



PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES IN QUR'ĀN

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the pragmatic roles of interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān — particularly rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions — through a linguopragmatic lens. Interrogatives in Qur'ānic discourse perform functions beyond information-seeking, including exhortation, rebuke, and cognitive engagement of the addressee. Drawing on speech-act theory and previous Qur'ānic research, this paper examines how interrogatives shape meaning and interaction in the Qur'ānic text, supported by contextual examples.

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān, as the central sacred text of Islam, represents a highly sophisticated form of Arabic discourse in which linguistic structure and communicative intention are inseparably intertwined. Among its numerous stylistic and rhetorical features, interrogative sentences occupy a particularly prominent position. These interrogatives are not limited to the grammatical function of seeking information; rather, they frequently operate as powerful pragmatic instruments that guide interpretation, stimulate reflection, and reinforce theological argumentation. From a linguopragmatic perspective, Qur'ānic interrogatives constitute speech acts whose illocutionary force often exceeds their surface syntactic form.

In classical Arabic rhetoric (balāgha), interrogatives (al-istifhām) are traditionally classified not only as genuine requests for information but also as rhetorical devices employed for rebuke (taubīkh), denial (inkār), affirmation (taqrīr), amazement (ta'ajjub), threat (tahdīd), and exhortation (ḥaḍḍ) (Abdel Haleem, 1992; Sells, 1999). Thus, the Qur'ānic interrogative form frequently encodes implied meanings that are contextually recoverable by the addressee. For example, the particle *hal* may introduce a question whose pragmatic function is confirmatory rather than inquisitive, while *a-* (the interrogative hamza) may intensify confrontation or disbelief within polemical passages. Such multifunctionality makes Qur'ānic



interrogatives an ideal subject for linguopragmatic analysis.

From the standpoint of modern pragmatics, interrogatives are analyzed in terms of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), implicature (Grice, 1975), and discourse interaction. Austin's distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts is particularly relevant: a Qur'ānic question may be formally interrogative (locution), function as a warning or reproach (illocution), and produce fear, reflection, or persuasion in the audience (perlocution). Therefore, examining interrogatives in the Qur'ān requires moving beyond syntactic classification toward an integrated approach that considers communicative intent, contextual presuppositions, and audience reception.

Scholarly attention to Qur'ānic interrogatives has been evident both in classical exegesis (e.g., al-Zamakhsharī's rhetorical interpretations) and in contemporary linguistic studies. Modern researchers such as Abdel Haleem (1992) and Maatoq (2022) emphasize that rhetorical questioning in the Qur'ān serves argumentative and persuasive purposes, often compelling the listener to arrive at a predetermined conclusion through cognitive engagement rather than direct assertion. This strategy reflects what Neuwirth (2010) describes as the dialogical and performative character of Qur'ānic discourse, where divine speech interacts dynamically with its implied audience.

Despite these contributions, a systematic linguopragmatic categorization of interrogative functions in the Qur'ān remains underdeveloped.

Many studies focus either on rhetorical analysis within the framework of balāgha or on isolated pragmatic observations without integrating both traditions. Consequently, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis that synthesizes classical Arabic rhetorical theory with modern pragmatic models in order to clarify how interrogatives function simultaneously as grammatical structures and communicative acts.

By situating Qur'ānic interrogatives at the intersection of classical rhetoric and contemporary linguistics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how interrogative structures shape meaning and influence the interpretive experience of the reader or listener.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive and interpretive research design, grounded in linguopragmatic analysis. Since the objective is to examine the functional and communicative roles of interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān, the research does not rely on statistical quantification alone but instead focuses on contextual interpretation, discourse analysis, and pragmatic categorization. The approach integrates classical Arabic rhetorical analysis with modern pragmatic theory in order to provide a multidimensional interpretation of Qur'ānic interrogatives.

The study is theoretical-analytical in nature and is based on textual examination of selected Qur'ānic verses that contain explicit interrogative constructions.

3. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is grounded in two complementary traditions:



Classical Arabic Rhetoric (Balāgha)

In classical rhetoric, interrogatives (al-istifhām) are divided into two principal types:

Real interrogatives (ḥaqīqī) – seeking genuine information;

Rhetorical interrogatives (majāzī) – expressing secondary meanings such as denial (inkār), rebuke (taubīkh), affirmation (taqrīr), amazement (taʿajjub), or threat (tahdīd).

Works such as al-Zamakhsharī's al-Kashshāf and al-Jurjānī's rhetorical theory provide the classical interpretive background for understanding how interrogatives function stylistically within Qurʾānic discourse.

According to speech act theory, interrogatives may perform indirect speech acts. For example, a question may function as:

An assertion ("Is there any doubt about Allah?" → There is no doubt)

A warning ("Where are you going?" → You are heading toward misguidance)

A reproach ("What deceived you?" → Nothing justifies your negligence)

Thus, the illocutionary force is determined not by syntactic form alone but by contextual presuppositions and communicative intention.

Interpretations from authoritative exegetes (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr) were consulted to determine traditional rhetorical classification.

Each interrogative was classified according to its illocutionary force:

- Confirmatory
- Reproachful
- Argumentative
- Exhortative
- Threatening
- Reflective

Functional Interpretation

The perlocutionary effects (intended audience impact) were inferred from discourse context.

RESULTS

The qualitative analysis of selected Qurʾānic verses demonstrates that interrogative sentences function as complex communicative acts whose pragmatic force frequently transcends their grammatical structure. While formally marked as questions, most interrogatives in the Qurʾān perform indirect speech acts, serving theological, persuasive, emotive, and argumentative purposes. The results of the study are organized according to dominant linguopragmatic functions identified in the data.

Confirmatory (Taqrīrī) interrogatives

Confirmatory interrogatives are among the most frequent in the Qurʾān. These questions presuppose the truth of a proposition and invite the addressee to acknowledge it. Their illocutionary force is assertive rather than inquisitive.

Example 1: "Is not Allah the Most Just of judges?" (Q 95:8)

Grammatically, this verse is a yes/no interrogative introduced by the interrogative hamza. Pragmatically, however, it functions as an emphatic assertion. The structure presupposes agreement and leaves no room for denial. The question invites cognitive assent and reinforces divine authority.

From a speech-act perspective, this interrogative performs an indirect assertive act. Its perlocutionary effect is to strengthen conviction and internal affirmation within the audience.



Example 2: “Have We not expanded for you your breast?” (Q 94:1)

This interrogative recalls a known divine favor. It does not seek information but reminds the Prophet (peace be upon him) of divine support. Pragmatically, it functions as reassurance and encouragement. The expected response is acknowledgment rather than verbal reply.

Reproachful and rebuking interrogatives (Taubikh / Inkār)

Another prominent category involves interrogatives expressing blame, denial, or moral reproach. These questions are directed toward disbelievers or negligent individuals and carry strong emotive force.

Example 3: “What has deceived you concerning your Lord, the Most Generous?” (Q 82:6)

Here, the interrogative pronoun mā introduces a question whose literal form suggests inquiry. Pragmatically, however, the verse expresses astonishment and reproach. It implies that no justification exists for human ingratitude.

The illocutionary force corresponds to a directive-cum-expressive speech act, combining blame with moral awakening. The perlocutionary goal is repentance and reflection.

Example 4: “So where are you going?” (Q 81:26)

This interrogative challenges misguided behavior. Rather than requesting geographical information, it questions existential direction and moral orientation. It serves as a rhetorical challenge aimed at redirecting thought and action.

Argumentative and logical interrogatives

Interrogatives frequently appear in theological argumentation, especially in discussions about monotheism (tawhīd). In such cases, the question format guides the audience toward an inevitable logical conclusion.

Example 5: “Is there any creator other than Allah?” (Q 35:3)

The particle hal introduces a polar interrogative. Pragmatically, it functions as a logical negation. The verse asserts monotheism indirectly by presenting a question whose only rational answer is “No.”

This structure exemplifies what pragmatics identifies as a rhetorical question functioning as a negative assertion. The interrogative format intensifies persuasion because the audience participates cognitively in deriving the conclusion.

Example 6: “Is there any doubt about Allah?” (Q 14:10)

This concise interrogative is highly argumentative. It presupposes the irrationality of doubt and challenges skepticism. The brevity enhances rhetorical force, demonstrating how minimal structure can produce maximal pragmatic impact.

Reflective and contemplative interrogatives

A significant number of interrogatives invite reflection on natural phenomena, creation, and human existence. These questions stimulate cognitive engagement and theological contemplation.

Example 7: “Do they not look at the camels—how they are created?” (Q 88:17)



This interrogative encourages observation and reasoning. It functions as an indirect directive prompting intellectual inquiry. The pragmatic effect is educational and reflective.

Such interrogatives create what discourse analysis terms an interactive textual dynamic, drawing the reader into active participation rather than passive reception.

Threatening and warning interrogatives (Tahdīd)

In eschatological contexts, interrogatives may serve as warnings.

Example 8: "Is this not the truth?" (Q 46:34)

This question is posed in a context of resurrection and judgment. It compels acknowledgment of reality at the moment when denial is no longer possible. Pragmatically, it intensifies eschatological warning.

Such interrogatives combine assertive and commissive elements: they affirm truth while implying impending consequence.

Expressive Interrogatives: Amazement and Emphasis

Some interrogatives express amazement or highlight extraordinary circumstances.

Example 9: "How can you disbelieve in Allah?" (Q 2:28)

The interrogative *kayfa* signals astonishment. The question conveys emotional intensity rather than informational curiosity. It expresses disbelief at disbelief itself.

This category demonstrates the expressive dimension of Qur'ānic interrogatives, where emotion and cognition intersect.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān cannot be adequately explained through syntactic analysis alone. Although grammatically marked as questions, their dominant communicative function is rarely limited to information-seeking. Instead, Qur'ānic interrogatives operate as highly strategic discourse mechanisms that integrate rhetoric, theology, cognition, and persuasion. This section interprets the results in light of classical Arabic rhetorical theory and modern pragmatic frameworks.

The analysis reveals that interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān fulfill at least six major linguo-pragmatic functions:

Confirmatory (assertive reinforcement)

Reproachful (moral blame and denial)

Argumentative (logical persuasion)

Reflective (cognitive engagement)

Threatening (eschatological warning)

Expressive (amazement and emphasis)

In the majority of cases, interrogatives function as indirect speech acts. Their pragmatic force depends on contextual presuppositions, thematic placement within discourse, audience orientation, rhetorical tradition of Classical Arabic.

Thus, Qur'ānic interrogatives operate as dynamic communicative tools that combine grammatical form, rhetorical strategy, and theological intention.

CONCLUSION



This study has examined the linguopragmatic functions of interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān through an integrated framework combining classical Arabic rhetoric and modern pragmatic theory. The findings demonstrate that Qur'ānic interrogatives operate as multifunctional discourse devices whose communicative force extends far beyond their formal grammatical classification as questions.

First, the analysis confirms that the majority of interrogative constructions in the Qur'ān function as indirect speech acts. Rather than seeking information, they perform assertive, directive, expressive, and sometimes commissive roles. Confirmatory interrogatives reinforce theological truths; reproachful interrogatives express moral evaluation; argumentative interrogatives structure logical reasoning; reflective interrogatives stimulate intellectual contemplation; and threatening interrogatives intensify eschatological warning. In each case, the interrogative form serves as a pragmatic strategy designed to maximize cognitive and emotional engagement.

Second, the study highlights the central role of presupposition and implicature in Qur'ānic questioning. Many interrogatives presuppose shared theological knowledge, compelling the addressee to internally acknowledge established truths. This technique enhances persuasive power by transforming the listener from a passive recipient into an active participant in meaning construction. The interrogative structure thus becomes a dialogical

mechanism that strengthens internal conviction through self-affirmation.

Third, the research demonstrates strong continuity between classical rhetorical classifications (such as taqrīr, inkār, taubīkh, and tahdīd) and modern pragmatic categories (assertives, directives, expressives). While classical scholars described the semantic-rhetorical effects of interrogatives, contemporary linguopragmatics provides theoretical tools—speech act theory, discourse analysis, and argumentation theory—to explain how these effects operate communicatively. The convergence of these traditions suggests that Qur'ānic rhetoric anticipated principles later formalized in modern linguistic theory.

Fourth, the analysis underscores the importance of interrogatives in maintaining the dialogical and performative character of Qur'ānic discourse. By structuring revelation through questions, the text simulates interaction between divine speaker and human audience. This dialogical structure enhances memorability, emotional resonance, and interpretive dynamism. Interrogatives function not merely as stylistic ornamentation but as core structural elements of persuasive sacred discourse.

In conclusion, interrogative sentences in the Qur'ān represent a sophisticated intersection of grammar, rhetoric, and pragmatics. Their communicative effectiveness lies in their ability to compress assertion, argumentation, emotion, and exhortation into concise interrogative forms.



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