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**Research Paper**

## The motivational language of the Holy Quran: A pragmatic analysis of promises and threats

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**Abstract:**

Studies in literary religious discourses, including recent Quranic studies, suggest that speech act theory provides the researchers with variable pragmatic tools to interpret meanings that are constructed upon the intention of the speaker. This study draws upon speech act theory (SAT) to analyse the two ubiquitous speech acts of promise and threat in the Holy Quran. Employing the speech acts of promise and threat in the Quran to the detailed analysis of felicity conditions, this study, while arguing for the compatibility of SAT to the language of Quran, concludes that the main impetus behind the speech acts of promise and threat is creating the motivation in the addressees to conduct good and avoid evil deeds; therefore, the rules and conditions that drive the illocutionary force of promise and threat perfectly align with the motivational language of the Holy Quran.

**Keywords:** Speech Act Theory, Felicity Conditions, Quran Language, Promise, Threat

### 1. Introduction

Throughout the history, religious scholars have attempted to understand, interpret and explain religious texts. The Holy Quran is the most essential text that is believed to have been revealed from the Almighty Allah to his prophet Mohammad to direct human species towards salvation. Understanding the nature of language of the religious texts, in general, and Quran, in particular, requires casting multiple perspectives towards the structure and functions of religious texts/discourse. Islamic scholars, linguists and philosophers have been proposing a number of theories that pertain to the nature of Quranic language. One such theories subscribes to the view that Allah uses canonical human language to communicate with humans; a language which is intelligible to the followers and is resonant with human innateness. The most communicative function of the language of the holy is motivational. The motivational aspect of the Quran language is especially significant as it is an important force in directing the followers towards the ultimate goal of conducting good and avoiding evil deeds. Therefore, among a variety of methods and strategies to speak to the (potential) followers and believers, the motivational language stands out in the Quran.

This study employs Speech Act Theory as a pragmatic theory proposed by John Austin and John Searle. It drew upon this theory so as to explain the motivational aspect of the Quranic language to unpack the linguistic-pragmatic features and discursial prowess of Quranic language. The language of Quran is a form of literary text, which is a kind of communicative act, with both constative and performative propositions. As such, speech act theory has been found "extremely valuable in analysing literary texts" (Botha, 2007, p. 281). Drawing upon speech act theory, scholars have advocated its profound contribution and adaptability to religious texts. This is mainly because it provides analysts with workable theoretico-analytical toolkit to ponder upon the intention and meaning as well as interpretations of literary/religious texts (Botha, 2007; Briggs, 2001). This study argues that the motivational language of the Quran is reflected in the ubiquitous speech acts of promise and threat. Using Quranic verses as data, it sheds some light on the pragmatics of the Quran by exploring its motivational function through the analysis of promise and threat speech acts.

While the study of Quranic grammar and meaning dates back to early days of revelation, recent studies adopt pragmatic theories to shed new lights on the meaning and social functions of the Quran (Al-Khatib, 2012; Tajabadi and

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Poormohammad, 2022). From pragmatics perspective, previous studies have investigated different aspects of the Quranic language through the lens of speech act theory. However, previous studies have rendered the Quranic verses into the general classification of speech acts. In general, the motivational aspect of the Quranic language has not been the subject of prior research, and in particular, the two speech acts of promise and threat has rarely been scrutinized from the speech act theory perspective. From the side of speech act theory, most studies have focused on human-human communication, and less has attempted to accommodate the theory in the religious texts (Botha, 2007), including the language of Quran. This study contributes to the literature on the speech acts in the religious texts and discourse by exploring the speech acts of promise and threat (waʔd o waʔeed), which are among the most frequent speech acts in the Quran. In the rest of this paper, first the theory of speech acts is elaborated. Then, selected verses of the Quran are analysed drawing upon speech act theory. Finally, the conclusion is posited that speech act analysis can significantly contribute to the interpretation of the Holy Quran, and in particular, to Allah's intention of creating motivation among human beings to accomplish good and to avoid evil deeds.

## 2. Theoretical background and related literature: Speech act theory

Speech act theory (SAT) has its roots in Philosophy. It was developed and pioneered by two philosophers who were cynical of the truth conditional theories of semantics. Instead, the two philosophers, Austin and Searle observed ordinary language users and found out that language is used by ordinary people to perform an action, or simply put, to do things. Austin presented his ideas in the William James Lectures at Harvard University. SAT emphasizes the effects of different kinds of utterances in conversation and speech as well as the performative aspect of language use (Botha, 2007). SAT also provides a substantial contribution to the overall theory of meaning, logic and philosophy. Within linguistics, speech acts found its niche in Pragmatics, an approach to meaning that takes context of use into account, and hence advances the study of meaning beyond the borders of semantics.

The concept of speech act, therefore, represents the idea that every linguistic utterance lies at the bedrock of certain action that is performed by a speaker. Examples of action in this sense include but not limited to apology, request, refusal, invitation, promising, threatening, informing, begging, congratulating, etc. For example, by saying 'I'm sorry', we are not simply and solely expressing sorrow, but we are performing an 'apology' (Izadi and Zilaie, 2015). According to Searle (1969), a speech act comprises of three aspects, which require their analysis from different levels of pragmatic angles: the locutionary aspect, which is the linguistic realization of a speech act, the illocutionary aspect, which is the underlying action that is being performed by the speaker, and the perlocutionary act, that represents the effects of the utterance on the addressee. For example, the locutionary act of 'I'm sorry', said to someone who has been the target of an offense by a speaker, carries the illocutionary act or the illocutionary force of an 'apology'. If it leads to the acceptance of the apology by the offended addressee, the speech act is said to have a perlocutionary effect.

Speech acts can be viewed from different angles: One can investigate them in terms of level of directness. Every language provides its users with a variety of linguistic (grammatical, semantic, prosodic) choices to perform a speech act. These linguistic choices are termed Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs). Speakers choose to communicate their intended message to their interlocutors directly, indirectly or implicitly. Each choice, of course, invokes a set of contextual stipulations and the type of socio-relational parameters of language use. The most direct speech acts are the ones with a 'performative verb' that corresponds with the illocutionary force of the utterance, as in 'I apologize', if used to express apology. Blum-Kulka (1987, p. 133) argues that the distinction between direct, indirect and implicit speech acts can be assumed in terms of the illocutionary transparency of the act. For example, when we use an interrogative sentence to seek information (i.e., ask questions), the illocutionary force of our interrogatively formatted utterance is transparent, but when we use the same format to request for something, it is less transparent, as we may be inferred as asking questions, due to the language users' experience that interrogative sentence also applies for asking questions (Izadi, 2014). In case of implicit acts, we make the inference, understanding, and interpretation of our utterances more obfuscated for the addressee by just giving some hints and not clearly using a grammatical format or lexical choices that clearly associate with the intended speech act. In other words, the correspondence between IFID of the speech act and its intended meaning (illocutionary force) is fuzzy. This is termed as 'implicature' in pragmatics; meaning is communicated by what is implied rather than by what is explicitly stated. As such, implicit acts require higher efforts from the side of listener to interpret meaning and are more susceptible to variability in interpretations compared with indirect and direct speech acts.

Searle (1969) refines Austin's original classification of illocutions and provides the following taxonomy of illocution categories (cf. also, Pratt, 1977).

- **Representatives** – here the speaker asserts a proposition to be true, using such verbs as: affirm, believe, conclude, deny, report.
- **Directives** – here the speaker tries to make the hearer do something, with such words as: ask, beg, challenge, command, dare, invite, insist, request.
- **Commissives** – here the speaker commits him/herself to a (future) course of action, with verbs such as: guarantee, pledge, promise, swear, vow, undertake.
- **Expressives** – the speaker expresses an attitude to or about a state of affairs, using such verbs as: apologize,



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appreciate, congratulate, deplore, detest, regret, thank, welcome.

- **Declarations** – the speaker alters the external status or condition of an object or situation, solely by making the utterance: I now pronounce you man and wife, I sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you be dead, I name this ship...

Austin and Searle also set some conditions for the speech acts to become effective or to become *felicitous* in their terms. These felicity conditions provide necessary bases for the contextual environments that facilitates the effective communication of the speech acts. The felicity conditions include preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, essential conditions and for some speech acts, conditions of execution. These conditions pertain to two basic premises in the SAT that all speech is rule-governed behaviour and intension is central communication (Searle, 1969). Felicity conditions form part of the knowledge which speakers of a language assume to be in force in their verbal utterances and on which they rely in order to use the language correctly; both in producing and understanding utterance. Preparatory conditions deal with the speaker's appropriate position with regard to the speech act, their possession of relevant authority, the proper time and location of the delivery of speech acts and so on. Sincerity conditions mandates that the speaker has true intension about his/her propositions and is serious about them. For some speech acts, speakers need to execute the acts with some gestural and non-linguistic elements in order that their act result in perlocutionary effect. The felicity conditions of promises and threats are further elaborated in the analysis section.

### 3. Review of promise and threat (al-wa?d o al-wa?eed) in the Quran

Among various types of speech that could represent Allah's rhetorical dexterities of speaking to the believers and disbelievers of the religion, promises and threats are selected for the detailed pragmatic analysis in this paper. The two speech acts of promise and threat fall within the category of commissive speech acts. As indicated above, commissive speech acts or commissives, in short, represent a category of speech acts by which speakers commit themselves to perform a course of action in the future (Searle, 1969). Commissives are considered performatives in contrast with constatives. However, there is a pivotal difference between promise and threat, although they both index the speaker's commitment to a future action. In the promise, the speaker commits him/herself to an action which benefits the addressee, while in threats, the speaker commits him/herself to perform an action which is to the detriment of the addressee. Therefore, the two speech acts form a binary opposition in terms of their benefactive dimension. Given this difference in the benefactive aspect, promise has a motivational force but threat has a demotivational and preventive force. Promise creates hope and threat create fear. Previous research proposes that the grammatical structure of promise and threat is of four types: direct, evasive, satirical, and conditional (Saidi, et al., 2014).

The literature on promise and threat in religious texts and specifically in the Quran is scarce. According to Tajabadi and Poormohammad (2022), while the language of Quran constitutes a variety of purposive communicative genres, Allah speaks to the followers either directly (without mediation of the prophet) by addressing them explicitly, i.e., through vocatives, or implicitly (without vocatives) or indirectly (through mediation of the prophet). In the latter, Allah does not directly engage with speaking with the believers or disbelievers but assigns prophet Mohammad<sup>PBUH</sup> to convey his message to the audience.

Previous research has identified 1828 verses to denote and implicate promises and threats, most of which are issued by Allah (Tajabadi and Poormohammad, 2022). The high distributional frequency as such indicates that promises and threats play a significant role in motivating the believers to do good and avoid evil deeds. Promise and threat are denoted in the Quran language by the cognate words of wa?d and wa?eed, both derived from the root verb `wa?ada`. According to the taxonomy of speech acts, they belong to the category of commissives, that are considered performatives in contrast with constatives. In the case of al-wa?d (promise), the speaker (Allah) commits itself to an action that is to the benefit of the addressee (believers or followers). This is while when it comes to wa?eed (threat), The speaker commits itself to undertaking certain actions that may cause some sorts of hazard and menace to the addressee. According to al-Ragheb Isfahani (1991), al-wa?d has also been used to refer to deleterious promises in the Quran. This mandates a more in-depth analysis of meaning of verses taking into account both the co-text and the context of the Quranic verses. AS the literature shows, there is lack of research on the detailed analysis of the speech acts of promise and threat in light of the felicity conditions that Searle proposes for the two speech acts. In other words, there remains a question how the conditions that undergo a speech act of promise and threat can explain the Quranic promises and threats. In the following, we provide a detailed analysis of the conditions and rules of realizations of promise and threat based on the nine felicity conditions proposed by Searle (1969).

### 4. Data and methodology

This study follows a qualitative analysis of Quranic verses which have been purposefully selected out of huge number of verses presented in both imperative and narrative forms (Al-Khatib, 2012). In the first step, the researcher read the text back-to-back to select the verses that include the two speech acts under investigation. In the second step, the researcher investigated how the nine felicity conditions of promise and threat would match the Quranic promises and threats. The data comprise 1828 speech acts of promise and threat.

### 5. Analysis: Quranic promises and threats from the lens of felicity conditions of speech act

In "how to promise: a complicated way", Searle states the basic principle of making promise as follows: "Given that a



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speaker *S* utters a sentence *T* in the presence of a hearer *H*, then, in the literal utterance of *T*, *S* sincerely and non-defectively promises that *p* to *H* if and only if the following conditions 1--9 obtain". The analyses of the representative Quranic verses are geared towards the nine conditions that Searle sets forth as felicity conditions of promise. These principles are also extendable and applicable to threats.

**5.1. The obtainment of normal input and output conditions**

The terms input and output refer to “the large and indefinite range of conditions under which any kind of serious and literal linguistic communication is possible” (Searle, 1967, p. 57). Therefore, input and output cover the intelligibility and mutual understanding of the code used for communication. Searle also stipulates that those speakers and hearer must know how to speak the language, must be conscious about it, and must not suffer from any physical impediments (e. g., deafness) that may hamper communication. Similarly, the communication must be a serious mode and not in a situation such as telling jokes and acting in a play.

Allah uses human language to speak to humans. The specific code he has chosen in Arabic, which is intelligible to both his prophet and the potential followers. However, as the Quran is a religious text that is revealed to the prophet for the salvation of human being in general, it is not limited to specific time and place. Therefore, the language of Quran is either learned by its followers or translated for them. Regarding the second dimension of normal input-output condition, Allah lucidly states that the Quran is serious and whatever it states is hard and fast. Therefore, it is not satirical text: “Surely, this Quran is a decisive word and it is not to be taken lightly” (Q<sup>1</sup>: 86:13-14)<sup>2</sup>. The Holy Quran also expresses the mood of the addressees after the perception of Allah’s promises in the following verse: “And say, Glory be to our Lord! Surely the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled” (Q: 17:108)<sup>3</sup>.

**5.2. S expresses the proposition that pins the utterance of T**

This condition has a distinguishing power: it provides a base for distinguishing the speech act of promise from the other speech acts: Searle also calls this condition the propositional content (1969, p. 57). To understand this condition better, we need to return to the three aspects of speech acts mentioned earlier: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Locutionary act is the very utterance that is expressed, realized and has conventional meaning: It consists of prosodic, lexical and grammatical signifiers of language. Locutionary acts correspond with an underlying signified meaning, which is illocutionary act. Simply put, to mean a promise, a speaker has to deliver an utterance that proposes a specific meaning, through its constituent linguistic elements. The word *al-wa’d* is the linguistic signifier of a promise or threat in the Quranic language. The locutionary act is the prerequisite and the necessary condition for the illocutionary act. The propositions entailing Allah’s promises and threats as reflected in the Quran are of two types: conditional and absolute (cf. also Tajabadi and Poormohammad, 2022). Allah’s promises and threats are contingent upon certain acts, deeds and beliefs of the followers or the target of the commitment. We call this restrictive promises and threats propositional conditional. Allah pays commitment to the general and specified addressees (followers, human kind, believers) but restricts His commitment to certain conditions to be met by the addressees: “O believers! If you are mindful of Allah, He will grant you a standard (to distinguish between right and wrong), absolve you of your sins, and forgive you. And Allah is the Lord of infinite bounty” (Q: 8:29)<sup>4</sup>. In this verse, Allah first addresses the believers and then specifies a condition for the realization of His promise, using the canonical condition conjunction of Arabic language (*?en*): Allah will only commit to His promise of granting the believers the power of distinguishing right from wrong, of absolving their sins and of forgiving them provided that the condition of being mindful of Allah is met by them.

In another type of promises and threats, which we call it addressee conditional, Allah first specifies the addressees of the speech and then make an unconditional promise or threat. In this type of promises and threats, one is the target of the speech act of promise if they already belong to or decide to belong to the group of addressees addressed in the verse using the vocative.

“Allah has promised those who have believed among you and done righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] on the earth just as He granted it to those before them, and that He will indeed establish for them [therein] their religion which He has preferred for them, and that He will undoubtedly substitute for them, after their fear, security, [because] they worship Me without associating anything with Me. Those who refuse to believe after that are brazenly disobedient” (Q. 24:55)<sup>5</sup>

In this type of promise, the propositional content of promise is not conditional, but to be illegible to benefit from the blessings stipulated in the promise, one needs to have faith in Allah and to do good deeds. In fact, the two conditions of faith and good deeds always apply to Allah’s promises (Mohadesi, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Q stands for Quran and 86 is the ordinal number of the Surah in the Quran

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ  
 وَيَقُولُونَ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنْ كَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّنَا لَمَفْعُولًا  
 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ  
 وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي ارْتَضَى لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدِّلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ خَوْفِهِمْ أَمْنًا يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ه ه



**5.3. In expressing that p, S predicates a future act A of S**

Searle writes: “in the case of promising the scope of the illocutionary force indicating device includes certain features of the proposition. In a promise an act must be predicated of the speaker and it cannot be a past act” (1969, p. 57). In English, at least, the future tense is used for promises, because promises involve commitments that will realize in the future. One cannot promise to have done something. Also, the promise becomes felicitous if the acts indicated in the propositional content will be accomplished by the speaker of the promise. One cannot promise that someone else will do something. Act here refers to any future action that the speaker commits to perform or not to perform and may also include states and conditions. As mentioned earlier, the Quran uses canonical Arabic language to speak to the followers and believers. In Arabic, a future tense is linguistically realized both through the prefixes of `sa` and `sofa`, and through present tense. Therefore, Quranic promises and threats are linguistically realized through future and present tense. Also, past verbal sentences are used to refer to the timelessness and eternity of Allah’s promises and threats (see footnote 4 above):

“As for those who believe and do good, we will admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there for ever and ever. There they will have pure spouses, and We will place them under a vast shade” (Q: 4:57)<sup>1</sup>.

**5.4. H would prefer S’ s doing A to his not doing A, and S believes H would prefer his doing A to his not doing A**

Searle writes “one crucial distinction between promises on the one hand and threats on the other is that a promise is a pledge to do something for you, not to you; but a threat is a pledge to do something to you, not for you. A promise is defective if the thing promised is something the promisee does not want done; and it is further defective if the promisor does not believe the promisee wants it done, since a non-defective promise must be intended as a promise and not as a threat or warning” (1969, p. 87). Therefore, the point of difference between promise and threat lies in the benefactive aspect of speech act. In most promises of the Holy Quran, the promised is the Paradise with all the concomitant blessings. In threat, on the contrary, the threat is the Hell, with all the concomitant punishments. The Paradise and the Hell are elaborately and eloquently described in the Quran to exert the maximum effect on the addressee: to create two opposite feelings of hope and fear, attached to the motivation to perform good deeds and the demotivation to commit evil deeds. These acts are well accommodated to the intrinsic nature of human being *vis-à-vis* his eternal desires, on one hand, and fears and aversions, on the other: “The description of the Paradise promised to the righteous is that in it are rivers of fresh water, rivers of milk that never changes in taste, rivers of wine delicious to drink, and rivers of pure honey. There they will also have all kinds of fruit...” (Q: 47:15).<sup>2</sup> This is while in case of threat, the Holy Quran says: “when shackles will be around their necks and chains (on their legs). They will be dragged (Q: 40:71)<sup>3</sup>, and through boiling water, then burned in the Fire (as fuel)” (Q: 40:72)<sup>4</sup>. As these verses indicate, what is promised is something the hearer wants done and the speaker (in this case Allah) is fully aware and knows that this is the case (Searle, 1969).

**5.5. It is not obvious to both S and H that S will do A in the normal course of events**

This condition is an instance of a general condition on many different kinds of illocutionary acts to the effect that the act must have a point. Searle (1969, p. 59) calls this and the previous condition (condition 4) *preparatory conditions*, since they are necessary for happy promising. Searle writes:

“It is out of order for me to promise to do something that it is obvious to all concerned that I am going to do anyhow. If I do make such a promise, the only way my audience can interpret my utterance is to assume that I believe that it is not obvious that I am going to do the thing promised” (1969, p. 59).

In the Quran, the principal function of promise and threat speech acts is to engender fear and hope in the addressee that subsequently leads to abandoning evil deeds and performing righteous, religiously optimal and humane deeds: “We fear from our Lord a horribly distressful Day” (Q: 76: 10)<sup>5</sup>, or for promise, the Holy Quran states: “Surely those who have believed, emigrated, and struggled in the Way of Allah—they can hope for Allah’s mercy. And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (Q: 2: 218)<sup>6</sup>. In the Quran, promises and threats are often collocated with (ethically) optimal and prohibited deeds and accompanied by other linguistic and rhetorical strategies that provoke fear and hope in the addressees (the believers) and maximizes the impact of speech acts. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, promises are often conditional upon the believers’ compliance with the divine injunctions and their success in passing the divine examination. Note the following two verses, which clearly emphasize these points: “So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it” (Q: 99:7&8)<sup>7</sup>:

وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا لَهُمْ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِطْرَةٌ وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا زَيْتًا بَاطِنًا وَسَيُؤْتُونَ فِيهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَاتٍ أُخْرَى سَيُحِبُّونَ فِيهَا مَقْعَدًا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (سورة البقرة ٥٧)  
 مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ (محمد ١٥)  
 إِذِ الْأَغْلَالُ فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ وَالسَّلْسَلُ يُسْحَبُونَ (غافر ٧١)  
 فِي الْحَمِيمِ ثُمَّ فِي النَّارِ يُسْجَرُونَ (غافر ٧٢)  
 إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا غَمًسًا قَمَطِرٌ يَرِي (انسان ١٠)  
 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (بقره ٢١٨)  
 فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ (٧) وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ (٨) (زلزال)

“Do you think you will be admitted into Paradise without being tested like those before you? They were afflicted with suffering and adversity and were so (violently) shaken that (even) the Messenger and the believers with him cried out, ‘When will Allah’s help come?’ Indeed, Allah’s help is (always) near” (Q: 2: 214)<sup>1</sup>.

**5.6. S intends to do A**

This rule-condition deals with sincerity. In order for any speech act to come to any perlocutionary effect, it must fulfil the condition of sincerity. As Searle puts it, “the distinction between sincere and insincere promises is that, in the case of sincere promises, the speaker intends to do the act promised; in the case of insincere promises, he does not intend to do the act” (1969, p. 60). Sincerity also involves some element of possibility, that is, that speaker must truly believe that he has the power of fulfilling the promised act (or refraining from doing it). The discourse of the holy Quran is replete with the rhetorical features that emphasize Allah’s intension and sincerity towards His promises and threats. One such emphatic markers is Allah’s delivery of oath, realized in the oath marker `wa` (Fakhr Meybodi, 2004), as in the following verses: In heaven is your sustenance and whatever you are promised. Then by the Lord of heaven and earth! (All) this is certainly as true as (the fact that) you can speak! (Q: 51: 22&23)<sup>2</sup>. Here, Allah takes an oath that His promise of paradise and its blessings, represented in the previous verse, is certainly true. He then provides an analogy for the truth of the paradise by comparing it with something very obvious, unquestionable and undoubtable, namely, the fact that people speak. As for the possibility aspect of sincerity condition, throughout the Quran, Allah focuses on His absolute power, using the attributes of Almighty and Omnipotent (*qadeer*). As the creator of the whole universe, He has the absolute control and dominance over it: “Surely Allah is most capable of everything” (Q: 2: 20)<sup>3</sup>. All these indicate that Allah’s promises and threats are sincere and Allah is the perfect position to fulfil His promises and threats.

**5.7. S intends that the utterance of T will place him under an obligation to do A**

This is again an essential condition for promise (and threat), according to Searle (1969, p.60). A promise will create an obligation for the speaker to undertake to perform certain actions in the future. Seale posits:

“I think that this condition distinguishes promises (and other members of the same family such as vows) from other kinds of illocutionary acts. Notice that in the statement of the condition, we only specify the speaker's intention; further conditions will make clear how that intention is realized” (1969, p. 61).

Searle continues “if a speaker can demonstrate that he did not have this intention in a given utterance he can prove that the utterance was not a promise” (1969, p. 61).

In short, this essential condition denotes that the speaker of the promise and threat truly and sincerely accepts the obligation implicated in his acts: Such sincere intension is interpretable in Allah’s promises and the meta-pragmatic phrases that emphasize the truth, righteousness, and veracity of Allah’s will in fulfilling His promises and threats. Allah communicates His serious intension intertwined with His Power of the operationalization of His speech acts with a variety of rhetorical strategies to exert the utmost influence on the believers and to create the strongest motivation in them to do good and avoid evil deeds:

“To Him is your return all together. Allah’s promise is (always) true. Indeed, He originates the creation then resurrects it so that He may justly reward those who believe and do good. But those who disbelieve will have a boiling drink and a painful punishment for their disbelief” (Q: 10: 4)<sup>4</sup>.

The emphasis in the clause *wa?dallahi haqqan*<sup>5</sup> (Allah’s promise is always true) is grammatically indexed in the Standard Arabic language by the elliptic Cognate Object (*wa?dan*), substituted by the adjective *haqqan* (true), to emphasize and intensify the verb (*wa?da*) (Alquraishi, 2020). The word *haqq* in Islamic scholarship has the connotation of resurrection which is a principle behind the creation of the Universe. The creation is never complete without the resurrection, which provides absolute rationale for the righteousness of the divine promises and threats. The second part of the above-mentioned verse (He may justly reward those who believe and do good) indicates Allah’s promise of treating humanity with justice in the resurrection, which implicates His commitment to the promise of paradise and its blessings for the believers and the threat of punishment for the disbelievers.

Yet in another verse, Allah explicitly foregrounds His true intension of committing to His promises and threats and His capability to perform them, drawing upon emphatic repetition as a discourse strategy: “On that Day We will roll up the heavens like a scroll of writings. Just as We produced the first creation, (so) shall We reproduce it. That is a

<sup>1</sup> أَمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنْ تُدْخَلُوا الْجَنَّةَ وَلَمَّا يَأْتِكُمْ مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ خَلَوْا مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ مَسْتَهْتُمُ الْبَاسَاءَ وَالضَّرَّاءَ وَرُزِلُوا حَتَّى يَقُولَ الرَّسُولُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ مَتَى نَصُرُ اللَّهُ أَأَلَا إِنَّ نَصْرَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ (بقره ٢١٤)  
<sup>2</sup> أَوْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ رِزْقَكُمْ وَمَا تُوَعْدُونَ فَرِيبَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّهُ لَحَقٌّ مِثْلَ مَا أَنَّكُمْ تَنْطِفُونَ (ذاريات ٥١ و ٥٢)  
<sup>3</sup> إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (بقره ٢٠)  
<sup>4</sup> إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ حَقًّا إِنَّهُ يَبْدُوا الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ بِالْقِسْطِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ (يونس ٤)  
<sup>5</sup> وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ حَقًّا



promise binding on Us. We truly uphold (Our promises)” (Q: 21:104)<sup>1</sup>. There are myriads of instances of emphatic markers that denote Allah’s definite will and true intension of fulfilling His promises and threats throughout the Holy Quran (Q: 25: 6; Q: 9: 68, 72; Q: 10: 4).

**5.8. S intends (i- I) to produce in H the knowledge (K) that the utterance of T is to count as placing S under an obligation to do A. S intends to produce K fry means of the recognition of i- I, and he intends i-1 to be recognized in virtue of (by means of) H's knowledge of the meaning of T**

This condition complements the previous condition in that not only the speaker must mean his utterance, but he is also responsible to convey this intension to the addressee of his message so that the message would be acceptable for them. Searle states this as following: “The speaker intends to produce a certain illocutionary effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect, and he also intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that the meaning of the item he utters conventionally associates it with producing that effect. In this case the speaker assumes that the semantic rules (which determine the meaning) of the expressions uttered are such that the utterance counts the undertaking of an obligation”. (Searle, 1969, p. 60)

Adequate evidence has so far been presented in relation to Allah’s quality of intention in the previous sections. The punchline of this condition pertains to the accountability of the speaker to make their promises and threats believable. This is clearly reflected in Allah’s ubiquitous propositions that His promises are true and right, with various evidential and emphatic linguistic indices. One can mention the very use of the verb “*wa?ada*” as a performative verb and its nominalization (*wa?d*) with a bunch of rhetorical devices with emphatic function (taking an oath, analogy, cognate object, etc), accompanied by adverbs of certainty. Three examples are in order: “Surely Allah’s promise is (always) true” (Q: 10: 55)<sup>2</sup>. “Surely His promise will be fulfilled” (Q: 19: 61)<sup>3</sup>. “Surely the promise of our Lord has been fulfilled” (Q: 17: 108)<sup>4</sup>.

**5. 9. The semantic rules of the dialect spoken by S and H are such that T is correctly and sincerely uttered if and only if conditions 1-8 obtain**

This condition is intended to make clear that the sentence uttered is one which, by the semantical rules of the language, is used to make a promise. The meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meaning of its elements, both lexical and syntactical. This condition is already attended in the discussion of the locutionary act: It is obvious in the grammatical and lexical structure of the Quran that Allah uses the canonical and conventional resources of Arabic language to realize His promises and threats, namely the use of future tense markers and the cognates of the lexical root ‘*wa?ada*’ Allah does this task even emphatically by a variety of linguistic and rhetorical methods: 1) clear nominal reference to Himself and delivering the speech acts in third person point of view as in “Allah has promised those who have believed among you... (footnote 4), or the use of first-person plural pronouns and verbs as in “We will admit them into Gardens...” (footnote 5). 2) metapragmatic or metalinguistic reference to those promises and threats to remind and emphasize His true intention (footnote 18), using the canonical emphatic markers of Arabic language (e.g., *inna*)<sup>5</sup>. 3) His meta-linguistic reference to Arabic language as the eloquent language: whereas this (Quran) is (in) eloquent Arabic (Q: 16: 103)<sup>6</sup>.

**6. Conclusion**

This study renders the Quranic verses representing Allah’s promises and threats into speech act analysis. Searlean approach to speech act with the nine conditions and rules for their realization is adopted to interpret the Divine Promises and Threats in the Holy Quran. The nine conditions do not bear the same value for Searle, as he states: “I am construing condition 1 broadly enough so that together with the other conditions it guarantees that H understands the utterance” (1969, p. 61). However, the nine conditions guarantee a successful communication of speech acts, in general, and the two speech acts under investigation in this study. Searlean intentionist approach provides a fruitful analytical interpretive tool to interpret speaker and writer’s intention as central artifact of communicative meaning. SAT provides a complex of necessary but conventional rules and conditions to perform effective speech acts, and the careful analysis of speech acts through the lens of such conditions would pave the way through the cognitive path towards the sources of meaning.

Allah is the omniscient speaker in the Holy Quran. He adopts human language to speak to homo sapiens, and the specific language He uses is the Arabic language: SAT is also applicable to the language of Quran, providing tools to equally focus on the co-text and context of the linguistic messages in the Quran. As for promises and threats, our

أَيُّومَ نَطْوِي السَّمَاءَ كَطَيِّ السِّجِّ لِلْكُتُبِ كَمَا بَدَأْنَا أَوَّلَ خَلْقٍ نُعِيدُهُ وَعَدَّا عَلَيْهَا إِنَّا كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ (انبیاء ۱۰۴)  
 إِلَّا إِنْ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ حَقًّا (یونس ۵۵)  
 إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَأْتِيًّا (مریم ۶۱)  
 رَبَّنَا إِنْ كُنَّا وَعَدُّ رَبِّنَا لَمَفْعُولًا (اسراء ۱۰۸)  
 إِنَّ  
 وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ (نحل)



analyses reveal that the felicity conditions of speech acts also apply to the promises and threats in the Holy Quran. The locutionary act, which is the mere linguistic wordings of the act, conventionally gives rise to their underlying meaning. This meaning, termed as illocutionary act, is context-dependent, and must fulfil certain conditions to produce the intended effect on the hearer, which is termed as perlocutionary effect.

Our study provides evidence from the Quranic verses that the rules and conditions Searle sets forth for the felicitous performance of promises and threats apply to the language Allah uses to speak to the followers. Allah uses the canonical resources of Arabic language as locutionary acts, to perform the illocutionary acts of promise and threat. Allah eloquently exercises the two acts to exert the maximum impact of the addresses. Such impact, or the perlocutionary effect, encompasses two oppositional feelings of fear and hope, which in turn, lead to the motivation to perform good deeds and to avoid committing sins that lead to Allah's punishment. We argue that the motivational goal is pursued through Quranic promises and threats, which among various other rhetorical and linguistic devices, are instrumental in evoking the senses of fear and hope; two psychological driving forces of doing good and refraining from evil.

We suggest further studies be conducted on the pragmatics of the Holy Quran, drawing upon speech act theory. The motivational language of Quran is not merely reflected in promises and threat: Future research might explore what other speech acts in the Quran are at the service of motivational function or even more generally, they might show how the language of the Quran maps onto pragmatic theories.

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