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Interpreting Quranic Rhetorical Questions as Indirect Speech Acts: Part-II

Dr. Muhammad Asif Gul

Associate Professor

National University of Pakistan Islamabad

dr.asif.gul@nup.edu.pk

Mr. Riaz Ahmed

Lecturer

Riphah International University Islamabad

arghubtarar@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is a sequel to Gul and Ahmed (2024). The second paper in the series also presents a qualitative analysis of a set of rhetorical questions in the Holy Quran. The complete data set consists of Thirty-three rhetorical questions that start with exactly same syntactic phrase. While Part-I offered analysis of first seven instances, the current part analyzes subsequent thirteen (8-20) rhetorical questions, and the remaining thirteen (21-33) questions will be analyzed in Part-III. Methodology and theoretical framework of Part-I (Gul and Ahmed, 2024) guided Part-II and Part-III. Considering rhetorical questions as indirect speech acts, we explore differences and similarities in the illocutionary force of different questions in the data set. The study establishes that rhetorical questions serve as a range of illocutionary acts and every act is governed by its content, context, and addressee. Moreover, the findings show that the questions share marked similarities in their power for engaging readers emotionally. These similarities amplify their argumentative effect and psychological impact. The study found minor differences also.

1. Introduction

Studies (Abdul-Raof, 2019; Qassem, 2020) have made important contribution towards the application of modern English linguistic theories on the Holy Quran. Inspired by such studies, the present study applied the micro lens of Speech Act Theory (SAT) on the Holy Quran and aimed to capture profound communicative function of a certain set of rhetorical questions. It also provides a pragmatic lens to Quranic readership and scholarship for uncovering meanings relevant to their individual and social life. Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) have elucidated Quranic verses in gender issues.

2. Problem Statement

Rhetorical questions serve a variety of pragmatic functions when interpreted as indirect speech acts, and thus heighten the argumentative power of the text. How Quranic text becomes

more revealing for readers, the present study uncovers the illocutionary force of a certain set of rhetorical questions.

3. Research Questions

- a. What is the illocutionary force of different Quranic rhetorical questions starting with the same syntactic structure when they are interpreted as indirect speech acts?
- b. How are the strategies used in the sample rhetorical questions for readers' emotional engagement associated with each other?

4. Literature Review

Studies (Mubarok, 2016; Flowers, 2022; J.P, 2022; Mardiyah, 2022; Saleh, 2022) have analyzed the different chapters(Suras) of the Holy Quran in the light of Speech Act Theory. Pragmatic functions of different interrogative structures have been investigated by several scholars (Badameh, 2003; Hidayat, 2009; Istinah, 2011; Bisriyah, 2014; Eddin, 2019).

Data Analysis

There are 33 sample rhetorical questions which form an appreciating number. They are found in 17 different chapters (Suras). They show close interconnection with one another in inducing readers' involvement through inviting them to reconstruct meaning because they create implicit and gap filling situation.

The analysis starts with the first instance of the sample rhetorical question and ends on the last utterance. Discussion on different salient illocutions of the utterance precedes the description of strategies for the enhancement of readers' active emotional involvement.

'ART THOU NOT aware of those who claim that they believe in what has been bestowed from on high upon thee, [O Prophet,] as well as in what was bestowed from on high before thee, [and yet] are willing to defer to the rule of the powers of evil- although they were bidden to deny it, seeing that Satan but wants to lead them far astray' (Asad, 2003). (4:60)

Locution: The Jews and the Christians declare that they are the followers of Divine revelation. However, what they practically do benefits the power of evil. It shows that their actions are motivated by Satan not by God.

Illocution: God admonishes both the Jews and the Christians that they have been completely overcome by evil. They are being rebuked for paying only lip service to the Divine guidance sent as revelation to the prophets. God reproaches them on supporting those who, in their blindness to moral teachings of prophets, are bent on destroying the fabric of human society by their utter oblivion to Divine law. The Speaker advises the hearers to always remember that belief in God was a mere claim; rather, it was a commitment or a pledge to establish justice in society. However, what

is justice and what is a virtue is defined by God in His revelations sent to prophets. Since Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) was the final prophet, it was incumbent on the people to establish justice in society as he himself had done in his life by making Divine law as supreme authority. God criticizes those who claim that they are believers, but they molest their faith by withholding their support to a just cause. Since their claim is not supported by their actions, it means that their love for material benefits was stronger than their commitment to God and faith in moral values. Since Satan has led them astray, they are doomed to perish sooner or later.

In this question also, the Speaker refers to the present behaviour of the Christians and the Jews without focusing on particular characters. Marked with more detail, high intensity of feelings, and more vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery, the utterance asserts that only commitment to God and faith in moral values can keep people safe from Satanic temptations.

'ART THOU NOT aware of those who have been told, "Curb your hands, and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues"? But as soon as fighting [in God's cause] is ordained for them, lo, some of them stand in awe of men as one should stand in awe of God - or in even greater awe - and say, "O our Sustainer! Why hast Thou ordained fighting for us? If only Thou hadst granted us a delay for a little while!" (Asad, 2003). (4:77)

Locution: There have been observed two extreme human tendencies in human history. On one hand, there were transgressors who, due to lack of self-constraint, failed to refrain from violence. On the other hand, there were feeble-minded people who trembled with fear even at the thought of physical danger.

Illocution: God protests against two extreme human inclinations towards fighting. Neither does He allow individuals and nations to commit or provoke aggression nor He allows them to connive in injustice and violence. God complains that both the transgressors and peace preachers during aggression are violating the Divine law. The Speaker advises the hearers to always refrain from aggression even when they are fighting in His cause but exhorts them to be fight courageously when hit by aggression. In other words, passivity and non-resistance cannot promote peace; rather, the establishment of justice in society requires the cultivation of strong determination, unwavering faith and total indifference to physical dangers.

In this question also, the Speaker refers to the present behaviour of the Christians and the Jews without focusing on particular characters. Moreover, it is more detailed than the earlier one. Marked with high intensity of feelings, the utterance relies more on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance is disputed status of physical and moral death.

'ART THOU NOT aware that God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth? He can, if He so wills, do away with you and bring forth a new mankind [in your stead]' (Asad, 2003). (14:19)

Locution: God has created the universe where human beings are assigned a well-defined role. Their failure to fulfil that role may lead to their replacement with another of their kind.

Illocution: The Speaker warns the hearers that they should act responsibly; otherwise, they would be replaced with those who understand the meaning and purpose of their creation and are always mindful of their responsibilities towards their Creator, their fellow beings and the universe that surrounds them. He also reminds them that in His plan of creation, nothing happens accidentally and haphazardly as those who are bent on denying the truth often surmise.

In this question also, the Speaker refers to natural objects familiar to universal audience. Though, it is less detailed, it is marked with high intensity of feelings. The utterance relies more on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance is universal idea of human responsibility to God.

'ART THOU NOT aware how God sets forth the parable of a good word? [It is] like a good tree, firmly rooted, [reaching out] with its branches towards the sky' (Asad, 2003). (14:24)

Locution: A good word is like a tree that is firmly rooted in the earth and its branches are reaching out towards the sky. It means that prophetic "call to moral righteousness" can be understood through the parable of a tree.

Illocution: God asserts that prophetic calls to moral responsibility have enduring spiritual value; they are not mere words, they are outbursts of their intense affiliation with the Creator's plan of creation. The hearers are reminded to contemplate on the spiritual value of what prophets have established through their words and deeds. Moreover, the Speaker invites the hearers to purify their intentions of doing good on the earth. Since the best virtue in the Speaker's eye is His fear, they are advised to rise to the ideal standard set by Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) so that they can become immortal.

This question is different from others in the entire set because, in it the Speaker refers to a parable, but the characters of the parable are not specified. Moreover, it is more detailed and marked with high intensity of feelings. In addition, the utterance relies more on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance is universal status of spiritual values in human life.

'ART THOU NOT aware of those who have preferred a denial of the truth to God's blessings and [thereby] invited their people to alight in that abode of utter desolation' (Asad, 2003). (14:28)

Locution: The people who are bent on denying truth are inviting not only themselves but also their followers to destruction and despair.

Illocution: God admonishes the leaders and their weak followers who are bent on denying truth for exchanging His blessings, which came as a call to moral righteousness by the prophets, with their arrogant denial of truth. They are being warned that if they did not follow Divine law given in the revelation to Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him), they would be severely punished for destroying the fabric of human society. The Speaker advises the hearers to always remember that the revelation Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) received was the greatest blessing for mankind, and no scheme of human welfare could prove effective in establishing justice in society unless Divine law is accepted as supreme authority. God criticizes those who follow their leaders blindly and molest their faith by withholding their support to a just cause. Since their devotion to their leaders is motivated by their love for material benefits, and they forgot their commitment to God and faith in moral values, they are doomed to perish ultimately.

In this question also, the Speaker refers to the past behaviour of despotic leaders and their blind followers. Without focusing on particular characters and with less detail, the question is marked with high intensity of feelings. Moreover, the utterance relies less on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance is disputed resurrection.

'ART THOU NOT aware that We have let loose all [manner of] satanic forces upon those who deny the truth - [forces] that impel them [towards sin] with strong impulsion?' (Asad, 2003) (19: 83)

Locution: Those who deny the truth are an easy prey to Satanic forces that make them strongly impulsive towards sin.

Illocution: God warns those who deny the truth against the threatening and disastrous consequences of their stubbornness because obstinacy in refusing to obey moral laws leads to utter loss of self-constraint. Since it is only the will to resist temptation that helps individuals maintain their integrity in sinful situations where satanic forces impel them to commit deeds that threaten the very fabric of human society, God reproaches them for their irrational attitude.

This question shares certain features with others in the set. One of them is that the Speaker refers to general human tendency to stubbornness in denying truth. Without focusing on particular characters and with less detail, the question is marked with high intensity of feelings. The utterance

relies less on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance is universal human propensity towards irrational attitude.

'ART THOU NOT aware that before God prostrate themselves all [things and beings] that are in the heavens and all that are on earth - the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and the beasts? And many human beings [submit to God consciously], whereas many [others, having defied Him,] will inevitably have to suffer [in the life to come]; and he whom God shall scorn [on Resurrection Day] will have none who could bestow honour on him: for, verily, God does what He wills' (Asad, 2003). (22: 18)

Locution: All things, living and non-living, submit to God unconsciously. In human beings, while some decide to submit, others refuse to bow before Him. Suffering on the Resurrection Day is the ultimate fate of the latter, and none could bring them succour.

Illocution: God asserts His Sovereignty in the universe. He invites the hearers to accept His complete control on natural objects and living creatures that follow Divine commands in the form of natural laws, though they are conscious of what they do. Since conscious decision to reject Divine law by humans is against their primordial nature, it will bring them suffering and pain on the Resurrection Day.

This question is similar to others in the data set in which the content refers to natural objects. A detailed description of how they are made beneficial for the hearers with more vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery enhances readers' involvement in the reconstruction of meaning. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal beneficence of God towards human beings with human's accountability to Him on the Resurrection Day.

'ART THOU NOT aware that it is God who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green? Verily, God is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware' (Asad, 2003). (22: 63)

Locution: God sends rain and the rainwater helps vegetation grow everywhere on the earth.

Illocution: The Speaker reminds the hearers of His unfathomable mercy and wisdom that is evident everywhere. One of the clear signs of His mercy for them is rain. How can they be ungrateful to Him Who is so generous to them. If they realize the wonder of natural phenomenon of rain and understand the way rainwater brings life to the dead earth, they will always remember His blessings and stay committed to serve Him by establishing justice and equality in society.

This question also has great similarity to several others in the data set in which natural phenomenon of rain is shown as one of the Speaker's bountiful blessings on mankind. Though lacking the detailed description of others, the question relies on vivid sensory, temporal and spatial

imagery and enhances readers' involvement in the reconstruction of meaning. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal beneficence of God towards human beings.

'Art thou not aware that it is God who has made subservient to you all that is on earth, and the ships that sail through the sea at His behest - and [that it is He who] holds the celestial bodies~ [in their orbits], so that they may not fall upon the earth otherwise than by His leave?' (Asad, 2003) (22: 65)

Locution: All things, living and non-living, have been made subservient to human beings. God has complete control even on celestial bodies orbiting in the universe.

Illocution: The Speaker reminds the hearers of their central status in the universe. However, the reminder is followed by the assertion of His Sovereignty in the universe. Thus, the Speaker exhorts the hearers to rise to the eminent position He has set for them. Moreover, they are recommended to remember God's Sovereign power over the universe, otherwise, they will lose their ruling power.

This question share several similarities with other question which have natural objects as signs of God's mercy to human beings. A more detailed description of how earthly and celestial bodies following the Speaker's commands to serve mankind becomes more emphatic in its effect when the hearers' imagination is aroused with more vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal beneficence of God towards human beings with His claim of sovereign authority over the entire universe, thus, setting moral constraints on human role in it.

'ART THOU NOT aware that it is God whose limitless glory all [creatures] that are in the heavens and on earth extol, even the birds as they spread out their wings? Each [of them] knows indeed how to pray unto Him and to glorify Him; and God has full knowledge of all that they do' (Asad, 2003). (24: 41)

Locution: All creatures in the universe glorify God and pray unto Him. He has full knowledge of everything they do.

Illocution: The Speaker reminds the hearers of His limitless glory evident everywhere on the earth and in the sky. They are exhorted to align with other creatures in extolling God. They are advised to be mindful of their primary purpose to serve God so that they could enjoy full benefits of their privileged position in the universe.

This question also is similar to several other questions in which God presents natural objects as proofs of His bountiful blessings on human beings and signs of His grandeur. With finely detailed description, the utterance appeals hearers' imagination with highly vivid sensory, temporal

and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal beneficence of God towards human beings with His disputed proposition that there is complete harmony in whatever God creates. Thus, humans' privileged position in the universe is associated with God's purpose.

'Art thou not aware that it is God who causes the clouds to move onward, then joins them together, then piles them up in masses, until thou canst see rain come forth from their midst? And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountainous masses [of clouds] charged with hail, striking therewith whomever He wills and averting it from whomever He wills, [the while] the flash of His lightning well-nigh deprives [men of their] sight!' (Asad, 2003). (24:43)

Locution: God causes clouds to move from one form to another until they start showering rain. Sometimes, raindrops fall as hails from the sky and strike some lands but not others. During thunderstorms, lightning often deprives many a man from sight.

Illocution: God asserts His power in the universe by describing in detail how He forms clouds and brings benefit through them to some communities and cause others to suffer. The Speaker reminds the hearers of His unfathomable mercy towards His creatures and unequal power over natural phenomena.

Like several other questions in the data set, the current utterance asserts the Speaker's authority over the universe. Presenting a variety of natural objects and natural phenomenon as proofs of His bountiful blessings on human beings and signs of His grandeur, the Speaker provides finely detailed description of the objects and how they are interconnected. The utterance appeals hearers' imagination with highly vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal beneficence of God towards human beings with disputed proposition that God's power over natural phenomena. Thus, humans' privileged position in the universe is constrained with his moral responsibility towards the universe.

'ART THOU NOT aware of thy Sustainer (through His works)? - how He causes the shadow to lengthen [towards the night] when, had He so willed, He could indeed have made it stand still: but then, We have made the sun its guide' (Asad, 2003). (25:45)

Locution: God causes shadows change their length by keeping the sun in continuous movement. He has the power to make them stand still.

Illocution: God asserts His authority in the universe by describing in detail how He causes shadows continuously change their length by keeping the sun in steady movement. He reminds the readers of His blessings associated with the movement of the sun. They are exhorted to benefit

from natural objects and natural phenomena but always remember that they are accountable to a Supreme Authority.

This question also shares certain elements with several other questions in which God presents natural phenomenon. With finely detailed description, the utterance has a direct appeal to hearers' imagination with vivid not only sensory but also temporal and spatial imagery. The propositional content of the utterance combines universal God's purposeful control over the universe.

'ART THOU NOT AWARE that they roam confusedly through all the valleys [of words and thoughts]' (Asad, 2003). (26: 225)

Locution: The poets lacking self-constraint pour out confusion through their words.

Illocution: God reproaches the poets and so-called artists whose imaginative powers bring destruction and moral collapse of their society by spreading confusion and chaos through their words. Since their rhetorical powers cause ruin to civilizations, the hearers are advised to be on their guards against the evil influence they have on immature minds.

This question differs from every other question in the data set because in it, the content of the question has neither natural objects, nor natural phenomenon nor any historical event. Rather, poets without any sense of moral responsibility towards the universe are the subject of the argument. In vivid sensory, temporal and spatial imagery images, the Speaker evokes the feelings of confusion and chaos that characterizes their creations.

Conclusion

Findings of the study clearly demonstrate that the Quranic text contains several rhetorical questions that share exact syntactic elements, yet they markedly differ in their illocutionary force, and divergence in performativity of pragmatic function is usually driven by either inclusion or exclusion of the addressees and/or the content of the utterance. The analysis also reveals that the strategies found in the data set share several similarities when we explore their power to emotionally engage readers and their greater psychological impact on them.

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