

Politeness Strategies in Qur'anic Communication: A Pragmatic Exploration

Ahmad Zulfadhli Nokman

Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Terengganu Branch, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Politeness plays a fundamental role in achieving effective communication by promoting respect, cooperation, and social harmony. While politeness has been extensively examined in interpersonal communication, its application to Qur'anic discourse remains underexplored. This study investigates politeness strategies in Qur'anic communication from a pragmatic perspective through integrating Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Leech's General Strategy regarding Politeness, Speech Act Theory, and Islamic communication principles derived from the Qur'anic concepts of *Qaulan Sadidan*, *Qaulan Ma'rufa*, *Qaulan Layyina*, *Qaulan Karima*, *Qaulan Maysura*, and *Qaulan Baligha*. Employing a qualitative document analysis approach, selected Qur'anic verses representing commands, prohibitions, advice, invitations, narratives, and dialogues were analysed through thematic and pragmatic discourse analyses. The results show that the Qur'an systematically employs positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies to communicate divine guidance while preserving human dignity, promoting reflection, and promoting voluntary acceptance rather than coercion. Directive speech acts are consistently mitigated through kindness, wisdom, compassion, and respectful language, demonstrating that politeness functions not simply as a linguistic strategy but as an ethical and communicative principle. Furthermore, the study shows that Qur'anic communication integrates pragmatic effectiveness with moral responsibility, extending conventional face-saving models by grounding politeness within divine principles and goals. The proposed integrated framework contributes to Arabic pragmatics, Qur'anic discourse studies, and Islamic communication by delivering a more in-depth understanding of politeness in sacred discourse and laying the starting point for future empirical research.

Keywords: Qur'anic communication; politeness strategies; pragmatics; speech acts; Islamic communication; Qur'anic discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Language is not simply a medium for conveying information but also a tool for establishing interpersonal relationships, preserving social harmony, and influencing human behaviour. One of the key aspects of good communication is politeness, which reflects respect, empathy, and sensitivity toward others. Within pragmatics, politeness has been widely investigated through influential frameworks such as Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Leech's Politeness Principle (2014). These theories explain how speakers employ linguistic strategies to preserve face, minimise conflict, and accomplish communicative goals (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014).

Although politeness has been extensively examined in interpersonal, institutional, educational, and intercultural communication, relatively little attention has been devoted to politeness strategies in Qur'anic communication. The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic guidance, demonstrates a distinctive communicative style characterised by linguistic precision, rhetorical sophistication, and ethical values (Abdel Haleem, 2005). Its discourse encompasses commands, prohibitions, narratives, advice, promises, warnings, and dialogues, all delivered in language that preserves human dignity while successfully conveying divine guidance.

From a pragmatic perspective, Qur'anic communication goes beyond maintaining interpersonal harmony. Its communicative strategies seek to educate, persuade, reform behaviour, and strengthen the relationship between

Allah and humanity. Consequently, conventional politeness theories alone might not sufficiently explain the pragmatic functions regarding politeness within divine discourse (Al-Ameedi & Al-Hindawi, 2022). Integrating pragmatic theories with Islamic communication principles may therefore deliver a more complete understanding of politeness in the Qur'an.

This study intends to explore politeness strategies in Qur'anic communication through a pragmatic lens by analysing selected Qur'anic verses. It aims to identify the linguistic realisation of politeness strategies, explain their communicative functions, and develop a conceptual framework that contributes to Arabic pragmatics, Qur'anic discourse studies, and Islamic communication.

Background of the Study

Pragmatics is concerned with how meaning is constructed within specific communicative contexts rather than through linguistic forms alone (Yule, 2020). Among its central concerns is politeness, which investigates how speakers achieve communicative objectives while preserving harmonious social relationships. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face Theory and Leech's (2014) General Strategy of Politeness remain the most influential theoretical frameworks in this field.

However, these theories were primarily developed based on human interpersonal communication and may not fully account for the communicative characteristics of divine revelation. The Qur'an represents a unique discourse whose main objective is guidance rather than ordinary conversation. Its language demonstrates remarkable contextual appropriateness, rhetorical variation, and persuasive power. Commands are frequently accompanied by encouragement, prohibitions by wisdom and explanation, and narratives by moral reflection, illustrating sophisticated pragmatic strategies (Abdel Haleem, 2005).

Islamic communication further introduces indigenous principles such as *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan baligha*, *qaulan ma'rufa*, *qaulan layyina*, *qaulan karima*, and *qaulan maysura*, all of which emphasise truthful, gentle, respectful, and appropriate speech (Rahman, 2020). These principles complement contemporary pragmatic theories and offer an Islamic perspective on politeness that has yet to be systematically integrated into linguistic studies.

Problem Statement

Research on linguistic politeness has predominantly focused on everyday communication, institutional discourse, media interactions, and intercultural communication (Leech, 2014). Although scholars have investigated various pragmatic features of Qur'anic discourse—including speech acts, implicature, deixis, and rhetorical devices—few studies have examined politeness strategies as the primary focus of analysis (Al-Ameedi & Al-Hindawi, 2022).

Existing studies also tend to apply Western politeness theories directly to Qur'anic discourse without considering the theological and ethical objectives that distinguish divine communication from ordinary human interaction. Consequently, communicative functions such as moral persuasion, spiritual guidance, and compassionate instruction may not be fully explained through face-saving models alone.

Furthermore, there is still no comprehensive framework that integrates contemporary politeness theories with Islamic communication principles to explain politeness in Qur'anic discourse. This theoretical gap limits our understanding of how politeness contributes to the Qur'an's persuasive and educational functions. Therefore, this study attempts to close this gap by developing a pragmatic framework founded in both linguistic theory and Islamic communication principles.

Significance of the Study

The study contributes theoretically by extending politeness research into the domain of sacred discourse. It also enriches Arabic pragmatics through integrating Western politeness theories with Islamic communication principles, thereby broadening existing models of pragmatic analysis (Leech, 2014; Al-Ameedi & Al-Hindawi, 2022).

Methodologically, the research shows the applicability of pragmatic discourse analysis to Qur'anic texts while maintaining sensitivity to their linguistic, rhetorical, and contextual dimensions.

Practically, the findings may benefit researchers in Arabic linguistics, Qur'anic studies, Islamic communication, and Arabic language education by providing insights into effective, ethical, and contextually appropriate communication.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that combines four complementary perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of politeness in Qur'anic communication. Since the Qur'an represents divine discourse with distinctive communicative objectives, no single pragmatic theory is sufficient to explain its linguistic and rhetorical characteristics. Therefore, the framework synthesises contemporary pragmatics with Islamic communication principles to analyse how politeness functions within Qur'anic discourse.

The first component is Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), which provides the primary analytical framework for identifying politeness strategies. The theory distinguishes between positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald-on-record strategies, all of which are used to manage face-threatening acts while maintaining interpersonal relationships. In this study, the theory is used to examine how Qur'anic discourse communicates commands, prohibitions, advice, and invitations in ways that preserve human dignity while successfully conveying divine guidance.

The second component is Leech's General Strategy of Politeness (2014), which complements Brown and Levinson's model by emphasising communicative principles such as generosity, tact, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Unlike face-oriented approaches, Leech's framework stresses how politeness contributes to interpersonal harmony and cooperative communication. Applying this perspective allows the study to explain how Qur'anic language promotes ethical interaction, social cohesion, and courteous communication beyond the mere management of face.

The third component is Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969), which classifies utterances according to their communicative functions, including directives, representatives, expressives, commissives, and declarations. This theory is particularly relevant because Qur'anic discourse comprises various speech acts, including commands, prohibitions, promises, warnings, narratives, and invitations. By analysing these speech acts alongside politeness strategies, the study explores how different communicative functions are realised pragmatically and how they contribute to the Qur'an's persuasive and educational objectives.

The fourth component comprises Islamic Communication Principles, which are derived from the Qur'anic concepts of *qaulan sadidan* (truthful speech), *qaulan baligha* (effective and persuasive speech), *qaulan ma'rufa* (kind speech), *qaulan karima* (honourable speech), *qaulan layyina* (gentle speech), and *qaulan maysura* (easy and comforting speech). These principles constitute the moral foundation of communication in Islam and offer an indigenous perspective on politeness that aligns with contemporary pragmatic theories. Integrating these Qur'anic principles allows the study to interpret politeness not only as a linguistic strategy for managing interpersonal relationships but also as a moral responsibility that promotes justice, compassion, wisdom, and respect in human communication.

By integrating these four perspectives, the proposed framework offers a holistic approach to analysing politeness in Qur'anic communication. It connects Western pragmatic theories and Islamic communication principles, offering a more comprehensive explanation of how linguistic strategies, communicative intentions, and ethical values work together to achieve the Qur'an's objectives of guidance, persuasion, and moral development. This integrated framework also addresses the limitations of applying conventional politeness theories to sacred discourse and provides a stronger theoretical foundation for future research in Arabic pragmatics, Qur'anic discourse studies, and Islamic communication.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach (Bowen, 2009). Data will consist of selected Qur'anic verses supported by classical and contemporary tafsir literature. Purposive sampling will be employed to select verses representing various communicative functions. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and pragmatic discourse analysis to identify politeness strategies and interpret their communicative functions. The findings will then be synthesised to develop an integrated framework of Qur'anic politeness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness has long been recognised as a basic element of pragmatic competence, promoting successful communication by preserving interpersonal relationships and social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014). Although politeness theory has been extensively applied to interpersonal and intercultural communication, its application to Qur'anic discourse has only recently begun to receive systematic scholarly attention. Existing studies show that the Qur'an uses sophisticated linguistic strategies that advance ethical communication while simultaneously fulfilling its divine objectives of guidance, persuasion, and moral education.

One of the earliest in-depth studies is Al-Khatib (2012), who examined politeness in the Holy Qur'an from sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives. The study argues that Qur'anic discourse cannot be adequately interpreted solely through conventional linguistic analysis, as its communicative functions are deeply embedded in religious, ethical, and social contexts. Al-Khatib concludes that the Qur'an consistently employs respectful and contextually appropriate expressions that minimise confrontation while maximising the persuasive effect of divine messages. This work created an important foundation for viewing Qur'anic discourse as a legitimate domain of pragmatic inquiry.

Later research has progressively adopted established politeness theories to analyse Qur'anic communication. Al Momani et al. (2018) investigated politeness strategies in the representation of women in the Holy Qur'an. Drawing upon Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, the authors show that Qur'anic references to women consistently preserve dignity, respect, and social honour through carefully selected lexical and rhetorical choices. Their studies show that politeness in the Qur'an goes beyond face-saving strategies and functions as a mechanism for promoting ethical values and protecting human dignity. Nevertheless, the study focuses specifically on gender representation rather than providing a wider account of Qur'anic communication.

Expanding the discussion beyond gender, Ahmad (2021) examined politeness strategies in the Qur'an as a model for interpersonal relationships, particularly within the Nigerian context. The study argues that Qur'anic communication provides practical guidance for promoting peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and conflict resolution in multicultural societies. Ahmad indicates that the Qur'an employs indirectness, respectful forms of address, and compassionate expressions that encourage positive interpersonal behaviour. However, the research mainly emphasises the social application of Qur'anic communication rather than conducting a detailed pragmatic analysis of its linguistic mechanisms.

Recent scholarship has further diversified the scope of Qur'anic politeness studies. Arifianto et al. (2023) explored politeness in the prayers of prophets narrated in the Qur'an. Their analysis demonstrates that prophetic supplications consistently employ humility, gratitude, indirect requests, and self-effacement, all of which reflect positive politeness and deference toward Allah. The study illustrates that politeness functions not merely as an interpersonal strategy but also as a communicative expression of faith, submission, and spiritual intimacy. This finding expands the understanding of politeness by incorporating the vertical relationship between human beings and the Divine.

Similarly, Ismath et al. (2023) analysed politeness in marital relationships depicted in the Qur'an using both pragmatic theory and cultural intelligence perspectives. Their results show that Qur'anic discourse encourages harmonious family relationships through respectful speech, empathy, mutual consideration, and indirect advice. By integrating pragmatics with cultural intelligence, the study shows that Qur'anic communication promotes

both linguistic appropriateness and emotional sensitivity. Nevertheless, its analysis remains limited to family discourse and does not propose a comprehensive model of Qur'anic politeness.

A important theoretical development appears in the works of Saleh et al. (2025, 2026), who propose a religio-pragmatic approach to analysing face-saving strategies in Qur'anic prohibitive and imperative discourse. Their studies argue that divine communication employs mitigation, contextual justification, and compassionate expressions to preserve human dignity even when delivering commands and prohibitions. Rather than viewing politeness merely as interpersonal face management, they conceptualise it as an expression of divine identity that integrates ethical instruction with linguistic appropriateness. These studies represent an important advancement by demonstrating that conventional politeness theories require adaptation when applied to sacred texts.

Beyond Qur'anic studies, research on Arabic politeness also highlights the influence of religion on communicative behaviour. Bouchara (2015) investigated greeting expressions in Moroccan Arabic and found that Islamic values significantly shape politeness conventions and intercultural communication. Although the study focuses on spoken Moroccan Arabic rather than Qur'anic discourse, it provides evidence that religious principles continue to influence Arabic politeness practices across different communicative settings.

Collectively, the existing literature demonstrates growing scholarly interest in Qur'anic politeness from sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and religio-pragmatic perspectives. The studies consistently show that Qur'anic communication employs strategies such as indirectness, mitigation, respectful address, humility, solidarity, and contextual adaptation to achieve guidance while preserving dignity and encouraging voluntary compliance. These findings also indicate that politeness in the Qur'an serves multiple communicative functions, including persuasion, moral education, conflict avoidance, and relationship building.

Despite these important contributions, several gaps remain. First, most studies focus on specific themes, such as women, prayers, marital communication, or imperative and prohibitive discourse, rather than providing a holistic analysis of politeness strategies across diverse communicative contexts in the Qur'an. Second, the majority rely primarily on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, with limited integration of Leech's General Strategy of Politeness or Islamic communication principles such as *qaulan sadidan*, *qaulan ma'rufa*, *qaulan karima*, and *qaulan layyina*. Third, there remains no comprehensive pragmatic framework that synthesises Western politeness theories with indigenous Islamic communication concepts to explain the distinctive characteristics of Qur'anic discourse.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address these gaps by undertaking a comprehensive pragmatic exploration of politeness strategies in Qur'anic communication. By analysing a broader range of communicative contexts and integrating contemporary politeness theories with Islamic communication principles, the study aims to propose a more comprehensive framework for understanding politeness in divine discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the Qur'an systematically incorporates politeness strategies across diverse communicative contexts, indicating that politeness is a fundamental principle rather than merely a stylistic feature of religious discourse. Rather than functioning solely as linguistic etiquette, politeness in the Qur'an serves as a pragmatic mechanism for achieving ethical, social, and communicative objectives. This finding is consistent with recent studies that argue Qur'anic communication integrates rhetorical excellence with moral guidance, making language an instrument for both persuasion and character development (Ahmad & Ghafar, 2025).

A notable finding is the predominance of directive speech acts, including commands, advice, prohibitions, and invitations. According to Searle (1979), directive speech acts are intended to influence the behaviour of the hearer by encouraging or discouraging particular actions. However, unlike ordinary directives, which often threaten the hearer's face, the Qur'an consistently mitigates such face-threatening acts through politeness strategies. This demonstrates that divine commands are communicated in ways that preserve interpersonal harmony while maintaining moral authority.

Table 1: Analysis of the Quranic Verse.

Qur'anic Verse	Communicative Function	Speech Act	Politeness Strategy	Qur'anic Principle	Pragmatic Function
2:83	Command	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Ma'rufa</i>	Promotes social harmony and kindness in interpersonal relationships
2:256 "There shall be no compulsion in religion."	Declaration	Representative	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Sadidan</i>	Respects individual autonomy while presenting divine truth
3:159 "Speak gently and consult them..."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Layyina</i>	Builds trust, consultation, and social cohesion
4:5 "Speak to them kindly."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Ma'rufa</i>	Protects dignity of vulnerable individuals
4:8 "Speak to them words of kindness."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Ma'rufa</i>	Demonstrates compassion and generosity
4:9 "Let them speak words of appropriate justice."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Sadidan</i>	Encourages truthful and responsible communication
17:23 "Do not even say 'uff' to your parents."	Prohibition	Directive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Karima</i>	Preserves respect and family harmony
17:28 "Speak to them a gentle word."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Maysura</i>	Softens refusal and protects the hearer's feelings
17:53 "Tell My servants to say that which is best."	Command	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Sadidan</i>	Prevents conflict and promotes peaceful interaction
20:44 "Speak to him gently."	Command	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Layyina</i>	Softens confrontation even with an oppressor
16:125 "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom..."	Invitation	Directive	Off-record / Indirect Strategy	<i>Qaulan Baligha</i>	Encourages persuasion rather than coercion
25:63 "When the ignorant address them harshly, they say 'Peace'."	Response	Expressive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Layyina</i>	Avoids conflict and de-escalates hostility
31:19 "Lower your voice."	Advice	Directive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Layyina</i>	Demonstrates humility and moderation

33:70 "Speak words of appropriate justice."	Command	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Sadidan</i>	Encourages honesty and moral integrity
41:34 "Repel evil with that which is better."	Advice	Directive	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Ma'rufa</i>	Transforms hostility into friendship
49:11 "Do not ridicule one another."	Prohibition	Directive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Karima</i>	Protects dignity and positive face
49:12 "Avoid much suspicion..."	Prohibition	Directive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Sadidan</i>	Promotes trust and social harmony
49:13 "We created you into nations and tribes..."	Information	Representative	Positive Politeness	<i>Qaulan Ma'rufa</i>	Encourages mutual respect and equality
55:60 "Is there any reward for goodness except goodness?"	Rhetorical Question	Representative	Off-record Strategy	<i>Qaulan Baligha</i>	Persuades through reflection rather than direct instruction
93:9–10 "Do not oppress the orphan... do not repel the beggar."	Prohibition	Directive	Negative Politeness	<i>Qaulan Karima</i>	Protects vulnerable members of society

The analysis shows that positive politeness is the most frequently employed strategy. Verses such as 2:83, 3:159, 4:5, 4:8, 17:53, 33:70, 41:34, and 49:13 emphasize kindness, consultation, compassion, truthful speech, reconciliation, and equality. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness aims to reduce social distance by emphasizing solidarity, shared values, and mutual respect. The findings suggest that Qur'anic communication consistently promotes cooperation rather than coercion. Although Allah possesses absolute authority, the Qur'an frequently frames directives within expressions of empathy, encouragement, and concern for human welfare. This observation supports recent pragmatic research which argues that politeness strategies enhance persuasive effectiveness by strengthening interpersonal relationships and facilitating voluntary acceptance of the intended message (Haugh & Kádár, 2021; Kádár & Haugh, 2023).

The findings also demonstrate the significant role of negative politeness, particularly in verses concerning respect for personal dignity and individual autonomy. For example, 2:256 ("There shall be no compulsion in religion"), 17:23, 49:11, 49:12, and 93:9–10 protect the hearer's personal rights while discouraging behaviours that may harm others. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe negative politeness as a strategy that minimizes imposition and acknowledges the hearer's freedom of action. The Qur'an reflects this principle by balancing divine guidance with respect for human agency. Even when prohibiting undesirable behaviour, the discourse avoids humiliation and instead preserves the audience's dignity. This aligns with recent studies suggesting that respectful communication contributes to trust, social cohesion, and conflict prevention in both religious and secular contexts (Haugh & Kádár, 2021).

Although less frequent, off-record politeness strategies are also evident. Verses such as 16:125 encourage inviting others with wisdom and beautiful preaching, while 55:60 employs a rhetorical question to stimulate reflection rather than imposing a direct command. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that off-record strategies reduce direct imposition by allowing hearers to infer the intended meaning independently. In the Qur'an, these indirect forms of communication encourage critical reflection and voluntary acceptance of divine guidance. Such findings demonstrate that persuasion in the Qur'an is achieved through reasoning and wisdom rather than coercion, consistent with contemporary pragmatic studies that identify indirectness as an effective persuasive strategy in sensitive communicative contexts (Kádár & Haugh, 2023).

An equally significant finding is the close relationship between politeness strategies and the Qur'anic communication principles of Qaulan Ma'rufa, Qaulan Sadidan, Qaulan Layyina, Qaulan Karima, Qaulan Maysura, and Qaulan Baligha. These principles extend beyond linguistic choices by establishing ethical norms governing human interaction. For example, *Qaulan Ma'rufa* is consistently associated with kindness, generosity, and social harmony, whereas *Qaulan Sadidan* emphasizes truthful, honest, and responsible communication. Likewise, *Qaulan Layyina* advocates gentle speech even when addressing hostile individuals, as demonstrated in 20:44, where Prophet Musa is instructed to speak gently to Pharaoh. These findings reinforce the argument that Qur'anic communication integrates pragmatic effectiveness with moral responsibility, reflecting the Qur'an's broader objective of cultivating ethical character (Ahmad & Ghafar, 2025).

The relationship between speech acts and politeness strategies is another important contribution of this study. Almost all directive speech acts identified in the selected verses are accompanied by either positive or negative politeness strategies. This suggests that the Qur'an intentionally softens the potentially face-threatening nature of directives through expressions of compassion, wisdom, justice, and respect. Consequently, divine authority is exercised without undermining interpersonal dignity. This finding extends Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory by demonstrating that politeness strategies are not merely social conventions but can also function as moral instruments within religious discourse.

Furthermore, the identified pragmatic functions consistently emphasize the promotion of social harmony, trust, compassion, justice, humility, equality, conflict resolution, and protection of vulnerable individuals. These communicative objectives indicate that politeness in the Qur'an serves broader societal purposes beyond successful interpersonal interaction. The repeated emphasis on preserving dignity and preventing social conflict suggests that effective communication is essential for establishing peaceful and just communities. Similar conclusions have been reported in contemporary Islamic communication studies, which describe Qur'anic discourse as integrating linguistic excellence with ethical and social transformation (Ahmad & Ghafar, 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Qur'an presents a comprehensive model of communication in which speech acts, politeness strategies, and ethical communication principles (Qaulan) operate as an integrated framework. While Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory provides a valuable analytical lens for examining the interpersonal aspects of Qur'anic discourse, the present findings suggest that Qur'anic politeness extends beyond face management, grounding communication in divine ethical values. Therefore, politeness in the Qur'an should be understood not only as a pragmatic strategy for effective communication but also as a moral obligation that promotes justice, compassion, and harmonious human relationships.

CONCLUSION

This concept paper proposes an integrated pragmatic investigation into politeness strategies in Qur'anic communication. By synthesizing contemporary politeness theories with Islamic communication principles, the study seeks to advance the understanding of Qur'anic discourse beyond conventional face-saving models. The proposed framework is expected to contribute to Arabic pragmatics, Qur'anic linguistics, Islamic communication, and Arabic language pedagogy while providing a foundation for future empirical research.

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