

Speech Act of Vow in Quranic Discourse

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Abstract: *This paper has tackled a very important topic pragmatics which is speech act of vows in the holy Quran. In this paper the researcher has proved that the vow is a speech act that accomplishes the three levels of any speech act by analyzing some verses of the holy Quran which are frank vows. The research consists of two parts. The theoretical part which provides an introduction about the meaning of speech act, levels, types, and while various examples from Holly Qur'an will be discussed in the second part to prove that the Speech Act of Vow in Quranic Discourse is a true. It ends with a conclusion which sums up the main findings of the research.*

Keywords: Speech act, illocutionary, perlocutionary, locutionary, vow

Research Questions

- 1- Is the vow a speech act?
- 2- Does the vow have the locutionary, illocutionary act and the perlocutionary acts?
- 3- Is it possible to vow something with the locutionary act (stating the vow in a specific structure)?

1.Part One

1.1 Introduction

This brief paper will try to prove that the vow is a speech act that follows the three levels of any speech act, (locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act).It will not take vow in general but it will rather focus on the verses of vows that are stated in the Holly Quran. Those verse will be analyzed linguistically to prove that the vows in them are pure strong speech acts. This research will try to answer the research questions.

1.2 Speech Act

Speech act theory is established firstly by Austen in1962 and then published by his students. This theory means that sometimes we don't speak only to communicate something but to perform an act, this kind of speech is performed by certain verbs called performative verbs such as warn, threat, promise forgive, declare order, ask.... etc.

- 1 *I saw a snake in the garden.*
- 2 *Don't enter into the garden, there is a snake there.*

Sentence (1) is a statement states a piece of information but sentence (2) is a direct warning asking to not to enter into the garden, sentence (2) expresses a direct speech act and the hearer responses according to that act.

1.3 Levels of Speech Act.

Any speech act must be performed by three levels: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. If any of these three levels is missing, the speech act will not be convened. Firstly, locutionary act is the correct grammatical utterance (written or spoken), any wrong ungrammatical sentence doesn't actually have a locutionary act. Secondly illocutionary act is the intention of the speaker to perform something, without that

intention, there will be a pragmatic failure. Thirdly perlocutionary act is the response of the hearer or reader to that speech act, also there is no reaction or response, it is not actually a speech act (Leech 1983: 198).

- 3 *I promise you to come.*

In example (3) we can see the three acts of the speech act of promise, saying the sentence in this form constructing the locutionary act, the intention of the speaker to give a promise is the illocutionary act, the reaction of accepting or binding that promise between these two people is the perlocutionary act (Quirk et al, 1987:804).

1.4 Types of Speech Act

Any speech act can be stated directly or indirectly. The direct speech act means that the form of a sentence is equivalent to its discourse function such as an order is performed by an imperative sentence.

- 4 *Be quiet*
- 5 *Keep calm.*

In the couple of examples above, they are imperative sentences and their function is to imply an order. On the other hand, when the form of a sentence is different from its discourse function, see the following example:

- 6 *The weather is a little bit cold outside.*

This sentence is a statement in form but is a request in function. The speaker asks somebody to close the door or the window indirectly by using such a sentence.

2.Part Two

2.1 Speech act of vows

First of all, let's define the notion "vow". It could be defined as a commitment that a person confines himself to

do it after a promise between him and God. The vow should be obligatorily fulfilled when the person vows to do something if his wish or a matter is accomplished and his wish is actually accomplished according to the religious beliefs. (Al Fahdawi 2010, P. 60).

The vow means the intention to do a kind of warship or work as a promise between the person and his God, and if he doesn't do it, it will be a sin so the person commits himself to perform the vow, see the example a man vows the following:

7 *I vow my next son to be a priest.*

The vow (7) means that if the next baby of the speaker is baby boy (male). He will make him a priest in the church, if he doesn't do that, he will be punished by Allah of not obeying his vow according to his religious belief. As it is mentioned in (1.1) any speech performs the three acts (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary) it is called a speech act (Ibid:61).

Concerning vows, the paper will try to prove that the vow is a speech act. According to Al Sistani (2001, P:445) the vow convenes only when a person exerts a locutionary act (a specific expression) and an illocutionary act (the intention to do that vow). In the Islamic rules, the vow must be expressed by a specific expression including the Name of Allah, this is the locutionary act of the vow; see example (8)

8 *I vow to donate hundred dinars for the sake of Allah.*

The above structure is one of the structures of vows. It is not enough to have the intention or the illocutionary act to vow something as the vow will not be convened without the locutionary act. There are some conditions for the person who wants to vow something, he should be adult, have the choice to vow something and have the intention or the illocutionary act to vow something (AL Kho'ee, 1989, P:318).

Let's take some examples to show the locutionary and illocutionary acts.

9 *I vow to pray the night prayer for Allah.*

10 *I vow to fast one day for Allah.*

In (9) and (10) the person expresses the vow by using a specific structure includes the name of Allah, this is the locutionary act, the intention to perform these actions or vows (praying and fasting) is the illocutionary act of the vows. If any of the two acts is missing, the vow will not be convened, the person should have the intention to vow something and he should say it according to a specific expression includes the name of Allah. In this case the vow accomplishes the two acts of a speech act (locutionary and illocutionary) (Al Sistani, 2001, P:445).

The perlocutionary act of the vow is the achievement of vow after the thing that the person vows for is done, for example:

11 *If the patient gets better, I will pray for Allah.*

After vowing, the patient might get better, if this happens, the person who vows must fulfill his vow or he will be punished and he would undertake the consequences of not obeying this vow. In the Islamic culture, not accomplishing the vow is just like not accomplishing the oath or promise, i.e. it is a shameful thing to break the promise of the vow and the person should face the consequence of not performing his vow.

2.2 Vows in the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an states some situations in which a prophet or one of his relative's vow something to bond them to do something if Allah has given something they asked. The statement of these situations means that stating a vow is so familiar in the ancient nations, Arabs and non-Arabs.

There are certain verses in the Holy Qur'an express a frank explicit vow. If these vows maintain the three acts of a speech act, they are definitely speech act. The first verse is 270 n Surat Al Baqara which states the vow.

12 *وما انفقتم من نفقة او نذرتم من نذر فان الله به عليم*

And whatever ye spend in charity or devotion, be sure Allah knows it all. But the wrong-doers have no helpers. (Ali, 2001:)

This verse means that if you spend something voluntarily or vow something, Allah knows your intention (your locutionary act) very well whether you spend or vow that thing for the sake of Allah or for somebody else. So this is the value of the vow that if you make a promise with full intention to spend or do something for Allah, it will be a must to achieve that vow or you will be condemned by Allah (AL Qurtuby, 1935).

The second verse in the Holy Qur'an is the verse (35) in Surat AAl- Imran.

13 *اِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ رَبِّ اِنِّي نَذَرْتُ لَكَ مَا فِي بَطْنِي مُحَرَّرًا فَتَقَبَّلْ مِنِّي اِنَّكَ اَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ (35) وَوَضَعْتُهَا اُنْثَىٰ وَاللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ بِمَا وَضَعْتَ وَلَيْسَ الذَّكَرُ كَالْاُنْثَىٰ وَاِنِّي سَمَّيْتُهَا مَرْيَمَ وَاِنِّي اَعِيذُهَا بِكَ وَذَرَيْتَهَا مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ (36)*

Behold! a woman of 'Imran said: "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: So accept this of me: For Thou hearest and knowest all things." (36) (Ali, 2001:)

Al Razi (1968) in his explication of the Holy Qur'an says that Imran's wife was an old futile woman, so she vows that if Allah gave her a baby son, she would make him or assign him a priest and keep him away from the temptations of life. The locutionary act of this vow is so clear (the verse), the illocutionary act of this vow is Imran's wife's intention to make her son a priest in the church for the sake of Allah only. When she gave birth her baby, it was a girl, at first the mother was very disappointed because she couldn't fulfill her vow as the baby is a girl not a boy so the girl couldn't be a priest in

future. In spite of that she insisted to fulfill her vow and decided to make her daughter a nun in the church and she said " I seek refuge of her and her decedents from Satan". So in this way she performed her vow (the perlocutionary act). It is important to mention that vowed nun is the mother of the prophet Jesus.

The same meaning of the verse (35) of Surat Al Imran is explained by Al Tabrasy (V2 P:226-228) as he said that Allah inspired Imran that he will give him a baby son, that son will be a prophet to Israel nation. Imran's wife was futile and vows that if Allah gave her a baby son, she would make him a priest in the church and she would not ask him or use him to serve her or the family. When she delivered her baby, it was a baby girl, because of that Imran's wife felt very sorry as the girl would not be like the son in the church as she would not be clean all the time because of the womanly monthly periods and the men are better than women in churches. Despite that, she insisted to achieve her vow and she made the girl as a nun in the church, in this way Imran's wife accomplishes the three acts of her vow. It is essential to mention that the pure nungirl is Mariam, Jesus's mother so the inspiration of Allah to Imran is definitely accomplished.

The third verse which expresses a vow is the verse (26) of Surat Mariam.

14 فَكَلِمِي وَأَشْرِبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا أَفَبِمَا تَرَيْنَ مِنَ النَّبِيِّ أَحَدًا فَعُودِي آيَتِي
نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أَكَلِمَ النَّيْمَ إِنْسِيًّا (26)

"So eat and drink and cool [thine] eye. And if thou dost see any man, say, 'I have vowed a fast to [Allah] Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into not talk with any human being'" (26) (Ali, 2001:)

In this verse the vow was ordered by Allah to Mariam. She vowed that she would fast of speaking and never talk to anybody. There are two opinions about the vow statement, either Mariam stated her vow by using the sign language or she stated her vow verbally and then she fasted of speaking. Whatever the way is, Mariam achieved the three act of the speech act of vow, the locutionary act of the vow (verbally stated vow or stated by the sign language), the illocutionary act which s Mariam's intention to fast, and the perlocutionary act which is the act of fasting (Al Tabrasy V6 :320).

2.3 Events of Vows before Islam and in Islam

As it is mentioned above Allah stated the vow of Imran's wife and the vow of Mariam herself, Allah's speech to Ibrahim ordering him to tell the pilgrims to fulfill their vows, so definitely all these evidences prove that vow is there before Islam. Several events of vows happened before Islam, Abd Al Mutalib, because of what Khuraish did to him when he was digging the well Zamzam, vowed to slaughter one of his sons if had been given ten sons, when his sons became ten, he decided to accomplish his vow, he made a lottery and it was Abdullah, Khuraish prevented him to do that and advised him to consult a witch to tell him what to do, she told him to slaughter some camels as a ransom and they were hundred camels.

We can see the insistence of accomplishing the vow because it is a direct speech act to do something and it is shameful to leave it even if it was his son (Al Fahdawi 2010, P:62-63).

Another event of vow is that when Abdul Mutalib's wife Nafeela lost her baby son, she vowed to cover Al ka'aba with brocade if she found her son, and she did cover Alka'ba when she found her son, and it was the first time for Al Ka'aba to be covered with brocade. (Ibid:63).

In the Islamic era there are so many events of vows that cannot be mentioned here but we will mention some of them, Ibin Abbas said that Saeed bin Abbada came to the Messenger Mohammed (p.b.u.h.) and asked him about a vow his mother made and she died before accomplishing it, the messenger told him to fulfill it for the sake of his mother. Bin Abbas also said that a man came to the Messenger (p.b.u.h.) and told him that his sister vowed to do Al Haj and she died before doing that vow, the messenger (p.b.u.h.) told him to do Al Haj for the sake of her. Finally, Maymuna said that her father asked the messenger (p.b.u.h.) that he vowed to slaughter a camel, the messenger enquires if it is for an idol, he said " no" so the prophet (p.b.u.h.) said that she could fulfill his vow (Ibid).

3. Conclusions

At the end of this paper, we can conclude that the vow (Al Nither) is a highly strong speech act that fulfills the three forces of the speech act (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts).

It is very strong speech act because we have seen that the vow can't be neglected or left, it is a must to be accomplished. Let's not forget that the vow will not be convened unless it is stated in a specific structure (locutionary act) with the intention to do that vow. If Allah gave the person's asked, that person would accomplish the vow. We also have seen that some people vowed something but they died before accomplishing their vows, their ancestors asked prophet Mohammed (p.b.u.h) what to do. The prophet told him to accomplish the vow instead of their relatives. So we can simply say that the vow is a speech act and as strong as the marriage vow or the promise.

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