

The Pragmatics of Directive Discourse in Verses Indicating Public Etiquette and Social Transactions: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

This study presents a purely applied investigation of the pragmatics of Quranic verses indicating public etiquette and social transactions, with some theoretical discussion of pragmatic theory in general and speech act theory in particular. The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical approach. The findings indicate that the imperative and prohibitive forms are among the linguistic devices employed in the Holy Quran to guide people toward observing public etiquette and engaging in proper social transactions. The imperative and prohibitive forms are used in the Quran to provide believers with clear and firm instructions concerning appropriate conduct in social dealings and public morality. The imperative is employed to encourage people to perform righteous deeds and engage in proper transactions. Strong and binding expressions are used to convey commands, whereas prohibition constitutes a linguistic means of warning against and preventing improper behavior and misconduct in social dealings. Categorical and cautionary expressions are used to convey prohibitions, indicating the urgent necessity of avoiding such actions.

Keywords: Pragmatics, directive speech acts, imperative, prohibition.

1. Introduction

Various forms of guidance and warning occur in the Holy Quran, including the imperative and prohibitive forms employed in verses addressing social transactions and public morality. This linguistic approach is one of the devices through which the Quran guides people toward righteous conduct and warns them against improper behavior in their daily lives. With the growing ethical challenges and social problems facing contemporary societies, understanding the use of imperatives and prohibitions in verses dealing with social transactions has become essential. These verses provide religious and ethical guidance and establish the moral standards and values that believers should observe in their dealings with others and in their everyday lives.

One of the problems confronting researchers and interpreters is how to understand Quranic texts characterized by their directive function and how to apply their guidance in the modern era. Questions arise concerning how commands and prohibitions should be understood in the context of everyday transactions and what appropriate religious reasoning can be employed to derive ethical rules from these verses. Accordingly, this research aims to analyze the imperative

and prohibitive forms in verses addressing social transactions and to clarify their meaning and significance in building an ideal Islamic society. The study employs an approach based on analyzing Quranic texts and examining their religious interpretations in order to understand the context and content of these verses and identify the fundamental ethical principles and values that can be derived from them.

2. An Overview of Pragmatics and Speech Act Theory

Pragmatics is considered one of the most recent linguistic theories to have gained prominence in linguistic and literary studies because it approaches language as a means of investigating its uses. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines how listeners identify speakers' intentions; in other words, it studies speaker meaning. For example, when someone says, "I am thirsty," the speaker may mean, "Bring me a glass of water," rather than simply informing the listener that they are thirsty. Speakers frequently mean more than their words literally express. If this is the case, how can people understand one another?[i]

As for the linguistic meaning of the term, manifestations of the Arabic root *d-w-l* occur in several places in the Holy Quran. One example is the Almighty's saying:

"What Allah has bestowed upon His Messenger from the people of the towns belongs to Allah, the Messenger, close relatives, orphans, the needy, and the stranded traveler, so that it may not circulate exclusively among the rich among you. Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, refrain from it. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in punishment."

Surah Al-Hashr, verse 7.

Another example occurs in the Almighty's saying in Surah Aal Imran:

"If you have suffered a wound, they too have suffered a similar wound. Such days We alternate among people, so that Allah may distinguish those who believe and take martyrs from among you. And Allah does not love the wrongdoers."

Surah Aal Imran, verse 140.

The linguistic meaning of the root *d-w-l*, with its different vowel patterns, relates to what alternates or circulates for a person in terms of fortune and victory. It has also been stated that, with the *damma* vowel, the word refers to something that circulates, just as *ghurfa* denotes the thing used for scooping. With the *fatha* vowel, it is a verbal noun meaning circulation or alternation. Another interpretation is that the purpose is to prevent something from circulating exclusively among the rich, who would keep it among themselves, so that none of the poor would receive any share of it.[ii]

Speech act theory is regarded as the central pillar of pragmatic theory and has been defined as the systematic study of the relationship between signs and their interpreters. Accordingly, the speech act constitutes a fundamental focus of pragmatic linguistic studies. More precisely, the focus shifts from speech itself to its transformation into linguistic actions.

Pragmatics, as an idea, was also evident in classical works on rhetoric, legal theory, and jurisprudence. Its features can be identified in the theory of statements and performative utterances. Scholars of Islamic legal theory and jurisprudence examined this theory carefully and attentively, employing pragmatic considerations to derive religious rulings. Commands and prohibitions are among the most important topics in Islamic legal theory and jurisprudence

because they constitute the core of legislation and a fundamental component of prescriptive discourse. Religious law either requires an action to be performed or requires it to be abandoned. Knowledge of religious rulings therefore depends on understanding these two forms.

3. Pragmatic Analysis of Directives in Verses Indicating Public Etiquette and Social Transactions

First Example

The Almighty says:

“O you who believe, do not enter houses other than your own until you have sought permission and greeted their inhabitants. That is better for you, so that you may take heed.”

Surah An-Nur, verse 27.

This noble verse contains a speech act represented by the prohibitive utterance “Do not enter them.” The expression consists of a present-tense verb in the jussive mood, derived from the trilateral root *d-kh-l* (“to enter”), addressed to a masculine plural audience, with the *waw* serving as the second-person masculine plural pronoun.

In this surah, Almighty Allah specifically addresses the believers and prohibits them from entering other people’s homes without permission. These are religious manners through which Allah has instructed His believing servants. He commands them to seek permission and prohibits them from entering houses other than their own until they have obtained permission. He then explains the proper manner of seeking permission, including not standing directly in front of the door facing it. Instead, one should stand to its right or left.

An exception is made for the case in which a person knocks on the door and says, “It is me,” because “everyone identifies himself by saying ‘I’; this does not achieve the purpose of seeking permission, which is to establish familiarity, as commanded in the verse.”[iii] Such an expression remains ambiguous unless the person identifies himself by giving his name or the nickname by which he is commonly known.

Beginning the prohibition with a vocative address serves to engage the believers and listeners and encourage them to adhere to the law of the Most Merciful and observe the prohibitions contained in the address. The religious etiquette established by this verse and its implications can be explained as follows:

- **Commander:** Almighty Allah.
- **Addressees:** The believers.
- **Literal illocutionary act:** Conveying the meaning of explicit prohibition.
- **Resulting effect:** Guidance, moral instruction, and deterrence.

This speech act originates from Almighty Allah and is directed toward His believing servants. Its prohibitive form indicates guidance concerning public etiquette in social interactions and specifies the procedures and manners of seeking permission, as well as the rules governing visits.

This verse was revealed after Allah had finished warning against adultery and false accusations. He then proceeded to warn against entering houses without permission, because doing so could bring men and women into close contact and might lead to one of the two aforementioned offenses.[iv]

According to Al-Shawkani's interpretation of this verse, the prohibition conveys a sense of deterrence. Almighty Allah requires a person not to enter another person's home without first seeking permission and offering a greeting, because entering without these actions gives rise to suspicion. The verse also carries another implication: it establishes a system governing family relations and social interaction among neighbors.

This speech act, expressed through the prohibitive particle *la* followed by a present-tense verb accompanied by the plural *waw*, occurs in two other places in addition to this verse.

In Surah Yusuf, the Almighty says:

"He said, 'O my sons, do not enter through one gate, but enter through separate gates. I cannot protect you against anything decreed by Allah. Judgment belongs to Allah alone. In Him I have placed my trust, and in Him let those who trust place their trust.'"

Surah Yusuf, verse 67.

These words were spoken by Jacob, peace be upon him, to his sons when they were preparing to depart for Egypt. He prohibited them from entering Egypt through a single gate, warning them and expressing concern that they might be afflicted by the evil eye because they were handsome.[v]

In Surah Al-Ahzab, the Almighty says:

"O you who believe, do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless you are invited to a meal, without waiting for its preparation. But when you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse, without lingering for conversation. Indeed, such behavior used to cause discomfort to the Prophet, and he was shy to ask you to leave, but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when you ask his wives for something, ask them from behind a screen. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. It is not for you to cause harm to the Messenger of Allah, nor to marry his wives after him ever. Indeed, that would be a grave matter in the sight of Allah."

Surah Al-Ahzab, verse 53.

Almighty Allah begins the prohibition by addressing the believers, guiding them and clarifying the proper conduct they should observe in their relationship with the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. The reference to an invitation to a meal does not mean that entry into the Prophet's houses is permitted exclusively when someone has been invited to eat; rather, the invitation is presented as an example and is specifically mentioned for emphasis. The verse thus encompasses several forms of social etiquette, including not entering a house without permission and observing the appropriate conduct surrounding mealtimes. It therefore calls for good manners and moral discipline.

Second Example

The Almighty says:

"Establish prayer, give zakat, and obey the Messenger, so that you may receive mercy."

Surah An-Nur, verse 56.

This verse contains three speech acts represented by the utterances "Establish," "Give," and "Obey." These are commands issued by Almighty Allah and directed toward His believing servants. He directly commands them to establish prayer, give zakat, and obey the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, in his commands, prohibitions, guidance, and instructions, in the hope that they may receive mercy in both worlds.

Although this discourse was initially addressed to the Companions of the Messenger, it subsequently applies to every believing man and woman.

The first speech act, represented by the verb “Establish,” is an imperative form derived from the augmented triliteral pattern *afʿala*, based on the root *q-w-m*, and addressed to a masculine plural audience. The *waw* serves as the second-person masculine plural pronoun.

The second verb, “Give,” is also an imperative form derived from the augmented triliteral pattern *afʿala*, addressed to a masculine plural audience and derived from the root *ʿ-t-y*. The *waw* serves as the second-person masculine plural pronoun.

The third utterance, “Obey,” is likewise an imperative form derived from the augmented triliteral pattern *afʿala*, addressed to a masculine plural audience and derived from the root *t-w-ʿ*. The *waw* serves as the second-person masculine plural pronoun.

The verse begins with a command concerning physical worship, represented by prayer, followed by financial worship, represented by zakat, and then religious worship, represented by obedience to the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him. The command to obey the Messenger is repeated for emphasis, and obedience to him is specifically mentioned because obedience to him constitutes obedience to Almighty Allah. The object of obedience is not specified in order to convey a general meaning.[vi][1]

Almighty Allah also addresses obedience to those in authority in several verses. Examples, without claiming to provide an exhaustive list, include Surah Aal Imran, verse 132; Surah Al-Anfal, verse 1; and Surah Muhammad, verse 33, among others.

The command to give zakat occurs in six surahs. In Surah Al-Baqarah, it appears in verses 43, 86, 110, and 277; in Surah An-Nisa, in verses 2 and 77; in Surah Al-An'am, in verse 14; in Surah At-Tawbah, in verses 5 and 11; in Surah Al-Hajj, in verses 41, 56, and 78; and in Surah An-Nur, in verse 33, in addition to the verse under discussion. It also occurs in Surah Al-Mujadilah, verse 13, and Surah Al-Muzzammil, verse 20.

It is noteworthy that these verses associate the establishment of prayer with spending and giving from one's wealth, except in Surah Al-An'am, verse 141, and Surah An-Nisa, verses 24 and 77. Accordingly, these verses also convey a directive toward obedience and indicate that zakat is itself an act of worship through which a servant draws closer to their Lord.

The discourse, therefore, is addressed specifically to those who believe, whereas it had previously been directed to the person at the heart of the incident, as stated in the Almighty's words: “Joseph, turn away from this, and you (woman), ask forgiveness for your sin. Indeed, you were among the sinners” (Surah Yusuf, verse 29). The obedience commanded here differs from that mentioned in the following verse: “Say, ‘Obey Allah and obey the Messenger. But if you turn away, then upon him is only that [duty] with which he has been charged, and upon you is that with which you have been charged. And if you obey him, you will be guided. And there is not upon the Messenger except [the responsibility for] clear notification’” (Surah An-Nur, verse 54). The first verse calls upon those who turn away, whereas this verse calls upon the believers to increase their obedience.[i]

Third Example:

The Almighty says: “O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient person with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful” (Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 6).

The speech act in this verse arose in connection with the incident involving Al-Walid ibn Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'ayt, whom the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) sent to collect the alms from Banu al-Mustaliq. The directive in this verse is preceded by a vocative expression. The intended addressees in the expression “O you who have believed” are the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and those accompanying him. They also include Al-Walid ibn Uqbah, who believed the person informing him that Banu al-Mustaliq intended to harm him. The expression also encompasses the rulers and governors among the believers, since its purpose is to establish the principle of verifying the reports of those not known for truthfulness and probity. *Tabayyun* means the strength of clarification and is a transitive verb derived from the meaning of making something clear. It therefore means to reflect, investigate, and clarify. The object is omitted but is indicated by the expression “with information”; that is, investigate what has been brought to you, since the degree of clarification required depends on the nature of each matter.[ii]

The command to investigate constitutes a fundamental principle concerning the obligation to verify information in judicial proceedings. A judge must not follow rumours and hearsay or yield to emotions and personal inclinations. Accordingly, the meaning of *fatabayyanu* is to examine the matter and ascertain the truth. Although this verse was revealed in response to a particular incident, its application is general, and it constitutes an important fundamental rule: “Individuals, communities, and the state must not accept the reports conveyed to them or act upon their implications until they have been properly verified and clarified, for fear of harming an individual or a group without justification. [...] Adhering to the principle of verification and clarification upon hearing information from someone who is not known for complete piety, uprightness, and integrity is obligatory in order to preserve the dignity of individuals and protect their lives and property.”[iii]

Thus, although the verse was revealed in connection with an incident involving a particular individual, its application was generalised, and it became a fundamental rule governing social transactions and the etiquette that believers should observe in their dealings with one another. In this way, it serves as guidance towards noble moral conduct.

The author of *Nazm al-Durar* interpreted this discourse as originating from Allah Almighty, “drawing attention, in relation to noble moral conduct, to the necessity of abandoning negligence through reliance on reports conveyed by disobedient persons. This address is directed to everyone who acknowledges faith, by way of inference from what has preceded, and encourages recourse to reason [...] while drawing attention to the fact that the statement contained therein is of great significance and has profound implications.”[iv]

Accordingly, the speech act embodied in the utterance *fatabayyanu* (“investigate”) is an imperative verb derived from the augmented triliteral root *bayyana*, following the pattern *tafa‘‘ala*. It is addressed to a masculine plural audience and is derived from the root *b-y-n*. The *waw* is the pronoun referring to the masculine plural addressees. The verb conveys a strong directive and advisory force, as required by the context of the incident.

4. Conclusion

Through this study, the researcher has attempted to apply speech act theory to the Qur'anic text, specifically to the subject of public etiquette and social transactions. Islam has encouraged and recommended numerous forms of conduct in dealing with others in order to organise human life in all its circumstances and domains. It has prescribed rules of etiquette covering every aspect of life, including greetings, eating and drinking, standing and walking, seeking permission before entering a house, showing affection towards orphans and not rebuking them, and not harshly turning away those who ask for assistance, among other everyday interactions between people.

Accordingly, the study has reached a number of findings, including the following:

- Directive imperative constructions are numerous, amounting to approximately twenty-two instances, compared with prohibitive constructions, which number twelve. Both types appear in their direct and explicit forms.
- Most directive imperative constructions are introduced by the vocative expression “O you who have believed.” This is attributable to the intended addressees of the discourse, namely the believers. This introductory expression conveys a particularisation of the audience for purposes of direction and guidance.
- The study has demonstrated that the directive strategy plays a role in analysing linguistic structures pragmatically and interpreting them in a way that reveals the speaker's intentions and uncovers the implied meanings conveyed by these verses, in accordance with the principles of the pragmatic approach and, particularly, speech act theory, taking into account the interpretations provided by Qur'anic exegetes. The study has highlighted the directive strategy's role in shaping pragmatic meaning through speech act theory, specifically its two components: commands and prohibitions.
- The communicative intentions accomplished through performative constructions constitute pragmatic expressions that classical scholars had identified as implicit linguistic meanings. Modern pragmatics, however, has theorised these meanings within speech act theory, which involves the performance of communicative purposes aimed at producing social acts and behaviours.

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