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IMPERATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN CLASSICAL ARABIC RHETORIC: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS THROUGH AL-JURJĀNĪ'S THEORY OF NAZM

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Abstract

Imperative constructions (ṣīghat al-amr) constitute one of the most significant linguistic devices in Classical Arabic. Although traditional Arabic grammar primarily associates the imperative with command, rhetorical sources demonstrate that its communicative functions vary according to context. This study investigates the pragmatic functions of imperative constructions through the integrated perspectives of Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm and Speech Act Theory. Using a qualitative analysis of selected examples from the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and Classical Arabic poetry, the study identifies major pragmatic functions, including command, guidance, supplication, permission, threat, challenge, wish, and request. The findings reveal that contextual indicators, speaker intention, and discourse organization play a decisive role in meaning interpretation. The study further demonstrates significant convergence between classical Arabic rhetorical thought and contemporary pragmatics, highlighting the continuing relevance of Al-Jurjānī's linguistic insights to modern discourse analysis.

Keywords: imperative constructions, Arabic rhetoric, pragmatics, Al-Jurjānī, Nazm theory, speech acts, Classical Arabic.

JURJONIYNING NAZM NAZARIYASI ASOSIDA KLASSIK ARAB BALOG'ATIDA BUYRUQ SHAKLLARINING PRAGMATIK TAHLILI

Annotatsiya

Buyruq shakllari (ṣīghat al-amr) klassik arab tilining eng muhim lingvistik vositalaridan biri hisoblanadi. An'anaviy arab grammatikasida buyruq shakli asosan buyruq ma'nosini ifodalovchi vosita sifatida talqin qilinsa-da, balog'at manbalari uning kommunikativ funksiyalari kontekstga qarab o'zgarishini ko'rsatadi. Mazkur tadqiqotda buyruq shakllarining pragmatik funksiyalari Jurjoniyning Nazm nazariyasi va Nutq aktlari nazariyasining integratsiyalashgan yondashuvi asosida o'rganildi. Qur'oni karim, hadisi shariflar hamda klassik arab she'riyatidan tanlab olingan misollarni sifat jihatdan tahlil qilish asosida buyruq shakllarining buyruq, yo'naltirish, iltijo, ruxsat, tahdid, da'vat, istak va iltimos kabi asosiy pragmatik funksiyalari aniqlandi. Tadqiqot natijalari ma'no talqinida kontekstual ko'rsatkichlar, so'zlovchining kommunikativ niyati va diskurs tuzilmasi hal qiluvchi ahamiyatga ega ekanligini ko'rsatdi. Shuningdek, tadqiqot klassik arab balog'ati bilan zamonaviy pragmatika o'rtasida sezilarli nazariy mushtaraklik mavjudligini namoyon etib, Jurjoniyning lingvistik qarashlari zamonaviy diskurs tahlili uchun ham dolzarb ekanligini tasdiqlaydi.

Kalit so‘zlar: buyruq shakllari, arab balog‘ati, pragmatika, Jurjoniy, Nazm nazariyasi, nutq aktlari, klassik arab tili.

ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ПОВЕЛИТЕЛЬНЫХ КОНСТРУКЦИЙ В КЛАССИЧЕСКОЙ АРАБСКОЙ РИТОРИКЕ С ПОЗИЦИЙ ТЕОРИИ НАЗМА АЛЬ-ДЖУРДЖАНИ

Аннотация

Повелительные конструкции (ṣīghat al-amr) являются одним из наиболее значимых языковых средств классического арабского языка. Хотя традиционная арабская грамматика преимущественно связывает повелительное наклонение с выражением приказа, риторические источники свидетельствуют о том, что его коммуникативные функции варьируются в зависимости от контекста. В настоящем исследовании прагматические функции повелительных конструкций рассматриваются с позиций интеграции теории назма Аль-Джурджани и теории речевых актов. На основе качественного анализа примеров, отобранных из Корана, пророческих хадисов и классической арабской поэзии, выявлены основные прагматические функции повелительных конструкций, включая приказ, наставление, мольбу, разрешение, угрозу, вызов, пожелание и просьбу. Полученные результаты показывают, что контекстуальные показатели, коммуникативная интенция говорящего и организация дискурса играют решающую роль в интерпретации значения. Исследование также выявляет значительное сходство между классической арабской риторической традицией и современной прагматикой, подтверждая актуальность лингвистического наследия Аль-Джурджани для современных исследований дискурса.

Ключевые слова: повелительные конструкции, арабская риторика, прагматика, Аль-Джурджани, теория назма, речевые акты, классический арабский язык.

1. Introduction

The relationship between linguistic form and communicative meaning has long occupied a central position in both classical and modern linguistic studies. In the Arabic linguistic tradition, this issue is particularly evident in the study of imperative constructions (ṣīghat al-amr), which play an important role in grammar, rhetoric, and Islamic legal discourse.

Although the imperative is traditionally defined as a form expressing command or request, Classical Arabic texts reveal that it frequently performs a variety of communicative functions. In the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and Classical Arabic poetry, imperative constructions may express guidance, supplication, permission, threat, challenge, wish, or choice. This semantic diversity indicates that grammatical form alone is insufficient for determining meaning and that contextual interpretation is essential (Abdul-Raof, 2006).

Classical Arabic rhetoricians recognized this phenomenon at an early stage. Among them, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) argued in his Theory of Nazm that meaning emerges through the interrelationship of linguistic elements within discourse rather than from isolated lexical items (Al-Jurjānī, 1992). Modern pragmatics has reached similar conclusions. Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), likewise emphasizes the role of communicative intention and context in meaning construction.

Despite extensive studies on imperatives, research integrating Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm with modern pragmatic approaches remains limited. Therefore, this study examines the pragmatic functions of imperative constructions in Classical Arabic discourse through the combined perspectives of Arabic rhetoric, Nazm theory, and Speech Act Theory. It aims to identify the major pragmatic functions of imperative constructions, examine the role of contextual indicators in interpretation, and explore the relationship between classical Arabic rhetorical thought and contemporary pragmatics. The study also highlights the continuing relevance of Arabic linguistic heritage to modern semantic and pragmatic research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Imperative Constructions in Classical Arabic Tradition

Imperative constructions (ṣīghat al-amr) have long occupied an important place in Arabic grammatical, rhetorical, and legal scholarship. Early grammarians, particularly Sibawayh in Al-Kitāb, primarily examined the morphological and syntactic properties of imperatives (Sibawayh, 1988). Later scholars such as Ibn Jinnī and Ibn Hishām expanded this analysis by emphasizing that contextual and rhetorical factors may extend the meaning of imperative forms beyond direct command (Ibn Jinnī, 1952).

With the development of Arabic rhetoric (balāgha), scholarly attention shifted from purely grammatical description to discourse-based interpretation. Rhetoricians argued that the intended meaning of an utterance depends not only on grammatical structure but also on context and communicative purpose (Abdul-Raof, 2006). Among them, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī made a particularly significant contribution through his Theory of Nazm, according to which meaning emerges from the interrelationship of linguistic elements within discourse rather than from isolated lexical items (Al-Jurjānī, 1992).

2.2. Imperative Constructions in Arabic Rhetoric and Nazm Theory

Classical rhetoricians such as Al-Sakkākī and Al-Qazwīnī demonstrated that imperative constructions frequently convey meanings beyond direct command, including guidance, supplication, permission, threat, challenge, wish, and choice (Al-Sakkākī, 1987; Al-Qazwīnī, 2003). They emphasized that rhetorical interpretation depends on contextual indicators (qarāʾin) and communicative intention rather than on grammatical form alone.

Al-Jurjānī further developed this contextual approach through his Theory of Nazm. In Dalāʾil al-Iʿjāz and Asrār al-Balāgha, he argues that linguistic meaning is generated through syntactic and semantic relations within discourse. Consequently, identical grammatical structures may convey different meanings depending on their textual environment (Al-Jurjānī, 1992; 1997). Recent studies have noted important similarities between Nazm theory and modern discourse analysis, suggesting the continuing relevance of Al-Jurjānī's framework for contemporary linguistic research (Bayshak, 1991).

2.3. Imperatives in Modern Pragmatics

Modern pragmatics shifted the study of meaning from linguistic structure to language use in context. Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin (1962) and elaborated by Searle (1969), views utterances as communicative actions whose interpretation depends on speaker intention and contextual conditions. Within this framework, imperative constructions may function as commands, requests, warnings, advice, or invitations rather than expressing a single fixed meaning.

This pragmatic understanding closely parallels the classical Arabic emphasis on contextual interpretation and highlights the central role of discourse context in meaning construction (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996).

2.4. Research Gap

Recent studies on Arabic pragmatics have demonstrated that imperative constructions perform diverse communicative functions and require integrated syntactic, semantic, rhetorical, and pragmatic analysis (Abdul-Raof, 2006; Farghal, 1995). However, contemporary research has generally treated Arabic pragmatics and classical Arabic rhetoric as separate fields.

Although Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm has been widely studied in relation to textual coherence and eloquence, its application to the pragmatic interpretation of imperative constructions remains limited (Bayshak, 1991). Therefore, a significant gap persists between classical Arabic rhetorical theory and contemporary pragmatic analysis. The present study addresses this gap by integrating Nazm theory with Speech Act Theory to explain the pragmatic functions of imperative constructions in Classical Arabic discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework integrating Classical Arabic rhetorical theory with contemporary pragmatics to analyze the semantic and pragmatic functions of imperative constructions in Classical Arabic discourse. The framework consists of three complementary dimensions: linguistic, pragmatic, and rhetorical.

The linguistic dimension examines the grammatical structure of imperative constructions (ṣīghat al-amr). Although traditional Arabic grammar primarily associates the imperative with command, grammatical form alone cannot fully determine meaning because imperative expressions frequently acquire additional functions through contextual usage (Ibn Hishām, 2004).

The pragmatic dimension is based on Speech Act Theory developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Within this framework, imperative constructions are viewed as communicative acts whose interpretation depends on speaker intention, discourse context, and communicative purpose. Accordingly, imperative forms may perform various functions, including commands, requests, advice, warnings, and supplications.

The rhetorical dimension draws upon Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm, which maintains that meaning emerges through the interrelationship of linguistic elements within discourse rather than from isolated lexical items (Al-Jurjānī, 1992). This perspective emphasizes the role of contextual indicators (qarāʾin) in determining the intended meaning of imperative expressions.

By integrating these three dimensions, the study proposes a unified analytical model in which grammatical structure, contextual relations, and communicative intention jointly contribute to meaning construction in Classical Arabic discourse (Abdul-Raof, 2006).

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the pragmatic functions of imperative constructions in Classical Arabic discourse. The analysis is based on an interdisciplinary framework integrating Classical Arabic rhetoric, Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm, and Speech Act Theory. A qualitative approach was adopted because it enables an in-depth examination of linguistic phenomena within their natural discourse contexts (Creswell, 2014).

4.2. Corpus Selection

The corpus consists of forty imperative constructions selected from three major sources of Classical Arabic discourse: twenty examples from the Holy Qur'an, ten from Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), and ten from Classical Arabic poetry. The examples were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the representation of diverse pragmatic functions and sufficient contextual information for interpretation (Patton, 2002).

To illustrate the corpus, Table 1 presents representative examples from the dataset.

Table 1. Representative Imperative Constructions

Source	Imperative Expression	Pragmatic Function
Qur'an	أقيموا الصلاة	Command
Qur'an	وشاورهم في الأمر	Guidance
Qur'an	ربنا اغفر لنا	Supplication
Qur'an	اعملوا ما شئتم	Threat
Qur'an	فأتوا بسورة من مثله	Challenge
Hadith	يسروا ولا تعسروا	Guidance
Hadith	صلوا كما رأيتموني أصلي	Command
Poetry	قفا نبك	Request
Poetry	فدع الضلال	Advice
Poetry	ألا انجلي	Wish

4.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was conducted in four stages. First, imperative constructions were identified and extracted from the selected texts. Second, each example was examined within its immediate and broader discourse context. Third, the examples were classified according to their pragmatic functions. Finally, the identified functions were interpreted through the combined perspectives of Speech Act Theory and Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm.

The analysis employed qualitative content analysis and a predefined coding framework based on pragmatic function, contextual indicators, and rhetorical purpose (Schreier, 2012; Mayring, 2014).

4.4. Analytical Framework

The study applies three complementary analytical dimensions. Linguistic analysis examines the grammatical structure of imperative expressions; pragmatic analysis identifies their communicative functions using Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969); and rhetorical analysis employs Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm to explain how contextual relations contribute to meaning construction (Al-Jurjānī, 1992). The integration of these approaches provides a comprehensive account of semantic variation in Classical Arabic discourse (Abdul-Raof, 2006).

5. Results

5.1. Distribution of Pragmatic Functions

The analysis of the corpus demonstrates that imperative constructions in Classical Arabic perform a wide range of pragmatic functions extending beyond direct command. Although imperatives are traditionally associated with obligation and authority, the findings reveal considerable semantic diversity, confirming the observations of classical Arabic rhetoricians that contextual indicators (qarāʾin) play a decisive role in meaning interpretation (Al-Sakkākī, 1987; Al-Qazwīnī, 2003).

Table 2. Distribution of Pragmatic Functions

Pragmatic Function	Frequency
Command	9
Guidance	9
Supplication	3
Request	4

Pragmatic Function	Frequency
Advice	4
Challenge	3
Permission	2
Threat	2
Encouragement	2
Reflection	2
Wish	1
Choice	1
Exclamation	1
Praise	1

The results indicate that non-literal functions constitute approximately 77.5% of the corpus, whereas direct commands account for only 22.5%. This finding highlights the central role of context and communicative intention in interpreting imperative constructions and supports contemporary pragmatic approaches, which maintain that meaning cannot be derived from grammatical form alone (Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983).

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the traditional grammatical definition of the imperative as a direct command explains only a limited range of actual language use. The analyzed corpus reveals that imperative constructions frequently perform diverse functions, including guidance, supplication, permission, threat, challenge, and advice. This observation confirms the view of classical Arabic rhetoricians that the meaning of imperative expressions cannot be determined solely by grammatical form but depends largely on contextual indicators (qarāʾin) (Al-Sakkākī, 1987; Al-Qazwīnī, 2003).

The results further reveal a strong convergence between Classical Arabic rhetorical theory and contemporary pragmatics. Both traditions emphasize the decisive role of context, communicative intention, and discourse environment in meaning construction. In particular, the findings correspond closely to Speech Act Theory, which regards linguistic expressions as communicative actions whose interpretation depends on contextual conditions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

The study also highlights the continuing relevance of Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm for contemporary linguistic analysis. Consistent with Al-Jurjānī's view, the findings demonstrate that semantic variation in imperative constructions emerges through the interaction of linguistic form, contextual relations, and communicative purpose rather than through grammatical structure alone (Al-Jurjānī, 1992; 1997). These results support previous studies suggesting that Nazm theory anticipates important concepts in modern discourse analysis and pragmatics (Bayshak, 1991).

Overall, the study demonstrates the value of integrating classical Arabic rhetorical scholarship with contemporary pragmatic approaches and proposes an analytical framework for explaining semantic variation in Classical Arabic discourse.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the pragmatic functions of imperative constructions in Classical Arabic discourse through the integrated perspectives of Arabic rhetoric, Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Nazm, and Speech Act Theory. The findings demonstrate that imperative constructions perform a wide range

of communicative functions beyond direct command, with non-literal uses constituting the majority of the analyzed corpus.

The analysis confirms that contextual factors and communicative intention play a decisive role in interpreting imperative expressions. These findings support Al-Jurjānī's view that meaning emerges through contextual and textual relations rather than through grammatical form alone.

By integrating Nazm theory with contemporary pragmatics, the study establishes important points of convergence between classical Arabic rhetorical thought and modern linguistic theory, demonstrating the continuing relevance of Arabic linguistic heritage to contemporary discourse studies.

The study is limited by its relatively small corpus and predominantly qualitative methodology. Future research may expand the corpus and employ quantitative, corpus-based, and computational approaches to further investigate pragmatic meaning in Arabic discourse.

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