

Speech Acts in Surah Al-Maun and Their Relevance to the Muhammadiyah Social Movement

Nurfadila Hasani¹, Ismail Borut², Halima Bugis³, Asria Ratau⁴, Munazar Umar⁵

^{1,2,3,4}Department of Mathematics Education, University of Muhammadiyah Maluku

⁵Department of Business Administration, STIA Abdul Aziz Kataloka

email: nurfadilahasani23@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study applied speech act theory to analyze Surah Al-Ma'un, the 107th chapter of the Qur'an, in order to examine how its verses function as performative language conveying powerful moral and social messages. The research utilized a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on pragmatic analysis, drawing upon J.L. Austin and John Searle's Speech Act Theory. Data sources included the original Arabic text of Surah Al-Ma'un, along with reliable English translations and tafsir literature. The analysis identifies the dominant use of assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts, which serve to criticize religious hypocrisy, neglect of orphans and the poor, insincere worship, and the absence of everyday social responsibility. This study also contextualized these findings within the Muhammadiyah movement, demonstrating how the Surah's messages have been translated into practical social actions such as the establishment of orphanages, zakat institutions, schools, and health clinics. The research concluded that Surah Al-Ma'un provides a blueprint for ethical and social action in Muslim communities, highlighting the dynamic role of Qur'anic language in promoting active faith and social justice.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a tool for sharing information but also serves a powerful means of performing actions. In this context, speech act theory, introduced by philosophers like J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, provides a framework for understanding how utterances function beyond their literal meaning (Derakhshan, 2021; Dutsinma, 2025). According to this theory, speech acts can be analyzed through three dimensions. They are locutionary (the actual words and their literal meaning), illocutionary (the speaker's intended function), and perlocutionary dimensions (the effect the utterance has on the listener or what it causes them to think, feel, or do). Searle further categorized illocutionary acts into five types, which are assertive (e.g., stating, claiming, describing), directive (e.g., requesting, commanding, advising), commissive (e.g., promising, offering), and declaration (e.g., appointing, resigning,

baptizing). These categories include various communicative actions that are essential to the study of pragmatics (Saha, 2021).

The pragmatic understanding of language is particularly valuable when applied to religious texts, where language often carries performative force. In the Qur'an, language performs not only descriptive but also performative functions. Widely recognized as a linguistic and literary miracle, the Qur'an is rich in meaning and layered with communicative functions that extend beyond its surface structure (Spencer, 2022). Its messages operate not just through semantic content but through dynamic pragmatic strategies that engage the audience on moral, social, and spiritual levels (Daruhadi, 2024). Consequently, a pragmatic perspective enables a deeper understanding of how Qur'anic language calls believers to action and promotes ethical in society. This performative function of Qur'anic language is also evident in educational practice, where the internalization of Surah Al-Ma'un has been shown to foster empathy, social responsibility, and moral awareness among students (Borut et al., 2026).

Among the Qur'anic chapters that strongly exemplify this performative dimension is Surah Al-Ma'un. As the 107th chapter of the Qur'an, consisting of seven verses. It is a short but powerful chapter, addresses significant moral and social themes, such as hypocrisy, neglect of orphans, and disregard for communal responsibilities. These themes are conveyed through various types of speech acts including warnings, commands, and condemnations (Azizan, Zein, & Budianti, 2023; Kotan, 2022). Moreover, analyzing the speech acts in Surah Al-Ma'un reveals how language in the Qur'an functions to shape social behavior and ethical awareness, aligning with the concept of language as a tool for social construction (Daruhadi, 2024). Analyzing Al-Ma'un pragmatically also highlights the Qur'an's role in promoting social justice and moral responsibility key concerns in contemporary Islamic Thought (Alfani et al., 2025).

The social significance of Surah Al-Ma'un becomes even more evident when examined within the context of Islamic movements, particularly Muhammadiyah. In the Muhammadiyah movement, Surah Al-Ma'un holds a central position as a theological foundation for its social engagement and progressive Islamic identity. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan interpreted this surah as a direct call to transform Islamic teachings into concrete social action. In his view, religious devotion should not be limited to ritual practices alone but must be reflected in care for the poor, orphans, and marginalized members of society (Mohamed, Shohib, et al., 2024). As a result, Surah Al-Ma'un became a foundational text that shaped Muhammadiyah's approach to social engagement, leading to the establishment of schools, hospitals, and social welfare institutions. Importantly, the verses of this chapter were not read merely in a textual or literal sense, but were understood contextually to address the social challenges of the time (Labib, 2024). Through this interpretation, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan emphasized that true Islam is one that defends humanity, empowers the vulnerable, and promotes social justice. The principles that continue to guide Muhammadiyah's progressive mission.

Despite its strong moral and social message, however, the communicative power of Surah Al-Ma'un is often underexplored in traditional interpretations. Many approaches tend to emphasize literal meanings or theological aspects, overlooking the surah's pragmatic and action-oriented dimensions (Mubhar & Fahmi, 2023). As a result, readers tend to read the verses at surface level without exploring the deeper communicative intentions that can inspire ethical and social change (Labib, 2024). This limitation reduces the surah's full potential to support social reform and moral awakening is not fully used, especially in facing today's socio-political issues in Muslim communities (Ikrima et al., 2024; Rifai, 2024).

This limitation is further reinforced by a broader methodological gap in Qur'anic studies. There remains a lack of interpretive approaches that connect linguistic theories like speech act theory with Qur'anic interpretation (Ruytenbeek, 2021). This gap makes it harder to understand how the language of the Qur'an functions not only to inform, but also to encourage action, inspire responsibility, and create change (Wang, 2023). In the case of Surah Al-Ma'un, the absence of a speech act-based approach makes it difficult to uncover the communicative forces behind its

influence on Islamic movements such as Muhammadiyah (Azizan et al., 2023). Without this perspective, it is challenging to fully understand how the Qur'an encourages social involvement and moral responsibility through its language (Marsili, 2021; Ogiermann, 2021).

To address these concerns, the primary objective of this study is to analyze Surah Al-Ma'un using speech act theory in order to identify the types and functions of speech acts embedded in its verses and to examine their relevance to the Muhammadiyah social movement. Accordingly, this study is guided by the following core research question: *How are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts realized in Surah Al-Ma'un, and how do these speech acts function to inform, legitimize, and motivate Muhammadiyah's commitment to social welfare, justice, and moral responsibility?* By explicitly focusing on this question, the study seeks to demonstrate how Qur'anic language operates as performative discourse that not only conveys theological meaning but also generates concrete social action.

II. METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach with a focus on pragmatic analysis, specifically based on Speech Act Theory as developed by J.L. Austin and John Searle. The research was textual in nature and involved a detailed analysis of Surah Al-Ma'un from the Qur'an. The main objective was to identify and categorize the different types of speech acts found in the Surah and to interpret their roles in conveying its moral and social messages.

The data sources included the original Arabic text of Surah Al-Ma'un, English translations of the surah, and selected tafsir literature. The selection of tafsir sources was guided by their scholarly authority and relevance, prioritizing classical tafsir such as Al-Tabari and modern interpretations associated with linguistic, thematic, and social-ethical analysis. These references helped identify the illocutionary acts expressed in the verses. To provide a contextual interpretation, the study also examined the historical and socio-religious background of the Surah, as well as its relevance to modern Islamic movements, particularly Muhammadiyah. The analysis included secondary sources such as journal articles, books, and Muhammadiyah's official documents that reflect the principles and practices aligned with Surah Al-Ma'un.

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic stages grounded in speech act theory. First, each verse of Surah Al-Ma'un was examined to identify the presence of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Second, the identified speech acts were classified according to Searle's five categories of illocutionary acts, which consists of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Third, these speech acts were interpreted to explain how they convey ethical and social meanings, especially concerning responsibility toward orphans, the poor, and communal solidarity. Fourth, the findings were contextualized within the historical development and institutional practices of the Muhammadiyah movement by analyzing organizational documents, historical accounts, and social programs. This final stage aimed to trace the perlocutionary effects of the Qur'anic speech acts, demonstrating how the moral directives of Surah Al-Ma'un were translated into concrete forms of social action. Overall, this method integrates linguistic analysis with religious and social application, offering both theoretical insight and practical understanding of the Qur'an's continuing relevance in contemporary Islamic thought.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research finding from speech acts in Surah *Al-Maun* are comprehensively presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Speech Acts in Surah Al-Ma'un and Their Function

VERSE	TEXTUAL CONTENT	SPEECH ACT TYPE	FUNCTION	INTERPRETATION
1	"Have you seen the one who denies the religion?"	Assertive, Directive	Point out the problem and make people think	This rhetorical question exposes hypocrisy and disbelief; it pushes the listener to reflect deeply
2	"Then that is the one who repulses the orphan."	Assertive. Directive	State a moral reality and indirectly call for compassion	It shows that rejecting orphans is a form of injustice and we must care for them
3	"And does not encourage the feeding of the poor."	Assertive. Directive	State moral failure and implicitly urge social responsibility	It criticizes people who ignore the poor and reminds us to support those in need
4	"So woe to those who pray,"	Expressive, Directive	Give a strong warning to those who fake their worship	Shows that God disapproves of people who pray just for show, without sincerity
5	"But are heedless of their prayer."	Assertive, Directive	Point out careless worship and urge mindfulness	Warns against praying without focus or meaning; true prayer must come from the heart
6	"Those who make a show (of their deeds)."	Expressive, Directive	Express disapproval of showing off and urge sincerity	Criticizes those who show off their good deeds to impress others, not for true faith
7	"And withhold small kindnesses."	Assertive, Expressive. Directive	State moral failure, condemn the behavior, and call for kindness	Reminds us that small acts of kindness matter and should not be ignored

Verse 1 أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْإِيمَانِ

"Have you seen the one who denies the religion?"

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 1)

At the locutionary level, verse 1 takes the form of an interrogative sentence. However, in accordance with the speech act classification presented in Table 1, this question does not function to seek information. Instead, its primary illocutionary force is assertive, as it points out the existence of a moral problem: individuals who deny religion in the sense of rejecting ethical and moral responsibility.

The interrogative form functions rhetorically to expose disbelief as a moral condition, not merely a theological stance. By asserting the reality of such denial, the verse brings hidden hypocrisy into the open. At the same time, the verse carries a secondary directive force,

implicitly encouraging the listener to think deeply and reflect on their own moral position. Rather than commanding action directly, it invites contemplation and self-evaluation.

The perlocutionary effect of this speech act is to push the audience toward moral reflection. The listener is encouraged to question whether denial of religion is present not only in belief, but also in attitudes and behavior. In this way, verse 1 functions as a point of entry into the surah, establishing the moral framework for the social critiques that follow.

Verse 2 فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ

"So he is the one who repulses the orphan."

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 2)

Verse 2 continues the moral argument initiated in verse 1 by moving from general disbelief to a concrete social manifestation of that disbelief. The verse is structured as a declarative statement that identifies a specific unethical action, harsh treatment of orphans.

In line with the table, the verse functions primarily as an assertive speech act, stating a moral reality. It asserts that repulsing orphans is a clear sign of injustice and moral failure. Alongside this assertive force, the verse also contains an indirect directive, implicitly calling the audience to show compassion and care for orphans.

The perlocutionary effect of this verse is to awaken moral awareness and responsibility. By exposing the mistreatment of orphans as evidence of religious denial, the verse encourages listeners to reassess their own treatment of vulnerable groups. It reinforces the idea that faith must be reflected in social behavior, not merely in belief.

This mechanism aligns closely with Muhammadiyah's praxis-oriented interpretation of Islam, which emphasizes that religious authenticity is realized not through ritual performance alone, but through concrete commitments to social justice and care for the vulnerable (Rahim et al., 2023; Nawir & Lamabawa, 2023).

Verse 3 وَلَا يَحْضُرْ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ

"And does not encourage the feeding of the poor."

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 3)

Verse 3 deepens the critique by shifting attention from active injustice to passive neglect. While verse 2 condemns direct harm to orphans, this verse highlights moral failure through inaction specifically, the failure to encourage care for the poor.

At the locutionary level, the verse is declarative. Its illocutionary force is assertive, stating moral failure as a fact. According to the table, it also carries a directive function, implicitly urging social responsibility and concern for the poor.

The perlocutionary effect is a reminder that ignoring the needs of others is itself unethical. The verse pushes listeners to recognize that true faith involves not only avoiding harm, but also actively supporting those in need. It reinforces the Qur'anic message that social responsibility is an essential expression of belief.

Through this mechanism, verse 3 reinforces the surah's performative logic, transforming theological belief into a mandate for social action. This interpretive framework is reflected in Muhammadiyah's institutional praxis, particularly through structured charitable initiatives such as orphanages, zakat management bodies like LAZISMU, and healthcare services for marginalized communities. These institutions exemplify how Qur'anic discourse on moral obligation is operationalized into sustained social programs, demonstrating that for

Muhammadiyah, religious devotion is inseparable from concrete acts of social responsibility (Ikrima et al., 2024).

Verse 4 فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ

"So woe to those who pray,"

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 4)

Verse 4 marks a significant rhetorical shift in Surah Al-Ma'un by redirecting the critique from overt social injustice to internal religious practice. Unlike the previous verses, which condemn the denial of faith through harmful or neglectful social behavior, this verse employs a paradoxical strategy by declaring "woe" to those who pray. This unexpected pairing disrupts the listener's assumptions and functions as a deliberate linguistic shock.

At the locutionary level, the verse takes the form of a declarative warning. However, its illocutionary force is primarily expressive, conveying strong disapproval of hollow religiosity, and secondarily directive, implicitly urging the audience to reassess the quality and sincerity of their worship. In Searle's framework, the utterance does not reject prayer itself but criticizes prayer when it is detached from ethical awareness and social responsibility. A critique that is clarified in the subsequent verses.

The phrase "woe to" (فَوَيْلٌ) intensifies the perlocutionary effect by producing fear, moral unease, and self-examination. This shock is not an end in itself; rather, it functions performatively to realign religious ritual with moral accountability. By destabilizing ritual confidence, the verse prepares the audience to recognize that prayer lacking sincerity and social concern is ethically deficient.

Through this rhetorical strategy, the Qur'an transforms prayer from a purely devotional act into a moral test, reinforcing the surah's broader argument that authentic faith must manifest in ethical conduct and social compassion. The speech act thus operates not only as theological admonition but as a pragmatic intervention aimed at reforming both individual piety and communal values.

Verse 5 الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

"Those who are heedless of their prayer."

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 5)

Verse 5 serves as a clarification of the rhetorical tension introduced in the previous verse. After shocking the listener with the phrase "woe to those who pray," this verse specifies the type of prayer (ṣalāh) that is being condemned, not the act itself, but the negligence associated with it. From a speech act perspective, this verse continues to function as a powerful instrument of moral correction, employing assertive and indirect directive elements to provoke ethical introspection and behavioral reform.

The locutionary act of this verse is a simple declarative clause: "Those who are heedless of their prayer." Literally, it identifies a group of people and their specific behavior related to ṣalāh. However, this utterance is not neutral, it carries strong evaluative implications, which are conveyed through its illocutionary force.

The illocutionary act in this verse is assertive, but with a clear judgmental stance. It presents a morally charged description, condemning not those who do not pray, but those who are careless in their prayer. Those who are neglectful, indifferent, or inconsistent in fulfilling this central pillar of Islam. This includes both external delay or abandonment and internal lack of sincerity or attention. In this way, the verse exposes a disconnect between ritual performance and inner consciousness, a theme deeply rooted in Islamic ethics.

In Searle's framework, this can also be interpreted as an indirect directive. While it does not explicitly command the listener to be mindful in their prayer, it implicitly calls for sincere, conscious, and morally grounded worship. It challenges superficial religiosity and highlights that prayer without intentionality and moral engagement is spiritually deficient.

The perlocutionary effect of this verse is significant. It aims to stir feelings of guilt, unease, or self-examination in listeners who may recognize themselves in the description. It invites them to ask: *Do I truly focus in my prayer? Am I treating it as a meaningful act of devotion, or as a mechanical duty?* Such responses are meant to lead to behavioral change a transformation toward more deliberate, sincere acts of worship.

This verse refines the earlier warning in Verse 4 by identifying the qualitative failure in prayer rather than condemning the act itself. Through the use of assertive and directive speech acts, it functions not only as theological guidance but as a pragmatic intervention designed to align external rituals with internal moral consciousness. The Qur'an here emphasizes that true religious devotion is not in outward form alone, but in inner sincerity and ethical consistency.

Verse four and five criticize people who pray without meaning it. Muhammadiyah reminds its members that true prayer must be done with full awareness and honesty. Worship is not only about rituals but also about living a good and responsible life (Mukhlis, 2022; Rochmah & Munir, 2023).

Verse 6 الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ

"Those who make a show (of their deeds)."

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 6)

This verse deepens the critique established in the previous verses by identifying a specific moral flaw that undermines religious acts showing off (*riya'*). It exposes the insincerity behind the outward practice of worship. This verse plays a critical role in the Qur'anic discourse by highlighting the gap between external religiosity and internal sincerity. A gap that is not merely spiritually dangerous, but socially corrosive. Analyzed through the lens of speech act theory, the verse functions on multiple pragmatic levels.

The locutionary act here is a declarative sentence "Those who make a show of their deeds." On the surface, it names and identifies a group whose worship is driven not by devotion to God but by the desire to be seen and admired by others. However, the deeper force of the utterance lies in its illocutionary dimension.

The illocutionary act is an expressive and directive. It expresses strong disapproval of ostentatious religiosity, categorically rejecting the act of worship performed for the sake of public recognition rather than divine reward. In Searle's typology, this aligns with an expressive speech act that communicates contempt or disapproval of hypocrisy, and a directive act that implicitly urges sincerity and humanity. By describing those who "show off," the Qur'an subtly instructs the listener to avoid such behavior, without needing to issue a direct command.

This verse also has an essential evaluative function. It redefines the criteria of acceptable worship. It is not the visible performance of rituals that counts in the sight of God, but the intent behind them. Hence, the verse plays a crucial didactic role by setting moral standards for religious behavior.

The perlocutionary effect of this utterance is intended to evoke self-reflection, perhaps even shame, in those who recognize any traces of *riya'* (showing off) in themselves. It encourages a transformation from external conformity to internal authenticity from being driven by social approval to being guided by genuine piety. For the sincere believer, the verse acts as a

Speech Acts in Surah Al-Maun and Their Relevance to the Muhammadiyah Social Movement.

(Nurfadila Hasani)

mirror and warning, pushing them to purify their intentions and realign their acts of worship with spiritual sincerity. This verse acts as a strong ethical checkpoint in the surah's progression. Through its assertive and expressive speech act, the Qur'an not only informs but also corrects and transforms. It underscores that ritual without sincerity is hollow, and that true faith is defined not just by what is seen, but by the unseen intention behind every act.

The verse warns against people who show off their good deeds. Muhammadiyah teaches humility and teamwork. Their programs are done together and led by people who are expected to be honest and sincere. This helps the organization avoid selfishness in religious activities (Hastuti & Jinan, 2022; Sahara et al., 2024).

Verse 7

“and they withhold small acts of kindness”

(Qur'an, Al-Ma'un: 7)

The final verse of *Surah Al-Ma'un* ends the Surah with a strong message. After talking about fake or careless worship, it now focuses on people who don't even do simple, helpful things for others. These "small acts of kindness" might seem unimportant like lending something or helping someone with small tasks but the verse shows they are actually very important in Islam.

According to speech act theory, this sentence doesn't just give information, it communicates a deeper message. The sentence, “And they withhold small acts of kindness,” sounds like just a statement (this is the locutionary act), but it means much more.

The illocutionary act or what the sentence *really* wants to do is both to state and judge. It tells us what some people do (they hold back kindness), and also says that this behavior is wrong. Based on Searle's categories, this is a mix of assertive (saying something is true) and expressive (showing judgment or emotion). The verse is also directive, tells us what to do, don't be like them but be kind and helpful.

The perlocutionary force of the final verse of Surah Al-Ma'un is particularly powerful, as it is designed to shape both moral awareness and ethical behavior. It prompts listeners to engage in self-questioning, such as: “*If I am unable to perform even small acts of goodness, what does that reveal about my faith?*” Through this effect, the verse encourages deep self-reflection and motivates believers to practice kindness, even through the simplest actions in daily life. In this way, the Qur'an emphasizes that faith is not measured solely by ritual devotion, but by consistent ethical conduct toward others.

More broadly, this verse highlights a central Qur'anic principle: true faith is inseparable from social responsibility. As the concluding verse of Surah Al-Ma'un, it functions as the pragmatic culmination of the surah's moral argument. After condemning denial of religion (verse 1), injustice toward orphans and the poor (verses 2–3), negligence in prayer (verses 4–5), and ostentatious religiosity (verse 6), the Qur'an grounds faith firmly in everyday social practice. The emphasis on “small acts of kindness” deliberately shifts the discourse from abstract belief and ritual performance to ordinary, repeatable ethical behavior, thereby rendering faith socially observable and morally accountable.

The perlocutionary force of the verses in Surah Al-Ma'un does not stop at shaping individual piety but extends to collective and institutional practices. Within the Muhammadiyah movement, the ethical message of this surah is embodied in various forms of everyday social action, including community-based philanthropic programs, child-friendly welfare services, environmental cleanliness initiatives, as well as educational and social da'wah activities. These practices reflect Muhammadiyah's emphasis on small but consistent acts of service as the

foundation for broader social transformation (Permadi et al., 2022). Through this approach, Surah Al-Ma'un is not merely interpreted normatively but is actively operationalized through concrete institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, and other social service organizations (Putra & Arifin, 2024; Prihanta et al., 2024). This perlocutionary impact is also observable in educational settings, where the teachings of Surah Al-Ma'un contribute to sustained ethical behavior and social engagement among students (Borut et al., 2026).

From Muhammadiyah's perspective, Surah Al-Ma'un occupies a highly fundamental position, serving as the ideological foundation and spiritual impetus for the emergence of Muhammadiyah's socially oriented da'wah movement. Ideology is understood not merely as belief, but as something that must be realized through concrete action. Accordingly, Muhammadiyah's philanthropic movement is viewed as a direct implementation of Teologi Al-Ma'un. KH. Ahmad Dahlan interpreted this theology as a religious obligation that is simultaneously grounded in humanitarian values and devotion to the nation. These principles are institutionalized through the mission of *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar*, particularly in the field of schooling, healing, and social feeding which has been a central focus of Muhammadiyah since its establishment (Alifuddin et al., 2022).

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study shows that Surah Al-Ma'un uses several types of speech acts, mainly assertive, directive, and expressive, to convey strong moral and social messages. The Qur'anic language in this surah does not only provide information, but actively shapes the listener's awareness, emotions, and behavior. Through rhetorical questions, moral statements, warnings, and expressions of disapproval, Surah Al-Ma'un encourages reflection, criticizes social injustice, and urges ethical action, especially in relation to orphans, the poor, sincerity in worship, and everyday kindness.

The findings also demonstrate that the messages of Surah Al-Ma'un are closely aligned with the values and practices of the Muhammadiyah movement. Muhammadiyah has translated the ethical teachings of this surah into concrete social actions through institutions such as orphanages, zakat organizations, schools, hospitals, and other social services. This shows that Surah Al-Ma'un is not only a theological text, but also a practical guide for social responsibility and humanitarian engagement in Muslim communities. In this way, the surah exemplifies the performative power of Qur'anic language, where moral discourse leads directly to real social action.

This study is limited by its focus on a single surah. Therefore, future research could apply speech act theory to other Qur'anic surahs with strong social themes in order to further explore the relationship between divine speech and social transformation. Comparative studies involving different Islamic movements or broader sociolinguistic approaches could also enrich understanding of how Qur'anic language influences collective behavior.

Practically, the findings of this study can contribute to Islamic education by encouraging a more active and socially oriented understanding of religious teachings. Integrating speech act theory with tafsir can help students and educators move beyond ritual learning toward ethical awareness and real-life application. By emphasizing compassion, sincerity, and social responsibility, this approach supports a more dynamic model of religious education that reflects the Qur'an's continuing relevance in contemporary society.

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