

The Significance of the Imperative in the Context of the Qur'anic Text

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Abstract:

Semantics is a branch of linguistics through which the meanings of lexical items can be accessed via contexts of speech. The science of meanings is one of the three Arabic rhetorical sciences—*ma'ānī* (semantics), *bayān* (elucidation), and *badī'* (embellishment)—and it is closely connected to sentence construction and structure. Rhetoricians paid great attention to stylistic forms, particularly the imperative constructive styles, among which the imperative occupies a prominent place, as it is one of the most frequently used styles due to its close connection with religious discourse. Interest in studying it stems from its importance and status in issuing prescriptive rulings and distinguishing between what is lawful and unlawful. Accordingly, to what extent does the semantic value of the imperative appear in religious texts, whether explicit or implicit, that require interpretation?

Keywords: semantics, context, construction, imperative, the Holy Qur'an.

Introduction:

The imperative is considered one of the most prominent constructive styles in the Holy Qur'an, as it carries multiple meanings that go beyond mere request. The basic meaning of the imperative form is obligation, which is a binding request from God Almighty to His servants. However, the Qur'anic context may shift the meaning of the imperative from obligation to other meanings. This topic has been extensively discussed in the works of legal theorists, as the imperative is the foundation of speech, and speech itself has a long history, especially in the debates between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. Consequently, the issue of internal (mental) speech was raised alongside the issue of the imperative, and related questions were discussed, such as which constitutes the reality: internal speech or the external form that indicates it.

Semantics is considered a branch of the Arabic language through which the meanings of words can be accessed via speech contexts. The science of meanings is one of the three Arabic rhetorical sciences—*ma‘ānī*, *bayān*, and *badī‘*—and it is closely connected to sentence structure and composition. Rhetoricians showed great interest in stylistic forms, particularly imperative constructive styles, among which the imperative stands out as the most frequently used, due to its close association with religious discourse. Interest in its study is attributed to its importance and position in issuing prescriptive rulings and distinguishing between lawful and unlawful acts.

We also find that the principles-based rulings in rhetorical issues are rational rather than purely artistic. Legal theorists gravitated toward the domain of the Arabic language and addressed their issues guided by it, enabling them to judge the correctness or incorrectness of ideas. Their aim was to serve the scientific aspect of *ijtihād* in deriving rulings.

In Arabic usage, an imperative is that which, if not carried out by the one addressed, renders him disobedient, and it is expressed with forms such as “do” (*if‘al*) and “let him do” (*liyaf‘al*), as in the Almighty’s saying:

And establish prayer and give zakāt and bow with those who bow ﴿(2:43). According to rhetoricians, the imperative is a request for action expressed with superiority and obligation; superiority here means that the one who commands considers himself superior, whether in reality or not.

Linguistic issues and their relevance in linguistic discussions in books of legal theory:

The topic of the imperative is among the most frequently addressed subjects in the works of legal theorists, as the imperative constitutes the foundation of speech. Speech itself has a long history, particularly in debates between the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites. Therefore, the issue of internal speech was raised alongside the issue of the imperative, and related questions were discussed.

The term *uṣūl* (principles) in Islamic sciences refers to the science of *uṣūl al-fīqh* (principles of jurisprudence), which is the systematic method of juridical reasoning in Islamic legislation and addresses the foundations upon which legal rulings are established. In *al-Mu‘tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fīqh* it is stated: “As for our statement ‘principles,’ it linguistically refers to that upon which something else is built and from which it branches. As for our statement ‘principles of jurisprudence,’ it linguistically refers to that from which jurisprudence branches, such as monotheism, justice, and the evidences of jurisprudence; and in the jurists’ usage, it refers to

examining the methods of jurisprudence in a general manner regarding how to infer rulings from them.”

Among the most important linguistic issues for legal theorists is “language,” as the linguistic aspect is one of the most essential foundations upon which *uṣūl al-fiqh* is built. This science was established upon the logic and guidance of the Arabic language, which served as the foundational method for deriving rulings from the Qur’an and the Sunnah.

Legal theorists realized the close connection between the Arabic language and the legislative text; therefore, attention to language was among the most important means of accurately understanding the text and clearly defining ideas, as language is connected to legal rulings and their application. Consequently, linguistic issues are invariably present in books of legal theory. We also find Ibn Jinnī, the renowned linguist, who was among the first to extensively adopt the classifications and terminology of legal theorists and apply them to linguistic study in his book *al-Khaṣā’iṣ*. Thus, language occupies a notable position among legal theorists. Ibn al-Ḥājjib defined it as: “Every expression that is assigned to a meaning.”

Legal theorists did not overlook discussing the function of language; they recognized that language has a social function and, by virtue of that function, constitutes a distinctive behavior of certain living beings.

They also raised another issue: the relationship between a word and its usage in a meaning other than that for which it was originally assigned, through metaphor. Metaphorical usage may become more prevalent than the original meaning, or it may be more eloquent in expression or indication than the literal usage.

They also addressed the phenomenon of derivation, recognizing its role in the development of new concepts used in the Arabic environment. This derivational method leads to the emergence of words that share the same form but differ in grammatical function, resulting in a change in meaning.

Construction (*inshā’*) is of two types: imperative and non-imperative. The imperative requires something that is not yet realized at the time of the request, since obtaining what already exists is impossible. The imperative has five types: command, prohibition, wish, interrogation, and vocative. As mentioned earlier, the command is among the most widely circulated and used styles and is the opposite of prohibition. In terminological usage, the command is considered a category of speech, and speech is of two kinds: verbal and mental.

The Mu‘tazilites state: “A command is the request for an action by speech from one who is inferior,” meaning it is mental rather than verbal, and it is indicated by the term “request.” A request is a demand, and demand is an internal matter inherent in the self, constituting its reality and essence. It may also be indicated by gesture, symbol, or action, as evidenced by the Almighty’s saying:

And they say within themselves, ‘Why does Allah not punish us for what we say?’ ﴿(58:8). Thus, speech is what resides within the self, and the tongue is made an indicator of it. The majority of the Mu‘tazilites also hold that the one who commands must be of a higher rank than the one commanded for the request to be called a command; thus, superiority is taken as a condition.

The semantic value of the imperative in the Qur’anic text:

Rhetoricians mention that the imperative has four patterns that substitute for one another. These forms are: the verb in the imperative form, the present tense preceded by the jussive particle *lām* of command, the noun of the imperative, and a verbal noun substituting for the imperative verb. The verses in which the imperative appears in these four forms in the Holy Qur’an amount to 1,958 verses: 1,867 verses with the imperative verb, 79 verses with the present tense preceded by the *lām* of command, four verses with the noun of the imperative, and eight verses with the verbal noun substituting for the imperative verb.

First: The imperative verb form:

The imperative verb frequently appears in the Holy Qur’an due to its connection with the foundations of legislation and the contextual elements within the text. Its abundance is particularly evident in certain derivations, such as the verb “*qul*” (say), which appears in the Qur’an in 332 instances across half of the Qur’anic chapters, totaling 57 sūrahs. Six of these sūrahs contain 141 instances of this verb: al-Baqarah, Āl ‘Imrān, al-An‘ām, al-A‘rāf, Yūnus, and al-Isrā’.

This frequent occurrence may be explained by its connection with obligation in all its aspects, whether in creed, transactions, or communication between the الأمة and its Messenger regarding what he was commanded to convey, peace and blessings be upon him.

In matters of creed, the Almighty says:

Say: To Allah belong the east and the west. He guides whom He wills to a straight path ﴿(2:142). This is a response to the doubts of the Jews and their criticism of religion, affirming that all directions belong to Allah in ownership and sovereignty; none deserves to be a qiblah by itself,

but becomes so because Allah designates it. If this is the case, there can be no objection to changing from one direction to another.

In acts of worship, the Almighty says:

Say: Obey Allah and the Messenger. But if they turn away, then indeed Allah does not love the disbelievers ﴿3:32﴾.

The verse begins with two commands: a command to say that includes obedience, and a command directed to his people, peace and blessings be upon him. Obedience to him is equated with obedience to Allah, as Allah obligated following him because he is a Messenger from Allah. Since the Messenger conveys divine obligations, obedience to him becomes obligatory. According to *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, whoever claims to love Allah while opposing His Messenger is a liar, and the Book of Allah refutes him. The phrase “*fa-in tawallaw*” may be interpreted as past or present tense, meaning “if they turn away,” and it is included among what the Messenger says to them.

In transactions, the Almighty says: ﴿Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and guard their private parts; that is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is Aware of what they do﴾ (24:30). According to al-Bayḍāwī’s interpretation, “lower their gaze” refers to what is toward what is forbidden, and “guard their private parts” except from their spouses or those whom their right hands possess. Since the exception is rare, the command is expressed generally, while lowering the gaze is restricted by the particle of partiality. It is also said that guarding private parts here specifically refers to covering them. “That is purer for them” means more beneficial or purer, as it distances one from suspicion.

In His saying, “Indeed, Allah is Aware of what they do,” nothing is hidden from Him regarding their glances, use of senses, movements of limbs, and intentions. Thus, they should be cautious in every movement and stillness.

The imperative “*qul*” also appears in response to questions, as in the Almighty’s saying: ﴿And they ask you about the mountains. So say: My Lord will blast them away completely﴾ (20:105–107).

That is, about their final fate. The response begins with “say,” linking the Prophet, peace be upon him, with his community: “My Lord will blast them away,” making them like sand, then scattering them by the wind, leaving the land flat and level, without curvature or elevation, even upon close examination.

Among the frequently occurring imperative verbs is “*ittaqu*” (fear), which appears in 69 instances across 23 sūrahs, nearly half of which—34 instances—appear in the first four long sūrahs: al-Baqarah, Āl ‘Imrān, al-Nisā’, and al-Mā’idah.

The Almighty says:

And this is a blessed Book which We have sent down, so follow it and fear Allah that you may receive mercy {(6:155).

Al-Rāzī explains that the Book refers to the Qur’an, described as blessed and permanent, not subject to abrogation. “Follow it” is clear, and “fear Allah that you may receive mercy” has three interpretations: fear disobeying it in hope of mercy; fear so that mercy may be the purpose of piety; or fear so that mercy is the reward for piety.

Another frequently occurring imperative is “*udhkurū*” (remember), which appears in 29 instances, mostly related to reminding people of Allah’s blessings upon them. Among them is the Almighty’s saying:

And [remember] when Moses said to his people: O my people, remember the favor of Allah upon you when He appointed among you prophets and made you kings {(5:20). Ibn ‘Āshūr states that the story includes reminding them of Allah’s blessings and urging them to fulfill what they pledged to Allah in obedience, as a prelude to seeking their compliance.

Among other frequent imperative verbs is “*i‘lamū*” (know), which appears in 27 instances, such as the Almighty’s saying in Sūrat al-Baqarah: }And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him; and give good tidings to the believers {(2:223).

Ibn ‘Āshūr explains that fearing Allah entails adhering to the law by avoiding prohibitions and performing obligations, while “know that you will meet Him” combines warning and encouragement, meaning to meet Him in a manner that pleases Him.

Another frequently occurring imperative is “*kulū*” (eat), which is a permissive command reminding people of Allah’s blessings and His role as the Provider. This verb appears 27 times in the Qur’an, including the Almighty’s saying:

Eat from the good things We have provided for you {(2:160). It is an imperative connected to an omitted statement, meaning “and We said to them: eat.”

Similarly, the verb “*unẓur*” (look/consider) appears 26 times, mostly related to reflection on Allah’s creation, human actions, and the fate of wrongdoers, such as:

}See how We diversify the signs, yet they turn away {(6:46),

﴿Look how they lied against themselves ﴾(6:24), and So look how was the end of the criminals ﴾(6:84).

Likewise, the verb “*iṣbir*” (be patient) appears 19 times. This frequency is explained by the exhortation to endure divine decree and worldly trials. These passages are generally addressed to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, urging patience in the face of hardships encountered in calling to Allah, as in the Almighty’s saying:

So be patient as were those of determination among the messengers ﴾(46:35). Ibn ‘Āshūr explains that the command to be patient is followed by the prohibition of hastening punishment for the polytheists, as haste contradicts resolve, and it urges recalling the patience of previous prophets.

Second: The present tense preceded by the *lām* of command:

The imperative appears in the Qur’an in the form of the present tense preceded by the jussive *lām* of command in 79 instances across 32 sūrahs. Among them is the Almighty’s saying: ﴿And when My servants ask you about Me, indeed I am near. I respond to the call of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be guided ﴾(2:186).

This verse contains two commands: “let them respond” and “let them believe.” The first addresses the servants mentioned, indicating ease of response, while the second reinforces the first and suggests continuity, as stronger faith leads to stronger response.

Another example is the Almighty’s saying:

﴿And let those fear who, if they were to leave behind weak offspring, would be afraid for them; so let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice ﴾(4:9). Al-Zamakhsharī explains that this verse contains three commands: fearing Allah, then piety as the culmination of fear, and then speaking rightly to orphans, as one would speak to one’s own children.

Also among them is the Almighty’s saying: ﴿So let man look at what he was created from ﴾(86:5–6).

Ibn ‘Āshūr explains that this “looking” is intellectual reflection leading to knowledge through reasoning, calling for contemplation and reflection on creation to perfect faith.

Third: The noun of the imperative:

The imperative appears in the Qur'an in the form of the noun of the imperative in four instances: two with "*halumma*" in Sūrat al-An'ām and Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, one with "*'alaykum*" in Sūrat al-Mā'idah, and one with "*hayta*" in Sūrat Yūsuf.

Regarding "*halumma*" in the Almighty's saying:

Say: Bring forward your witnesses who testify that Allah has forbidden this ﴿(6:150).

"*Halumma*" means "come," does not take plural or dual forms, and is considered a noun of the imperative rather than a verb, as it indicates request but does not accept the address suffix.

The second instance is in the Almighty's saying:

And those who say to their brothers: Come to us ﴿(33:18).

The third instance is with "*'alaykum*" in the Almighty's saying:

O you who believe, upon you is responsibility for yourselves ﴿(5:105).

Ibn 'Āshūr explains that it means "adhere to yourselves," urging self-guidance and reform, emphasizing attention to oneself rather than preoccupation with others.

The final instance is with "*hayta*" in the Almighty's saying:

She locked the doors and said: Come to you ﴿(12:23).

Al-Farrā' notes that it is a dialectal expression, and in this verse it conveys the desire of the wife of al-'Azīz to entice Joseph, peace be upon him, into sin.

Fourth: The verbal noun substituting for the imperative verb:

The imperative through a substituting verbal noun appears in eight instances in the Qur'an, five of which use the noun "*iḥsānan*" in Sūrahs al-Baqarah, al-Nisā', al-An'ām, al-Isrā', and al-Aḥqāf. The sixth appears in Sūrat al-'Ankabūt, the seventh in Sūrat Muḥammad, and the eighth in Sūrat al-Mulk.

Among these is the Almighty's saying:

And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and to parents, good treatment ﴿(17:23).

Here, "decreed" means commanded, and the verbal noun implies "be good" to parents.

Another example is the verbal noun "*ḥusnan*" in the Almighty's saying:

And We have enjoined upon man kindness to his parents ﴿(29:8).

According to *al-Kashshāf*, "enjoined" has the meaning of command, and the verbal noun emphasizes the completeness and excellence of the act.

The verbal noun also substitutes for the verb to depict the manner and perfection of the act, as in the Almighty's saying:

So away with the companions of the Blaze ﴿(67:11).

The verbal noun here is understood as “may Allah consign them to destruction.”

As for the final instance, it is the command expressed through the substitutive verbal noun “*ḍarb*” in the Almighty’s saying:

So when you meet those who disbelieve, then striking of the necks al-Zamakhsharī says: “Its original form is *fa-ḍribū al-riqāba ḍarban* (then strike the necks with striking), so the verb was omitted and the verbal noun was advanced and made to stand in its place, being added to the object; in this there is brevity along with conveying the meaning of emphasis, because you mention the verbal noun and indicate the action by the relation contained within it” ().

The striking here relates to compelling the disbelievers to pronounce the word of monotheism, and the expression through the substitutive verbal noun in place of killing came to depict it in the most hideous image, to magnify its gravity, and to guide the fighters to what is easiest. The verse includes a clarification of the wisdom of fighting, encouragement toward it, honoring martyrdom therein, and a promise from God to honor the martyrs, to grant victory to those who engage in battle in support of God, and to bring about the destruction of the disbelievers and the nullification of their deeds.

Whoever delves into the verses of the Holy Qur’an comes to recognize the indications of command in the Qur’anic text, which have greatly contributed to clarifying the intended meaning within the text, as they have opened the way for researchers to draw inspiration from the intents of discourse in the Holy Qur’an and have helped in understanding the addressee of the discourse in all its aspects—whether in beliefs, acts of worship, transactions, events, or narratives. The language of the Qur’an and its eloquence continue to reveal wonders and singularities.

• The role of context in determining meaning:

A word within context absorbs, in addition to its lexical meaning, specific semantic values and other additional values; a word outside context carries with it all the meanings it may potentially evoke. Therefore, it is not possible to arrive at the specific meaning of a word except through its realization or performance within a defined textual or situational context.

Semantic research investigates the semantic relations between linguistic symbols and their referents and the consequences that follow for the soundness of performance in achieving the intended purpose. Attention to the stages of a word and its linguistic material in general paves

the way for granting it a dimension within the text and the surrounding shades from which benefit is derived in part.

A form may itself indicate a detailed meaning with clear indication that negates the intent of any other possibility, as in the Almighty's saying:

﴿And fight the polytheists altogether as they fight you altogether; and know that Allah is with the righteous﴾

for the word "the polytheists" is an explicit general noun, yet it admits specification; whenever "altogether" follows it, the possibility of specification is removed, and it becomes explicated.

Among explicative words that do not admit interpretation are those expressions that appear in the Qur'an in a concise manner and are then definitively detailed by the Sunnah, removing their conciseness, as in the Almighty's saying:

And establish prayer and give zakāt and bow with those who bow
The Noble Messenger detailed the meanings of prayer, zakāt, and bowing and clarified what is intended by them through his sayings and actions; thus these expressions became among the explicated that do not admit interpretation.

And what may appear as substituting one word for another, through the use of the intensive form and the active participle, is seen in the Almighty's saying:

﴿O my people, act according to your position; indeed, I am acting. You will come to know who will be visited by a punishment that will disgrace him and who is a liar. And wait; indeed, I am with you, watching﴾

By using the adjective "active participle" once and the intensive form once again, the context itself necessitates the use of the specific form rather than another. For in Sūrat Hūd, Shu'ayb, peace be upon him, was engaged in debate with his people who accused him of lying; he sought to refute this false claim while warning them of what God would decree. The context here does not call for exaggeration but rather calls for calm dialogue.

Thus, in the Almighty's saying:

So seek refuge in Allah; indeed, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing ﴿()﴾, and also His saying:

And if an incitement from Satan should incite you, then seek refuge in Allah; indeed, He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing ﴿()﴾,

for in Sūrat Fuṣṣilat it is emphasized by repetition following the preceding verse, whereas in Sūrat al-A‘rāf it appears in its original form, with the subject being definite and the predicate indefinite ().

• **The effect of the indications of command on differences in juristic rulings:**

Contextual indicators play a major role in what commands indicate in legal texts—whether obligation, recommendation, or otherwise. This has opened the door to ijtihād and provided a locus of disagreement among scholars, without forgetting the role of context in determining the indication of the ruling. Evidence of this is the occurrence of disagreement in many juristic and foundational discussions, as we find that the legal theorists differed regarding what is indicated by a command that comes after a prohibition or forbiddance.

Al-Shīrāzī says: “If a command occurs after a prohibition devoid of contextual indicators, it entails obligation” (). Commands commonly occur after prohibition or forbiddance, such as the Almighty’s saying:

And when you have exited the state of ihrām, then hunt ﴿()﴾,
after His saying:

﴿Forbidden to you is the game of the land so long as you are in the state of ihrām; and fear Allah to whom you will be gathered

and also His saying:

And when the prayer has concluded, disperse in the land and seek from the bounty of Allah and remember Allah much that you may succeed
and also His saying:

O you who believe, when the call to prayer is made on the day of Friday, hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trade; that is better for you, if you only knew ﴿()﴾.
If it is said that an absolute command indicates obligation, then what is the indication of this command after prohibition?

There were differing views on this, as evidenced by His saying:

﴿And when you have exited the state of ihrām, then hunt

Hunting after completing the rites of Hajj is permissible, and the indication of a command after prohibition is permissibility. Al-Ghazālī, however, holds that if the obstructive prohibition is incidental due to a cause, and the صيغة *af‘al* is attached to its cessation—such as “And when you have exited the state of ihrām, then hunt”—then customary usage indicates that it serves only to remove the prohibition so that the ruling returns to what it was before, even if it may

also admit recommendation or obligation. But if the *af'al* does not occur, and it is said: "If you exit the state of *ihrām*, then you are believers in hunting," this admits obligation or recommendation and does not admit permissibility ().

Hunting for one in a state of *ihrām* is prohibited, and its doer deserves blame; the linkage of prohibition to the obligation of exiting *ihrām* indicates that exiting *ihrām* is the cause for hunting. Also His saying:

And do not have relations with them while you are in retreat in the mosques; those are the limits of Allah, so do not approach them. Thus does Allah make clear His signs to the people that they may be righteous the prohibition of intercourse here is due to the existence of retreat (*i'tikāf*), and retreat is the cause with respect to marital relations, meaning that upon the end of the period of retreat, marriage becomes lawful.

Conclusion:

- The topic of command is among the most frequently addressed topics by legal theorists, due to its connection with legislative rulings in determining the lawful and the unlawful, as well as obligation, recommendation, and others.
- The foundational study and its analysis of texts, and the attempt to delve into the intent of the Lawgiver or the causes that guide their indication, have been among the reasons for the expansion of the field of research therein.
- The topic of command contributes to understanding the rulings of Islamic law because it is connected to obligation, which is the basis of action in Islam; a command entails the will of the one commanded by way of obligation and does not divert to other meanings except with a contextual indicator.
- Determining the indication of legal texts is a matter of utmost importance, for through it we understand the intent of the Lawgiver and extract the concealed rulings from the discourse.
- The indications of command in the Qur'anic text are fundamental to understanding the intended meaning; rulings align with what suits the context and the import of the verses, and context is the sound path for directing the indication of the verses, as it prevents falling into weak interpretations.

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