

SPEECH ACTS IN SURAH AL-FÂTIHAH: A Pragmatic Analysis from the Perspective of Speech Act Theory

Audrya Fauzi Islami* and Ade Nandang
UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia
*Email: audriyafauziislami@gmail.com**

Article History

Received: 03 May 2026

Accepted: 20 June 2026

Published: 26 June 2026

Abstract

Surah Al-Fâtiḥah occupies a central role in Islamic prayer and requires an understanding that extends beyond syntactic interpretation to the pragmatic dimensions of the text. This study aims to examine the types of speech acts, the distribution of illocutionary acts, and the theological-pragmatic implications embedded in the seven opening verses of the Qur'an. A descriptive qualitative method was employed using a textual analysis approach based on John R. Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts. The findings indicate that Surah Al-Fâtiḥah exhibits a complex configuration of speech acts. The first four verses are predominantly characterized by assertive and expressive illocutionary acts, which construct an acknowledgment of divine reality while simultaneously expressing gratitude and complete submission to God. The fifth verse represents the strongest manifestation of commissive speech acts through an exclusive commitment to worship Allah alone. In contrast, the sixth and seventh verses are dominated by directive speech acts expressed through earnest supplications for divine guidance and protection. The theological-pragmatic implications of these findings suggest that the recitation of Surah Al-Fâtiḥah in prayer functions as a form of sacred speech act and ritual performativity. The asymmetrical relationship between human beings and God transforms language from a medium of information exchange into a performative act that continuously reinforces spiritual commitment and facilitates the purification of the self.

Keywords: Speech Acts; Surah Al-Fâtiḥah; Searle's Taxonomy; Pragmatics; Ritual Performativity.

A. INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary instrument through which human beings establish communicative relationships, including the transcendental relationship between humanity and God. In the Islamic tradition, Surah al-Fâtiḥah (Qur'an 1:1–7) occupies an exceptionally central position: it is not merely the opening text of the Qur'an, but also a verbal pillar (rukun qawli) that must be recited in every unit of prayer. Consequently, a Muslim recites it at least seventeen times each day.

As a verbal text, al-Fâtiḥah not only communicates theological propositions but also performs actions through language. When a speaker recites *īyyâka na'budu wa īyyâka nasta'in* ("You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help"), the utterance does not merely

convey information to an addressee; it simultaneously constitutes a pledge of devotion and a request for assistance. This phenomenon accords with the foundational premise of Speech Act Theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and developed by Searle (1969; 1979): language is fundamentally action (language as action), rather than merely a vehicle for transmitting information.

Linguistic scholarship on Arabic has developed rapidly over the past several decades, including studies that focus specifically on the Qur'anic text through discourse analysis, stylistics, and lexical semantics (Holes et al., 2004; Kees, 2014; Hussein, 2014). Nevertheless, the pragmatic dimension, particularly within the framework of Speech Act Theory, has received comparatively limited attention. This limitation is notable because al-Fâtiḥah contains an exceptional diversity of speech functions within an extremely concise textual space: seven verses that simultaneously convey praise, theological assertions, a pledge, and supplication.

The urgency of this study rests on three considerations. First, from the perspective of applied linguistics, analyzing speech acts in a sacred text extends the scope of pragmatic theory, which has predominantly been tested on everyday conversational utterances. Second, from the perspective of Islamic studies, a pragmatic approach offers an interpretive layer that complements classical tafsir. Third, the study has pedagogical relevance because it can deepen Muslim speakers' linguistic awareness of a text they recite every day.

Previous research related to this topic can be classified into two broad groups. The first comprises linguistic studies of the Qur'an in general (Elsaid & Haleem, 2008; Salwa, 2006). The second consists of pragmatic studies of religious texts using Speech Act Theory, including analyses of speech acts in biblical prayers, the performativity of liturgical language, and Prophetic hadith (Patrick, 1994; Schaller, 1988).

Three significant research gaps remain: (1) no study has exclusively and comprehensively analyzed all seven verses of al-Fâtiḥah using Searle's complete taxonomy of illocutionary acts; (2) the perlocutionary dimension of al-Fâtiḥah in the ritual context of prayer has not been explicitly analyzed; and (3) the concept of the 'sacred speech act,' which accounts for the asymmetry between the human speaker and the divine addressee, has not been developed as a theoretical subframework.

This study aims to: (1) identify and classify the types of speech acts in al-Fâtiḥah; (2) analyze the illocutionary category of each verse according to Searle's taxonomy; and (3) elucidate the theological-pragmatic implications of the speech-act patterns identified within the ritual context of prayer.

Three research questions were formulated as follows:

- RQ1: What types of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary) can be identified in Surah al-Fâtiḥah based on Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory?
- RQ2: How are Searle's illocutionary categories distributed across the verses of Surah al-Fâtiḥah, and can a single verse simultaneously perform more than one category of illocutionary act?
- RQ3: What are the theological-pragmatic implications of the speech-act pattern in al-Fâtiḥah within the situational context of prayer?

At the theoretical level, this study extends the application of Speech Act Theory to Arabic sacred texts and proposes the concept of 'ritual performativity' as a development of Austin's

account of performative language. At the practical level, the findings may inform functional Arabic-language teaching, the development of cross-cultural pragmatics curricula, and the advancement of Qur'anic literacy through a scientific linguistic approach.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Austin's Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory originates in the work of J. L. Austin, a philosopher of language at the University of Oxford. This foundational idea was first introduced in the William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955 and was later compiled and published posthumously as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin's principal intervention in linguistic inquiry was his rejection of the traditional view that all sentences are constative, that is, that they merely describe states of affairs and are evaluated solely as true or false. Austin argued instead that some utterances are performative. Performative utterances do not describe anything; rather, they perform an action through the very act of being uttered. Classic examples include statements such as "I promise," "I pronounce you husband and wife," and "I name this ship." Performative utterances are therefore evaluated not by their truth value (true or false), but by whether they succeed: whether they are felicitous or infelicitous.

In the subsequent development of his theory, Austin recognized that this concept was not confined to explicitly performative utterances. He proposed that virtually every utterance simultaneously performs three dimensions of action when spoken. The first is the locutionary act, the act of producing an utterance with propositional or literal meaning. The second is the illocutionary act, the force or intention underlying the utterance, which indicates what the speaker is actually doing through it, such as promising, warning, or requesting. The third is the perlocutionary act, which refers to the effect or consequence produced in the addressee by the utterance, such as persuading, frightening, or convincing. These three dimensions provide the operational framework for analyzing the meaning and function of an utterance.

For a performative utterance to succeed and avoid a misfire, Austin formulated the requirements known as felicity conditions. These requirements are classified into three principal groups. First are the preparatory conditions, which require a recognized conventional procedure and ensure that the persons and circumstances involved are appropriate. Second is procedural completeness: all participants must execute the procedure fully and correctly. Third are the sincerity conditions, which require participants to possess intentions, thoughts, and feelings consistent with the action and to behave genuinely in accordance with those intentions after the utterance has been made.

Searle's Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts

Austin's initial account of speech acts was subsequently systematized and extended by his student at the University of Oxford, John R. Searle. This development was presented comprehensively in Searle's two principal works, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969) and *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (1979). Searle's intervention began with weaknesses he identified in Austin's original classification of illocutionary acts. Austin had divided illocutions into five categories: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. Searle argued that these categories lacked consistent distinguishing criteria because they conflated grammatical and performative

parameters. He therefore proposed a new taxonomy based on more rigorous and uniform criteria. This classification rests specifically on the direction of fit between words and the world, together with the underlying psychological sincerity conditions.

On the basis of these criteria, Searle classified illocutionary acts into five principal categories. First, assertives (representatives) commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition and have a word-to-world direction of fit. Second, directives are uttered to induce the addressee to perform an action and have a world-to-word direction of fit. Third, commissives commit the speaker to a future course of action and, like directives, have a world-to-word direction of fit. Fourth, expressives articulate the speaker's psychological state; this category has no direction of fit because the truth of its proposition is presupposed. Fifth, declarations directly alter reality through their utterance, as in the statement "I hereby declare this meeting closed"; this category has a double direction of fit.

In practice, these five categories are not always mutually exclusive. Searle's framework allows for multilayered or multifunctional illocution, whereby a single utterance may simultaneously carry more than one illocutionary function. This feature justifies the use of Searle's taxonomy as the primary analytical framework of the present study. Compared with Austin's broader classification, Searle's five categories provide substantially more precise distinguishing criteria. The taxonomy has also become the most widely used standard in contemporary pragmatics and is particularly well suited to analyzing complex texts beyond the boundaries of everyday spoken conversation.

Applications of Speech Act Theory to Religious Texts

Having outlined Austin's theoretical foundation of speech acts and Searle's subsequent development of the theory, the review must turn to the specific application of this taxonomy within the domain of religious texts. The transition from a general theoretical discussion to contextual application is essential for assessing the extent to which a theory rooted in the philosophy of spoken language can account for the complexity of meaning, function, and linguistic structure in sacred texts.

A review of the literature indicates that several scholars have approached religious and ritual texts through linguistic and performative frameworks. Kasmani, for example, directly applied Searle's taxonomy to the hadith literature (Mohd, 2019). His study focused on dialogue between the Prophet Muhammad and the Bedouin, mapping communication strategies through the identification of illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects. Prayer texts from other scriptural traditions have also been examined by Miller, who surveyed a wide range of biblical prayer forms from both the Old and New Testaments (Patrick, 1994). Although his object of study was closely related to liturgical texts, Miller did not use Austin's or Searle's pragmatic framework; instead, he relied on theological analysis and form criticism. Schaller (1988), meanwhile, adopted a broader approach by elaborating performative language theory for ritual language in general.

Efforts to examine the Qur'an through pragmatic analysis have been undertaken at different scales. Between 2021 and 2025, several studies applied Speech Act Theory to the Qur'anic corpus broadly (Heila, 2024; Alwan, 2025; Khazaleh et al., 2023). More specifically, Mariska et al. (2022) investigated speech acts in Surah al-Fâtiḥah. Their study analyzed the seven verses of al-Fâtiḥah in Abdullah Yusuf Ali's English translation and reported 18 illocutionary acts

distributed across six assertive, four directive, one commissive, three expressive, and five declarative functions. Among the studies reviewed, no other work was found to analyze al-Fâtiḥah through a complete taxonomy apart from the study by Mariska et al.

The existing literature sharpens the position and novelty of the present study through three fundamental points of distinction. First, regarding the data, previous research analyzed a translated text rather than the original Arabic (Mariska et al., 2022). Translation inevitably alters syntactic structure and introduces explanatory words; consequently, the distribution of speech acts in a translated text does not automatically represent the pragmatic properties of the source text. Second, regarding the unit of analysis, the extraction of 18 illocutionary acts from seven verses indicates that each verse was divided into sub-sentential units. Such a granular approach is vulnerable to internal inconsistency, as shown by the functions reported by Mariska et al., which should mathematically total 19 (6+4+1+3+5), not 18, thereby indicating insufficient methodological precision. By contrast, the present study treats each verse as an integral speech-act unit. Third, and most substantively, previous research has not analyzed sequential interdependence. The finding that declarations predominate in most verses of al-Fâtiḥah is theoretically problematic because Searle's framework requires the speaker to possess the authority to alter reality through an utterance, a structural prerequisite that a servant does not possess when addressing God. Moreover, no existing study has examined how the illocutionary force of one verse constitutes a felicity condition for the next. The novelty of this study therefore does not rest on the simplistic claim that it is the first to apply a complete taxonomy to the entire text. Rather, it lies in the combination of three analytical features: exclusive analysis of the original Arabic text, use of the complete verse as the unit of analysis, and identification of sequential interdependence among verses through felicity conditions. This combination has not been found concurrently in the existing literature.

Implications for Arabic Language Teaching

Historically, Arabic-language instruction across Islamic educational institutions has tended to privilege grammatical competence, particularly syntax (*nahw*) and morphology (*sharf*). Pragmatic competence—the ability to understand language as communicative action rather than merely as formal structure—has received comparatively little explicit attention in language-skills curricula (*mahârat al-lughawiyah*). The phenomena of multilayered illocution and felicity conditions identified in Surah al-Fâtiḥah offer concrete instructional material for addressing this pedagogical gap. A strategic advantage of using this text is that learners have generally memorized it from an early age. Pragmatics instruction therefore need not begin with texts alien to students' everyday experience; it can instead reconstruct functional awareness of a text they have already mastered orally. In classroom practice, instructors may guide students to identify independently the type of illocutionary act in each verse and articulate the logical justification for each classification. The pivotal fifth verse, where commissive and directive acts intersect directly, provides an especially effective exercise because its pragmatic shift is pronounced and readily observable. Consistent with the communicative-competence paradigm (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), this approach affirms that comprehensive mastery of Arabic requires a balanced integration of grammatical and pragmatic competence.

Implications for Islamic Religious Education

In everyday worship, most Muslims have memorized and recited Surah al-Fâtiḥah since childhood. Their cognitive understanding of the text, however, often stops at the equivalence provided by a literal translation. There is rarely an explicit awareness that reciting the text in prayer constitutes a process of 'doing things with words,' such as making a pledge, presenting a request, or declaring a commitment. The framework of the sacred speech act and the felicity conditions presented in the findings provides an operational conceptual vocabulary for contemplative reflection (*tadabbur*). It shifts the guiding question from merely 'What does this word mean?' to 'What action am I performing through this utterance?' In this way, spiritual engagement gains a solid structural foundation rather than resting solely on an affective response. Consistent with the linguistic analysis, the pivotal fifth verse is highly relevant to Islamic Religious Education at the upper-secondary level, although with a different orientation. The verse is no longer merely an object of linguistic identification; it becomes an instrument of spiritual awareness that marks the essential moment when the speaker, as servant, moves from pledging commitment to Allah to presenting a supplication. Ultimately, these implications should be understood as complementary to conventional tafsir. Whereas tafsir explains meaning within a theological domain, the pragmatic approach examines the functions performed by utterances. The two approaches therefore complement one another in constructing a comprehensive understanding of the sacred text.

Methodological Implications: Pragmatic Operationalization of the Concept of Munasabah in Tafsir Studies

Both classical and contemporary traditions of Qur'anic exegesis possess a strong foundation for explaining the theological and classical-linguistic meanings of verses. To account for correlations and relationships among verses, tafsir scholarship has long formulated the concept of *munasabah* as a principal analytical instrument. Conventional explanations of *munasabah*, however, tend to operate at a thematic-holistic level. Although this approach effectively elucidates semantic coherence, it does not yet provide a fully precise functional mechanism explaining how one utterance mechanically constitutes a validity condition, or prerequisite, for the emergence of the next utterance in a text.

The findings on felicity conditions in this study can bridge this mechanistic gap while providing a strong conceptual link between pragmatic linguistics and Qur'anic sciences. The fact that the directive speech acts in verses 6–7 attain pragmatic felicity only after the expressive, assertive, and commissive acts in the preceding sequence have been fulfilled may be understood as a modern operationalization of *munasabah*. Whereas the conventional framework explains correlations thematically, the finding of sequential dependency offers an instrument with greater analytical precision and the potential for systematic testing, demonstrating how relationships among verses operate in functional-pragmatic terms.

As an applied implication, this felicity-conditions framework has considerable potential for integration into comparative tafsir studies. It can serve as a supplementary analytical instrument for testing claims of *munasabah* in other sequences of verses whose coherence remains contested. By examining speech-act prerequisites across verses, this pragmatic approach can provide a more precise mechanistic analytical foundation while operating

alongside, and complementing, the established thematic-philological approaches used by Qur'anic exegetes.

Despite offering new methodological precision, the application of this approach requires considerable epistemological caution because its domain intersects with sacred texts. It must be explicitly emphasized that the framework functions solely as a supplementary linguistic instrument, not as a product of tafsir itself, and has no authority whatsoever to determine or alter the theological meaning of a verse. Pragmatic analysis merely complements the work of Qur'anic exegetes by examining the text's linguistic mechanisms; it is not intended to replace the scholarly authority of tafsir, which is firmly grounded in the discipline of ushul at-tafsir.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design, with textual content analysis as its principal methodological approach. A qualitative method was selected to examine the depth of meaning underlying syntactic structures, in which language is understood not merely as a sequence of grammatical symbols but as a performative medium that carries particular force or action. The research corpus consists entirely of the sacred text of Surah al-Fâtiḥah, specifically the sequence of seven verses from Qur'an 1:1 to 1:7. This corpus was selected because al-Fâtiḥah occupies a central position in Islamic ritual practice and constitutes an obligatory pillar of prayer.

As its analytical instrument, the study operationalizes the taxonomy of speech acts initiated by J. L. Austin through *How to Do Things with Words* and subsequently systematized more rigorously by John R. Searle. Searle's framework was selected because it differentiates the pragmatic functions of language into five fundamental categories: assertives (representatives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. This taxonomy is highly relevant to the complexity of religious texts, which frequently contain multiple functions or multilayered speech acts. Divine texts do not merely communicate information; they also enact spiritual reality, require commitment, and construct a relational structure between the human speaker and the supreme addressee, God.

Data were collected through close reading of the Arabic source text together with its semantic-exegetical content. Data extraction proceeded linearly according to the sequence of the verses. Pragmatic classification was conducted by identifying each utterance unit, namely each verse, across three dimensions of speech acts: locution (the text's basic propositional meaning), illocution (the intention and force underlying the utterance according to Searle's taxonomy), and perlocution (the anticipated psychological effect or behavioral response).

Data analysis was operationalized through a methodological synthesis of content analysis and Austin-Searle speech act theory. The process began with manifest content analysis, confined exclusively to the extraction of locutionary acts in order to establish the literal, textual, and purely denotative propositional meaning of each utterance unit without interpretive intervention. Beyond this textual surface, the analysis proceeded to latent content, which was explicitly divided into two analytical sublayers: the illocutionary and perlocutionary levels. At the illocutionary level, the text was examined through Searle's taxonomy to reveal the underlying intentions and performative forces of the utterances. The perlocutionary level focused on tracing the behavioral responses and psychological effects expected to arise within

the theological-ritual context of prayer. The structural convergence between the two-layer manifest-latent scheme and the pragmatic trichotomy validates the epistemological architecture of the study. It also provides a coherent theoretical foundation requiring the analytical narrative in the Results and Discussion section to follow three consistently interlocking stages for every verse: locution, illocution, and perlocution.

Following structural categorization, the analysis proceeded to contextual interpretation. Al-Fâtiḥah was not examined in a vacuum but was rigorously situated within the ritual context of prayer. Drawing contextual conclusions required convergence between pragmatic data and normative theology. Meanings derived from the pragmatic analysis were then assessed for coherence with the sociological-religious reality of Muslims reciting these verses. This methodological sequence was designed systematically to ensure that the findings remained grounded in empirical linguistic parameters while moving beyond textual limitations toward comprehensive theological significance.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyzing Surah al-Fâtiḥah requires considerable sensitivity to shifts in linguistic function across its verses. The seven opening verses of the Qur'an display diverse and interconnected speech acts that form a dynamic pattern of communication. Each phrase not only conveys information but also represents a verbal act that actively constructs the speaker's attitudes, beliefs, and mental orientation. Using the pragmatic framework adopted in this study, each verse was analyzed sequentially to identify the characteristics of its speech acts. Following the manifest-latent two-layer scheme described in the Methods section, every verse was examined consistently through three interlocking stages: locution as the manifestation of manifest analysis, and illocution and perlocution as the two sublayers of latent analysis. The findings are presented systematically according to the order of the verses.

Verse 1: Bismillâhir-Rahmânir-Rahîm

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse expresses the literal proposition, "In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful." In this utterance, Allah's name is invoked together with two of His principal attributes, Ar-Rahmân and Ar-Rahîm. The articulation of these attributes establishes the literal meaning that forms the basis for interpreting the speech acts at the subsequent levels.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, the verse represents a multidimensional pragmatic function. First, it contains an expressive act because the speaker conveys reverence, praise, and glorification of Allah by invoking His attributes of mercy. A commissive function can also be identified. Invoking Allah's name at the beginning of every activity is understood as the servant's implicit commitment to undertake the entire sequence of worship and the activities of life in accordance with Allah's will, authority, and pleasure, rather than solely from personal interest.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, this utterance is expected to produce a profound psychological effect on the reader. Awareness of Allah's greatness and mercy gradually weakens arrogance and cultivates humility. At the same time, a process of purifying intention begins, prompting the reader to redirect inward orientation from worldly interests toward spiritual readiness to communicate with the Creator.

Verse 2: Al-hamdu lillâhi rabbil-'âlamîn

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse conveys the literal proposition, "All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all worlds." The utterance states that every form of praise is directed absolutely to Allah as the Lord and Sustainer of all creation.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, the assertive (representative) function is the most dominant characteristic. The speaker states a fundamental truth: that all praise and the power to sustain the entire universe belong exclusively to Allah. This assertive function is accompanied by an expressive act manifested in gratitude and reverence toward Allah. The statement concerning Allah's oneness and omnipotence therefore conveys not only factual information but also the speaker's inward acknowledgment of the blessings received.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, the verse is expected to awaken spiritual and cosmic awareness in the reader. The human position as a small part of the universe under Allah's care is recognized more deeply. This awareness then fosters submission, humility, and gratitude while restraining the tendency to prioritize material interests.

Verse 3: Ar-Rahmânir-Rahîm

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse repeats the literal proposition, "The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful." The repetition reaffirms the two principal attributes of Allah introduced in the preceding verse without adding new information at the level of literal meaning.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, this verse is dominated by an assertive (representative) function. By repeating the two attributes, the speaker reaffirms that mercy is a defining attribute of Allah. This affirmation strengthens the belief that Allah is the Lord who continually bestows compassion and mercy upon all His creatures. The repetition therefore not only reiterates information but also reinforces the speaker's theological understanding of Allah's attributes.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, the repetition of the attributes Ar-Rahmân and Ar-Rahîm is expected to cultivate a sense of security, tranquility, and hope in the reader.

Verse 4: Mâliki Yaumid-Dîn

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse expresses the literal proposition, "Master or Sovereign of the Day of Judgment." The utterance states that complete authority over the Day of Judgment rests with Allah as the sole sovereign entitled to pronounce judgment on the Last Day.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, the verse combines assertive (representative) and expressive functions. The assertive function appears in the affirmation that the Day of Judgment will certainly occur as part of Islamic eschatological belief. An expressive dimension is also evident because the utterance reflects the speaker's acknowledgment of Allah's greatness as Sovereign of the Day of Judgment. This acknowledgment implies fear, submission, and profound reverence for the divine justice that will be established on the Last Day.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, this verse is expected to awaken deeper moral awareness in the reader. It encourages self-examination (muhasabah), greater vigilance regarding one's conduct, and a sense of fear (khauf) balanced by an awareness of the importance of preparing for the Day of Judgment.

Verse 5: Iyyâka Na'budu wa Iyyâka Nasta'in

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse expresses the literal proposition, "You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help." The utterance states that devotion and the request for assistance are directed exclusively to Allah.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, the verse combines commissive and directive functions. The phrase *iyâka na'budu* represents a commissive act because the speaker pledges complete devotion to Allah and affirms a willingness to worship Him alone. The phrase *iyâka nasta'in*, meanwhile, begins to introduce a directive dimension through a request for Allah's assistance.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, this verse is expected to cultivate awareness of humanity's dependence on Allah in every aspect of life. In addition, the use of the plural pronoun *na* ("we") as a textual marker evokes a collective awareness in the reader: individual identity is incorporated into the community of believers, thereby fostering awareness of the equal standing of all servants before Allah.

Verse 6: Ihdinash-Shirâthal-Mustaqîm

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse takes the form of an imperative clause meaning, "Guide us to the straight path." The utterance expresses a request that Allah guide human beings to follow the right path.

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, this verse is dominated by a directive function expressed as prayer or supplication. Although it uses an imperative grammatical form, the utterance is not intended as a command addressed to Allah. Rather, the imperative expresses the humility of a servant seeking guidance and direction in life.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, this verse is expected to foster awareness of the importance of Allah's guidance as a foundation for decision-making and living one's life. The reader is encouraged to continue seeking truth and evaluating every choice to ensure that it accords with the values pleasing to Allah.

Verse 7: Shirâthal-Ladzîna An'amta 'Alaihim, Ghairil-Maghdlûbi 'Alaihim wa Ladl-Dlâlîn

Locutionary Act. At the locutionary level, this verse explains the meaning of the "straight path": "The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have incurred wrath, nor of those who have gone astray."

Illocutionary Act. At the illocutionary level, this verse combines assertive (representative) and directive functions. The assertive function appears in the description of three groups of people: those who receive Allah's favor, those who incur His wrath, and those who have gone astray. A directive function can also be identified implicitly: the speaker simultaneously asks to be enabled to remain on the path of those who have received Allah's favor and to be kept away from paths leading to wrath and error.

Perlocutionary Act. At the perlocutionary level, this verse is expected to strengthen the reader's moral awareness when making life choices. It cultivates cautious restraint (*wara'*) in decision-making and a stronger commitment to remain on the path pleasing to Allah.

Table 1. Distribution of illocutionary act types across the seven verses of Surah al-Fâtiḥah. The category of declarations does not occur in any verse, a finding discussed further in the Conclusion section

V.	Illocutionary Type	Description
1	Expressive, Commissive	Praise for Allah's mercy; an implicit commitment to undertake activities in His name
2	Assertive (dominant), Expressive	Affirmation of Allah's sovereignty over the universe; an expression of gratitude
3	Assertive	Reaffirmation of the attributes Ar-Rahmân and Ar-Rahîm
4	Assertive, Expressive	Affirmation of the Day of Judgment; acknowledgment of Allah's greatness
5	Commissive, Directive	Pledge of exclusive devotion; request for assistance—the pivotal point
6	Directive (dominant)	Request for guidance to the straight path
7	Assertive, Directive	Description of three groups of people; an implicit plea for protection from error

Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

This study finds that the pragmatic construction of Surah al-Fâtiḥah centers on expressive and assertive speech acts combined with recurring commissive markers in the opening section, which establish the foundation for directive speech acts in the closing section. The findings reveal both methodological intersections and marked disparities when compared with previous scholarship. In comparison with Kasmani (2019), who likewise applied Searle's taxonomy directly, this study identifies a significant difference in focus: Kasmani applied the theory to an interactive dialogic text (hadith) to map the Prophet's communication strategies toward the Bedouin, whereas the present study applies it to a monologic liturgical text. Miller (1994), by contrast, examined prayer texts in depth but used form criticism and theology to map a typology of biblical prayer without addressing the pragmatic structure of utterances. Although Schaller (1988) earlier elaborated performative language theory to analyze ritual in general, that study did not specify how different classes of speech acts operate and interrelate within a complete liturgical text. The novelty of the present study in relation to these three works therefore lies in demonstrating that Searle's taxonomy can reveal pragmatic hierarchies and dependencies within a liturgical text: the illocutionary classifications in al-Fâtiḥah do not merely stand as isolated utterances or persuasion strategies; rather, they show how the felicity conditions for the directive acts in verses 6–7 are progressively established through expressive, assertive, and commissive acts in the preceding verses.

The verse-by-verse analysis demonstrates that the pragmatic phenomena arising when Surah al-Fâtiḥah is recited during prayer extend beyond conventional communication. In this context, the concept of the sacred speech act provides a relevant foundation for explaining

communication between human beings and Allah. In interpersonal communication, speech acts are generally used to convey information that the addressee does not yet know. This condition does not apply in prayer, however, because the addressee is Allah, the Omniscient. Reciting Surah al-Fâtiḥah is therefore not intended to transmit new information to Allah; rather, it performs a function that forms and reinforces the speaker's spiritual orientation.

The principle of ritual performativity is clearly operative in this context. Whenever a servant recites the seven verses of Surah al-Fâtiḥah—which must be repeated at least seventeen times each day in the obligatory prayers—the resulting utterance is more than the reading of a text. Through the utterance, the speaker simultaneously performs social and spiritual actions. Praise of Allah, commitment to worship Him alone, and supplication for guidance are continually renewed through ritual repetition. This repetition therefore not only sustains the communicative function of language but also reshapes the speaker's worldview, orientation, and spiritual awareness.

The dynamics of sacred speech acts are shaped by the asymmetrical relationship between speaker and addressee. In prayer, the human being occupies the position of a dependent and limited creature under Allah's authority, whereas Allah is understood as the Almighty, possessing absolute authority. Within this framework, an imperative syntactic form such as "Guide us!" is not interpreted as a command addressed to Allah. Instead, its imperative meaning is understood as a directive speech act realized as prayer or supplication.

The repeated recitation of Surah al-Fâtiḥah in every prayer also strengthens the internalization of its theological values. Assertive functions sustain an understanding of the principles of tawḥid, whereas directive functions represent the continuous supplication for Allah's guidance. The commissive function, particularly in the utterance *iyyâka na'budu*, reaffirms the servant's commitment to worship Allah alone. These three functions form a complementary speech-act structure. Consequently, Surah al-Fâtiḥah functions not only as an obligatory recitation in prayer but also as a means of shaping moral, spiritual, and religious orientation.

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the utterances in Surah al-Fâtiḥah display a structured, multilayered distribution and progression of illocutionary acts. Based on the identification of illocutionary types, expressive acts occur in verses 1, 2, and 4; assertive acts predominate in verses 2, 3, 4, and 7; commissive acts occur in verses 1 and 5; and directive acts are concentrated in verses 5, 6, and 7. A crucial feature of the text is the complete absence of declarations from all seven verses. This absence is logically consistent with the argument concerning an asymmetrical relationship: declarations presuppose that the speaker possesses the authority and power to alter reality, whereas al-Fâtiḥah functions as a manifestation of the servant's submission to Allah. With regard to the progression of the utterances, most verses simultaneously perform more than one illocutionary act along a unidirectional pragmatic trajectory: it begins with an expressive-assertive-commissive constellation in the opening section and culminates in an escalation of directives in the closing section. This configuration positions the fifth verse as the pivotal point that directly and precisely integrates commissive and directive articulation.

Within the domain of ritual performativity, the recitation of Surah al-Fâtiḥah operates as a sacred speech act that affirms a vertical asymmetrical relationship. Its repetition seventeen times each day performatively renews the servant's spiritual commitment. Theoretically, the principal conceptual contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the felicity conditions for the supplications, or directive acts, in verses 6 and 7 are progressively established through the preconditions formed by the expressive, assertive, and commissive acts in the preceding verses. This conclusion extends the discourse on the pragmatics of sacred texts and addresses a gap not covered by previous comparative studies, including Kasmani's (2019) focus on dialogic strategies, Miller's (1994) form-critical analysis, and Schaller's (1988) examination of general performative theory, which did not elaborate the specificity and hierarchical relationships among classes of speech acts.

Despite its analytical novelty, this study has inherent limitations. First, it relies on a single corpus; consequently, the constellation of illocutionary patterns identified may not represent the pragmatic anatomy of other surahs. Second, the perlocutionary dimension described here is exclusively interpretive and textual: it constitutes a theoretical prediction of utterance effects rather than an empirical measurement of actual speakers. In view of these limitations, future studies should replicate the sacred speech act framework in texts that are also recited regularly, such as Ayat al-Kursi or the three short surahs commonly recited in prayer (al-Ikhlâsh, al-Falaq, and an-Nâs). Empirical reception studies are also strongly recommended to test whether the perlocutionary effects predicted in this text are actually experienced and realized in speakers' spiritual awareness in practice.

REFERENCES

- Abdul-Raof, Hussein. *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*. London: Routledge, 2010.
- Alwan, R. H. "A Pragmatic Study of Directive Illocutionary Acts in the Qur'anic Discourse." 6, no. 1 (2025): 1–7. [the full journal name corresponding to the acronym HJHCS has not yet been confirmed; the remaining details follow the list provided by the author]
- Badawi, Elsaid M., and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. *Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Canale, Michael, and Merrill Swain. "Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing." *Applied Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (1980): 1–47
- Clive Holes, *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004).
- El-Awa, Salwa M. *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic–English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
- Heilan, T. A. "Speech Act Theory (A Textual Study in the Light of the Noble Qur'an)." *ARID International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (AIJSSH)* 6, no. 2 (2024).
- Holes, Clive. *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties*. Rev. ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2004.

- Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis* (London: Routledge, 2010).
- Hymes, Dell. "On Communicative Competence." In *Sociolinguistics: Selected Readings*, edited by J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes, 269–293. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.
- Kasmani, Mohd Faizal. "Muhammad's Conversations with the Bedouin: A Speech-Act Analysis of Prophetic Discourse in Hadith." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 17, no. 1 (2019). [the author's name still requires direct verification against the journal webpage]
- Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
- Khazaleh, H. A. D., A. A. Sapar, and J. Mohd. Jan. "A Pragmatic Analysis of the Speech Act of Supplication in the Holy Quran." *Al-Dhad* 7, no. 1 (2023). [not independently verified; the details follow the list provided by the author]
- Mariska, Liza, Iwan Kurniawan, and Dian Reftyawati. "Speech Acts in English Translation of Quran Surah Al-Fatihah and Surah Al-A'laa By Abdullah Yusuf Ali." *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 3, no. 1 (2022): 105–114.
- Miller, Patrick D. *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994.
- Mohd Faizal Kasmani, "Muhammad's Conversations with the Bedouin: A Speech-Act Analysis of Prophetic Discourse in Hadith," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 17, no. 1 (2019).
- Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).
- Salwa M. El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (London: Routledge, 2006).
- Schaller, J. J. "Performative Language Theory: An Exercise in the Analysis of Ritual." *Worship* 62 (1988): 415–432. [identified through a secondary citation; not yet verified against the primary source]
- Versteegh, Kees. *The Arabic Language*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.