

A Pragmatic Analysis of Patience in the Holy Quran

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Submission date: 12/10/2025

Acceptance date: 27/10/2025

Publication date: 26 / 11/2025

Abstract

In this paper, the concept of patience in the Holy Quran is examined on a pragmatic basis meaning how the different speech acts of directives, commissives, expresses, representatives and declaratives influence how believers perceive and practice patience. Basing on the theory of speech act by Searle, and classical Islamic exegesis, the paper will examine important verses in the Quran in order to show how the text, in addition to teaching about patience, actually embodies the message of the necessity of showing patience by its commands, promises, and statements of divine support. The results show that patience is introduced as a moral necessity of persevering in hardships as well as a source of spiritual and social development. Through the study of language as used in the Quran to instruct, inspire and comfort the believers, this study points out patience as a dynamic virtue, which goes beyond merely enduring, and eventually cementing faith, bonding communities, and gives hope of divine reward.

Keywords: Patience, Quran, speech act theory, Islamic discourse, commissive, expressive

دراسة تداولية لمفهوم الصبر في القرآن الكريم

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المديرية العامة لتربية القادسية / العراق

المستخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة مفهوم الصبر في القرآن الكريم من منظور تداولي، مركزة على الكيفية التي تسهم بها الأفعال الكلامية من توجيهيات، وإلزامات، وتعبيريات، وتمثيلات، وتصريحات - في تشكيل فهم المؤمنين للصبر وممارسته. وانطلاقاً من نظرية أفعال الكلام لسيرل، ومن التفسيرات الإسلامية الكلاسيكية، تحلل الدراسة آيات قرآنية مختارة لتبين أن النص القرآني لا يقتصر على بيان قيمة الصبر، بل يقوم أيضاً بفعلها وتفعيل أهميتها عبر الأوامر، والوعود، والتقريرات الداعمة من الله تعالى. وتشير النتائج إلى تقديم الصبر بوصفه واجباً أخلاقياً لتحمل الابتلاءات، وطريقاً للنمو الروحي والجماعي. وعبر استكشاف أساليب الخطاب القرآني في التوجيه والتحفيز والتسلية للمؤمنين، تبرز الدراسة الصبر فضيلة دينامية تتجاوز مجرد الاحتمال السلبي، لتغدو عاملاً في تعزيز الإيمان، وتقوية الروابط المجتمعية، وبت الأمل في نيل الثواب الإلهي.

الكلمات الدالة: الصبر، القرآن الكريم، نظرية أفعال الكلام، الخطاب الإسلامي، الإلزاميات، التعبيريات.

1. Introduction

One of the most common virtues as referred in the holy Quran is patience (Arabic: ṣabr). In Islamic perception of the world, patience is a moral obligation and spiritual discipline. It itself, as a concept, is found in a spectrum of situations, both on an individual level of struggle and on a larger level of faith in God (Arabic: tawakkul), gratitude (Arabic: shukr), and endurance in prayer. The Quran, revered by Muslims as the direct word of God (Allah), addresses humans in various rhetorical and pragmatic styles to convey ethical and theological teachings [1];[2].

Despite the considerable attention that classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship has given to the importance of patience, few studies have systematically addressed the pragmatic dimensions by which patience is communicated and enacted. Pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, examines how context shapes meaning and how language functions in real communicative settings[3]. To apply pragmatic tools-such as speech act theory and implicature-to Quranic discourse, this study uncovers the ways in which the text not only describes patience but also performs a wide range of communicative functions to encourage, command, promise, and console believers with respect to patience.

This paper starts with a background of historical and conceptual background of the issue of patience in the Islamic thought and locates the discussion in the field of pragmatics. It subsequently gives a comprehensive methodology, how the relevant verses of the Quran were chosen and analyzed. By examining some of the most important verses, the paper will show the practical roles that define how the believers comprehend the concept of patience. Lastly, there is a discussion and conclusion that summarizes these findings and gives future directions of the research on Quranic pragmatics.

1.1 Patience as an Islamic Virtue

Patience is among the virtues that are highly stressed in Islamic spirituality and jurisprudence. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya [4] divides patience into various types, including patience to submit to the command of God, patience to avoid committing sin, and patience to be patient during the ordeal of life. The Holy Quran commands followers to have patience in the course of their faith which is commonly accompanied with rewards both in the present life and in the afterlife.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatics and Religious Discourse

According to Levinson (1983), pragmatics does not only look at the literal meaning of an utterance, but focuses on the construction of meaning in context[3]. The context is particularly rich in the religious literature the historical background, theology, and communal practices interact with language forms. Religious scholars often note that sacred texts make use of a very diverse set of speech acts: commands, prohibitions, promises, praise and condemnation to instruct the faithful[5].

Regarding the Quran, Johnstone(2007) believes that the rhetorical structure, which involves direct guidance to the believers, use of parables and juridical injunctions, is unique, and thus, it is worth a closer examination of how the forms contribute to the development of spiritual and social behavior[5]. According to Rippin (2012), traditional exegesis (Arabic: tafsir) has a tendency to think in theological and historical terms, but

seldom uses modern pragmatic systems in a systematic way[2]. Therefore, the speech act analysis of the Quran can provide new insights into the way of how the divine communication directly and active interacts with and educates the audience.

2.2 Patience in the Islamic Tradition

In the literature that addresses the subject of patience (ranging between classical exegesis to modern scholarly works), it can be argued that the main attention was directed toward the theological and ethical meaning of patience[4]. At this point, patience is commended as a way of elevation into spirituality, forgiveness of sins, and harmonious coexistence in the society[6]. Recent researchers such as Ahmad(2020) and Yusof (2019) are starting to understand the rhetorical and linguistic techniques, repetition, parallelism, and emphatic constructions, to emphasize the value of patience[7],[8].

Nevertheless, a more systematic understanding of the pragmatic measures that the Quran uses to promote the message of patience is relatively rare.

This is the gap that offers the motivation toward the current study. Through investigating the method of delivering divine commands, warnings, consolations, and promises through the contextualization and interpretation of the Quran, the research will emphasize the various ways that the Quran teaches believers to be patient.

2.3 Searle's classification of speech acts

J. L. Austin developed his original work on the performative utterances, which was further pursued by John R. Searle who provided a systematization of the way in which language not merely describes reality but also performs it[9],[10]. Searle uses five primary categories of speech acts in Speech Acts (1969) and Expression and Meaning (1979). Representatives (assertion of belief or truth), directives (attempts to influence the actions of the hearer), commissives (commitments to future actions), expressives (disclosures of internal state of the speaker) and declaratives (statements that construct or modify social/institutional reality by being uttered). This classification offers adequate guidelines upon which speakers use language to carry out different functions, other than merely passing information.

Although it is clear, the classification provided by Searle has had its finesse improved and criticized over time. A model suggested by Bach and Harnish(1979) took into consideration the mutual understanding of intentions and followed the principles suggested by Searle to explain more complicated interactions [11]. The difference in the realisation of speech acts has also been illustrated by cross-cultural studies like the ones conducted by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain(1984) on the topic of requests and apologies in which the realisation of these speech acts may vary considerably across languages and cultures[12]. Nevertheless, the taxonomy of Searle still remains a gold standard in pragmatics so that scholars can analyze how speech is used by people to act in order to negotiate their social world.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design that is followed in this study is a qualitative research design based on discourse analysis and centered on speech act theory[10].The analysis of some

selected verses in the Quran that stress the importance of being patient reveals the role played by various speech acts to teach, inspire, or reassert the ethical position of patience.

3.2 Data Collection

Verses were identified through a concordance-based search for the root ṣ-b-r (صبر) and its derivatives (e.g., تصبروا, صابرين). These searches yielded numerous verses across multiple surahs. To balance depth and breadth, the study selected representative verses based on three criteria. First, relevance in which Verses where patience is the central or explicit focus. Second, Frequency in Scholarship, that is, Verses frequently cited in classical tafsīr and modern studies. Third, Contextual Diversity refers to Verses drawn from both Meccan and Medinan periods, covering various thematic contexts (personal trial, communal conflict, worship, etc.).

3.3 Analytical Framework

This study adopts pragmatic analysis according to the theory of speech act of Searle (1979) such as classification into directive, commissive, expressive, representative, and declarative speech acts. Moreover, Implicature according to Grice (1975) sheds light about the implied meanings that emerge from context. Contextualization, incorporation of historical backdrop, theological commentary, and relevant Hadith (prophetic traditions) to interpret each verse's pragmatic force.

The analysis proceeded by reading each verse in Arabic, consulting at least two classical tafsīrs (e.g., Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī) and one modern translation. Notes on speech act classification, direct and implied meanings, and contextual factors were recorded, allowing for thematic and comparative analysis across the verses.

The current study adopts Searle (1979) theory of speech acts as adopted model for data analysis.

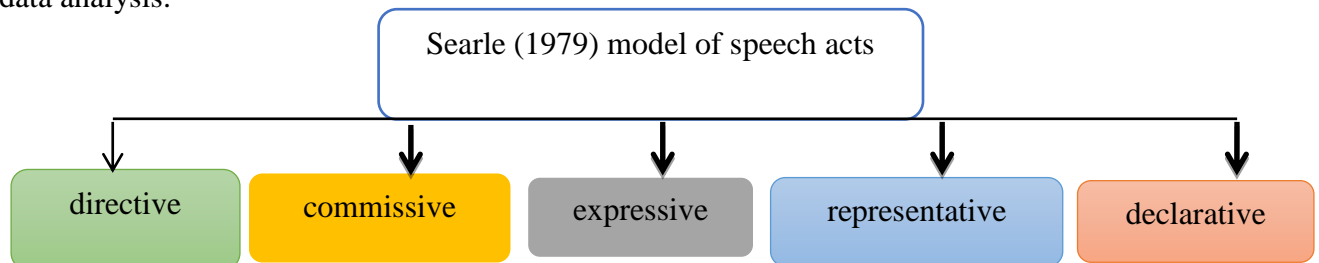


Figure 3.1 Searle's (1979) theory of speech acts [adopted from Searle (1979)]

4. Data Analysis

قال تعالى: (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ) (سورة البقرة : ١٥٣)

"O you who believe, seek help through patience and prayer; indeed, Allah is with the patient."

Contextual analysis of Text 1:

Surah Al-Baqarah is widely recognized as a **Medinan surah**, revealed after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) migrated from Mecca to Medina [6]. During this period, the Muslim community was establishing social, legal, and spiritual norms in a new environment. The challenges they faced included external hostility from adversarial groups (e.g., certain factions among the Quraysh, some Jewish tribes in Medina), as well as internal tests of faith as the community grew and integrated diverse populations.

Pragmatic Analysis of text 1:

Directive speech acts are used to control or guide the action of the addressee. In this verse in the Quran, O ye who believe, pray and be patient, Allah is with the patient indeed.- The word *asstaeen* (seek help) is the imperative form of the verb. The verse specifically advises the believers to request them to help them by being patient and praying. This type of imperative is emphasized in the direct address of O you who believe, which makes this a group religious duty. This is not an empty suggestion, it is supported by the power of God. It is interpreted by the recipients as a command to be patient and praying in taking in the challenges of life.

Pragmatically, even that patience is a precondition of spiritual support and success is implicated in the verse. According to the classical exegetes, the concept of being patient and praying is something that shows that there are two aspects of internal (emotional) and external (ritual) devotion [6]. The directive speech here therefore fulfills an instructive as well as cohesive role, which holds the believers together through the same practices.

The term *إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ*, in English, innocently translated means indeed, Allah is with the patient. It does or provides a change of status to those who are patient: they have now a special order of divine fellowship and assistance. This announcement of a transformative reality is known in Islamic theology: religious individuals who are patient are granted to a greater extent of divine presence.

The illocutionary force of this Verse in the Quran is that it defines the identity of the patients and their spiritual condition. By saying this, God does the act of bestowing his company and, as such, transforms the existential position of the believer (no longer a matter of ordinary faith but one that is gifted with the closeness of God).

قال تعالى: (مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ ۖ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ) (سورة النحل: ٩٦)

“What you have will end, but what is with Allah endures. And We will certainly grant those who are patient their reward according to the best of what they used to do.”

Contextual analysis of Text 2:

Surah an Nahl (16) is mostly a Meccan revelation, that speaks about a community that is under persecution and economic strife [4]. In this verse, the Quran makes it clear how temporary earthly riches are, when compared to the eternal reward provided by God- What you have will end. This admonition to patient (*ṣabr*) reminded the faithful that heavenly reward is among the greatest benefits in life than temporal material wealth. Classical exegetes such as Al-Tabari also focus on how such verses not only comfort oppressed Muslims but also admonish them to persevere, to remember that we should only be successful in what will endure and therefore our souls, but not material things [13].

Pragmatic Analysis of text 2:

The initial section of this verse, “مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ” *“What you have will end, but what is with Allah endures”* is a representative speech act. It claims a truth of the world and the divine reality. This is a quote that explains how human things are impermanent and opposed to the permanence of those things that belong to God. The

illocutionary force in this case is to re-orient the priorities of the believer- to take the focus out of the here and now material gains and focus on the here and now spiritual gain. Being representative, it serves to form the views of the listener concerning what indeed matters and encourages them to concentrate on the afterlife as opposed to the short-term material benefits.

The second line of the verse, “وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ” *“And We will certainly grant those who are patient their reward according to the best of what they used to do.”*, is a bright illustration of a commissive speech act. In this case, Allah, the divine speaker, is promising a reward of those who practice patience. The emphatic form employed, which is وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّ (We will surely reward) exudes a dedication and determination that the reward is assured. Divine promises are believed to be entirely dependable in the Islamic theology, and hence this act of commissiveness holds very heavy weight. Pragmatically, it can be used to encourage the faithful not to give up during the hardships, and their patience will be rewarded by the best measure of all.

Though the verse does not elaborate on an expressive act and it has a hidden expressive aspect. The verse represents Godly acceptance and recognition of this virtue by determining the patient as the recipients of a better reward. Such an indirect praise as a speech act is a form of expressive speech, but it does so in a subtle fashion- it is an emotive support and confirmation of the effort needed to be patient under such challenging situations.

قال تعالى: (يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ) (سورة آل عمران: ٢٠٠)

“O you who believe, be patient, and urge each other to patience, and remain steadfast, and fear Allah so that you may succeed.”

Contextual analysis of Text 3:

This verse, the Surah Al Imran, was revealed in Medina, probably, following the Battle of Uhud, when the Muslim community required the power and support. The verse is also an ending call to the believers where she tells them to be patient, to be supportive of each other in patience, to be steadfast and to be afraid of Allah. These four commands create a structure of spiritual and community strength. Other scholars such as Ibn Kathir clarify that this verse does not only seek to stress the perseverance of individuals but also group perseverance and discipline. These virtues are directly related to the worldly and eternal victory with the promise of success at the end.

Pragmatic Analysis of text 3:

This verse primarily uses directive speech acts as they can be analyzed through the speech act framework that was put forward by John Searle (1979). It has four imperatives- اصْبِرُوا “be patient,” وَصَابِرُوا “urge one another to patience,” وَرَابِطُوا “remain steadfast,” and وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ “fear Allah”, to guide the way the believers conduct themselves. Because the verse includes the reference to *O you that believe*, the verse is spoken to the whole Muslim world, and emphasis is made on moral and spiritual discipline during the time of hardship. Each of these commands is, though, directed differently towards the same object, perseverance and unity: personal endurance (be patient), social support (urge one another to patience), vigilance or preparedness (remain steadfast), and constant obedience (fear Allah).

The verse ends with the statement “so that you may succeed”. This resolution is a representative act of speech that claims that success is the direct result of the adherence to the previous commands. Instead of plainly having a promise of such a reward, the verse only refers to a common fact: the road to success is to learn to be patient, to help one another, to be steady, to be conscious of God. Therefore, no commissive (promising) and expressive (emotional statement) elements are clearly expressed in the verse, yet it still offers motivation and strengthening, as the actions of the believers are associated with a favorable result.

To sum up, this verse shows how Quran employs the directive speech acts in inculcating moral and spiritual strength in the community and a representative speech expresses the cause and effect relationship between obedience and success. This practical way does not only teach and encourage the faithful to be steadfast in faith and practice but it also guarantees that with patience and unity, they can be able to attain the real prosperity, in this life and in the Hereafter.

قال تعالى: (إِنَّمَا يُوفَى الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ) (سورة الزمر: ١٠)

“Indeed, those who are patient will be given their reward without measure.”

Contextual analysis of Text 4:

Generally, Surah Az-Zumar is regarded as a Meccan surah, which dealt with the central motives of tawhidi (as the One God), true worship and the opposite destiny of the faithful and faithless at the Hereafter. The verse under discussion, can be found in a text which urges believers not to forsake God because of persecution or suffering. The immediate context reminds Muslims that earthly world is vast and that the success of an individual is found in keeping faith which may involve migration or withstanding tribulations[4].

Indeed, “Indeed, those who are patient will be given their reward without measure”, in this context it is a great comfort. Classical commentators including Al-Tabari bring out that patience in this context involves perseverance through faith, resistance against sin and endurance in adversity. The verse will be encouraging and inspiring because the boundless nature of the reward is highlighted, and the believers will know that the reward that God will get is much beyond the sacrifice they make in His name.

Pragmatic Analysis of text 4:

The main speech act in this verse is commissive. A commissive is a promise to the speaker that he will do something in the future; in this instance, the words of God show that He is going to reward those who persevere. Although the verse consists of a mere affirmation of fact, it has a promise behind it: those who are patient will be rewarded without measure. Therefore, in an Islamic view, the Divine Speaker is issuing a binding statement concerning his future action, which is eternal rewards in case of faith, which was not compromised. The divine warrant becomes enormous in terms of illocutionary power attributing the words of god absolute reliability in the Islamic tradition[4].

Besides having the commissive side, the verse can also be interpreted as representative with a theological truth of the divine economy of reward- that patience always results in untold recompense. Being presented as a verifiable assertion within the Islamic

conceptual framework, it enlightens believers of something spiritual: that no matter how hard life may get, they should persevere in all circumstances since God is boundless in his mercy. There are no explicit directive elements in the verse (there is no explicit command given) and there is no display of emotional or psychological state in an expressive sense. Neither is it a declarative, since it does not implement a new social or legal status by being proclaimed. Rather, it offers the promise of reward in the future (commissive) and refers to the fact of patience and divine justice (representative), which is eloquently inspiring the early Muslim nation-powerfully urging all believers to be resolute in thought and action.

قال تعالى: (وَمَا يُقَالُهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُقَالُهَا إِلَّا لَئِذَا حُظِّ عَظِيمٍ) (سورة فصلت: ٣٥)

“But this cannot be attained except by those who are patient and who are truly fortunate.”

Contextual analysis of Text 5:

Surah Fussilat is a surah of Meccan origin, which underlines the importance of the morally responsible attitude, the oneness of God, and the virtues which people should possess to survive in the opposition. This verse of the Quran immediately follows the invitation in verse 34 to repel evil with good, to instruct that the good deeds used in response to hostility with goodness can be granted only to the really patient, and to those who possess a special portion of the divine favor (a great portion of good). Within the historical context, the early Muslims in Mecca were being persecuted and pressured by the society, thus this verse gave a sense of comfort as well as a moral challenge, by not retaliating by causing harm, they transformed their relationship with their adversary as well as uplift their own spiritual condition.

Pragmatic Analysis of text 5:

In this Quranic Verse *“But none will be granted it except those who are patient, and none will be granted it except one who has a great portion (of good),”* there is a referring to the noble act of repelling evil with good mentioned in the previous verse 34. From a speech act perspective using John Searle’s classification, this verse primarily functions as a **representative** speech act, describing a reality about who can truly act with such moral excellence: only those who exhibit deep patience and are blessed with divine favor. There is no direct directive (such as “do this!”), no explicit commissive (no promise of reward stated here), and no overt expressive in the form of praise or thanks.

However, the verse subtly encourages believers to cultivate patience, hinting at an implied directive-since it elevates patient people as uniquely capable of this high moral standard-and carries a subtle expressive undertone by emphasizing the virtue of patience. Finally, it is not a declarative, because it does not create a new legal or social status simply by being uttered. Instead, it represents a truth about spiritual growth and character, highlighting that to repay harm with kindness requires both steadfastness and a special measure of God’s grace.

5.Conclusion

This paper has examined the Holy Quran concept of patience in a pragmatic perspective utilizing the speech act theory of Searle. The results demonstrate that the Quranic language does not only describe patience, it actually does it in different ways using different speech acts like commands, promises, and truths. Directive acts challenge believers to be patient and persevering whereas commissive acts portray a promise of reward to the perseverers by God. Representative acts assert the spiritual and moral worth of patience, and it is the role of these acts to make believers concentrate on the eternal part of life without conflicting with the temporary aspects. Essentially, it is the Quran, which addresses patience as a practical virtue, which empower faith and society. The Quran instructs, inspires, and comforts with its practical approach to the word, making the ability to endure an action of internet are, as well as a moral and a devotional practice.

CONFLICT OF IN TERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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