers)...

The Qur’anic discourse intentionally varies its modes of address and rhetorical styles in order to effectively reach all recipients. It uses the appropriate vocative particle, then addresses each addressee in accordance with their nature, faith, or specific social or spiritual status. This is because the speech act is closely tied to the reception context and its standards. As it has been said: “The discourse to the intelligent differs from that to the ignorant, doctrinal topics that stir emotions differ from narrative topics, heated debate differs from calm teaching, and the language of promise and glad tidings differs from that of threat and warning.” (ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zurqānī, 2001, p. 188).

This reflects the unique, divinely miraculous nature of Qur’anic discourse.

The first vocative in the Qur’an is: “Yā ayyuhā al-nās” (O mankind), which indicates the universal message of the Qur’an and its address to all people. From there, the address becomes more specific depending on the type of discourse the Qur’an seeks to deliver. Allah Almighty affirms His oneness and His right to exclusive worship, as He is the sole Creator and Benefactor, having brought humans from non-existence into being, honored them, and bestowed upon them various blessings. Thus, He alone deserves to be worshiped, as expressed in the verse: “O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may become righteous.” (Al-Baqarah: 21).

R. Subsection Three: Commissive Acts (Promises and Threats)

In commissive speech acts, the speaker undertakes to do something toward the listener voluntarily. These include acts such as promises, threats, guarantees, and warnings. They are frequent in Qur’anic discourse. The main difference between commissive and directive acts lies in their orientation: while directive acts are aimed at influencing the listener’s action, commissive acts are centered on the speaker’s commitment to future action directed toward the listener (Nuʿmān Būqurah, 2006, p. 197).

Al-Shāṭibī classifies some Qur’anic expressions as implicit commands, which may appear in the form of informative statements, praise for those who obey commands, or mention of punishment for those who violate prohibitions. These devices signal a call to action when the act is praiseworthy, or a call to abstain when the act is blameworthy (Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭibī, 1997, p. 142).

Mentioning consequences is one of the explicit rhetorical strategies used by the speaker (God) to direct the listener (the human being) through a set of commands and prohibitions, ultimately concluding with a declaration of the outcome — what the Qur’an calls reward or punishment. These outcomes are tightly linked to promise and threat and are often presented in verses addressing duties to be fulfilled and prohibitions to be avoided. For example, in the verse: “So whoever follows My guidance will not go astray nor suffer. But whoever turns away from My reminder will certainly have a miserable life, and We will raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection”. (Ṭāhā: 123–124)

In this verse, being guided or misguided is tied to whether one follows Allah’s guidance or not. The particle “man” (whoever) introduces a conditional structure for both those who follow guidance and those who turn away. The “fa” (so/then) introduces the consequence: no misguidance or misery for the guided, and a miserable life for those who neglect Allah’s reminder. Thus, the condition in these verses serves as an implicit command or prohibition, paired with clear worldly and otherworldly consequences.

Forms of warning and threat are frequently repeated in the Qur’an, accompanied by expressions of admonition and rational argumentation to establish truths. For example:“And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur’an and varied the warnings in it so that they may become mindful or it may evoke in them a remembrance.” (Ṭāhā: 113)

The Qur’anic threats vary remarkably depending on the nature of the people and their social contexts. For the general public—those content with superficial worldly pleasures—threats tend to focus on physical punishments, such as the torment and flames of Hell. For elites, such as leaders and dignitaries, the threats are more characterized by humiliation and disgrace (ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ḥifnī, 2002, p. 3).

Thus, the purpose of threats in Qur’anic rhetoric is to reform, awaken the mind, and influence the recipient’s thoughts and actions, ultimately leading them to submit to Allah’s commands and prohibitions.

S. Subsection Four: Expressive (Revelatory) Speech Acts

In specific contexts—such as satisfaction, anger, sadness, or success—the speaker uses expressive speech acts

to convey emotions and feelings. These are numerous and include expressions of gratitude, apology, congratulation, consolation, regret, sorrow, anger, longing, and more (Nuʿmān Būqurah, 2006, p. 197).

One such example appears in the words of the wife of ʿImrān, who expresses regret over giving birth to a female, as she had hoped for a male child. The verse says: "Then when she gave birth to her, she said: 'My Lord, I have delivered a female'—and Allah knew best what she delivered—'and the male is not like the female. And I have named her Maryam, and I seek refuge for her and her offspring with You from Satan, the accursed.'" (Āl ʿImrān: 36)

This verse conveys a mix of regret and sorrow, as she had vowed to dedicate her child exclusively to worship and service in the Sacred House, a vow traditionally reserved for male children (Ibn Kathīr, 2001, p. 555). Since religious dedication at temples was only known for males at the time, she turned to her Lord with a sorrowful tone, lamenting that her child was not the male she had hoped for to fulfill that sacred task.

Her speech takes the form of a rhythmic supplication, reflecting a deeply personal and direct conversation with God. This kind of address is a form of devotional discourse, described as one-directional communication from "I" to "You (God)" (Āminah Balʿalā, 2002, p. 94).

The emotional moment is transformed from sorrow and regret into intimate supplication and then into divine acceptance and response, as shown in the next verse:

"So her Lord accepted her graciously and caused her to grow in a good manner and placed her under the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah entered upon her in the sanctuary, he found with her provision. He said: 'O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?' She said: 'It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.'" (Āl ʿImrān: 37)

Allah accepted her vow in response to her sincerity and devotion. He placed her under the care of the prophet Zachariah, and she grew up blessed, receiving bountiful provision from Allah beyond measure.

T. Subsection Five: Declarative Speech Acts

The illocutionary purpose of declarative acts is to bring about a change in the world such that the world conforms to the content of the statement upon the successful performance of the speech act. The direction of fit in these acts can be from speech to the world or from the world to speech—i.e., a dual direction of fit. These acts do not require the sincerity condition; it is sufficient for them to be successfully performed for the match with reality to be achieved.

The success of declarative acts depends on the world changing in accordance with the statement after it is uttered. If the world comes to match the propositional content, the act is considered successful—otherwise, it is not.

There are numerous examples of declarative acts in the Qur'an. One such example is the verse: "Permission [to fight] has been granted to those who are being fought, because they were wronged." (Al-Ḥajj: 39).

Here, the illocutionary force lies in the announcement of the permissibility of Muslims engaging in combat with the polytheists—after it had been prohibited during the Meccan period. However, this permission was not yet an obligation at that stage.

As mentioned in Al-Tafsīr al-Muyassar (The Simplified Exegesis): "In the early stages, Muslims were forbidden from fighting the disbelievers and were commanded to be patient in the face of their harm. But when the persecution by the polytheists reached its peak, and the Prophet ﷺ migrated from Mecca to Medina, and Islam gained strength, Allah granted the Muslims permission to fight—due to the oppression and aggression they had suffered. And indeed, Allah is capable of granting them victory and humiliating their enemies". (Al-Tafsīr al-Muyassar, 2009, p. 337)

U. Third Section: Analysis of Speech Acts

Speech acts are composed of four types of actions:

1. The Ascriptive (or Grammatical) Act: This refers to the purely linguistic activity, indicating the production of an utterance with meaning governed by syntactic structure. It forms part of the act of saying.

2. The Referential Act: This includes the use of proper nouns, pronouns, and place names, serving to identify or refer to specific entities within the discourse.

3. The Semantic Act: This involves the use of verbs according to specific meanings, reflecting how words are semantically employed within context.

4. The Illocutionary Act: This is the act through which the type of speech act is determined—whether it is a question, command, prohibition, or another category.

V. Subsection One: The Ascriptive or Grammatical Act

The ascriptive or grammatical act is part of the overall act of saying and refers to the physical (phonetic) aspect of speech—it involves the utterance of certain words, i.e., producing sounds in specific patterns associated with a particular lexicon and aligned with its system. It is an act that leads to the production of meaning in the traditional sense, meaning the formulation of meaning and its referent (Khālid Mīlād, 2001, p. 497).

In other words, it involves producing a sequence of sounds with syntactic organization that refers to a particular concept.

The act of saying consists of three sub-acts:

1. The phonetic act: the articulation of a sequence of sounds that belong to a particular language.

2. The ascriptive/grammatical act: the arrangement of words in accordance with the syntactic rules of the language.

3. The semantic act: the use of words based on specific meanings and references. (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ḥusaynayn, n.d., p. 211).

W. Subsection Two: The Referential Act

The referential act plays a role in establishing a connection between the interlocutors (the speaker and the listener). This can be illustrated with the following examples:

Example 1: “I ask you about the location of the meeting.” Here, the sentence refers to “I” through the verb “ask you” (first-person present tense), and to “you” through the pronoun “-kum”, which points to a group of people in the external world.

Example 2: “Al-Kindī is the physician of the Arabs.” This sentence refers to Al-Kindī, a well-known proper noun, identifying a specific individual who was known as the physician of the Arabs.

Example 3: “Algeria is the land of martyrs”. The word “Algeria” refers to a specific geographical location. Thus, the referential act in speech involves assigning parts of the utterance to specific references. These referents may be pronouns, proper names, or place names.

X. Subsection Three: The Semantic Act

The semantic act involves employing verbs and expressions according to specific meanings and references. It is important to note that the three sub-acts (phonetic, syntactic, and semantic) are interconnected and occur simultaneously.

When we produce a sequence of sounds belonging to a particular language within a recognizable and conventional form, we are also performing the act intentionally—as speech is typically a voluntary act. We are capable of controlling our language use. Nevertheless, linguistic utterances carry a full set of inherent features: they are composed of a chain of sounds organized into phonological groupings, which follow syntactic and grammatical rules, and carry specific meanings.

By producing these sounds, we simultaneously engage in phonological, morphological, grammatical, and syntactic processes (Teun A. van Dijk, 2001, p. 130).

Van Dijk points out: “We understand the original speech act as a complex action consisting of multiple layers of performance, namely: the phonetic level (the act of producing sounds), the phonological level (how those sounds function), and the syntactic level (the grammatical structure of the utterance)”. (Teun A. van Dijk, 2000, p. 263).

Y. Subsection Four: The Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act is a conventional act based on social agreement and established norms. It is an act that is performed through saying something, such as asking, commanding, warning, promising, etc.

What John Searle proposed in this regard aligns closely with what his teacher, J.L. Austin, had earlier laid out. The illocutionary act is one that is realized in reality simply by being uttered—it could be a command, threat, advice, or wish, as in: "I order you," "I advise you," "I promise you..." (Maḥmūd Nukhla, 2002, p. 71).

Austin identified certain criteria that help define an illocutionary act (ʿAlī Āyit Ūshān, 2000, p. 71), which can be summarized as follows:

- The illocutionary act is performed within the speech itself; it is not a consequence that follows from speech.

- It can be interpreted and identified by using a suitable performative formula.

- It is conventional in nature and based on social norms and mutual understanding.

II. Conclusion:

The most important finding reached through this study is that the theory of speech acts is not a modern invention introduced by Austin and his followers. Rather, it is deeply rooted in the Arabic linguistic tradition, particularly in the works of scholars of usūl (principles of jurisprudence), grammar, and rhetoric. These scholars were attentive to distinguishing between declarative (informative) and non-declarative (performative) sentences, and they established criteria to ensure that speech serves its intended purpose of informing and persuading the listener.

The research in this topic has led to a number of key conclusions, the most significant of which are:

- Speech acts are actions we perform through utterances. They follow a structured and meaningful system, and through them, we accomplish acts that influence the receiver.

- In Arabic linguistic studies, the theory of speech acts is reflected in two major branches of the science of meanings (ʿIlm al-Maʿānī): the informative style (al-aslūb al-khabarī) and the performative style (al-aslūb al-inshāʾī).

- J.L. Austin is considered the founding figure of the speech act theory in Western linguistic studies. He divided speech into three types:

1. The locutionary act (the act of saying something).

2. The illocutionary act (the act performed in saying something).

3. The perlocutionary act (the act performed by saying something, i.e., its effect-.

He then classified speech acts by their function into: Assertives, Commissives, Directives, Declaratives, Expressives.

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