

Verbs of Saying in the Qur'ān: The Case of *qāla*

Verbos de dicción en el Corán: el caso de *qāla*

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to highlight the functions and meanings of the verb of saying *qāla* in the Qur'ānic text. To define the properties of this verb, four interrelated aspects are investigated: the context, the pragmatics, the semantics and the syntax of *qāla*. Theory, methodology and theoretical insights from the literature dealing with verbs corresponding to *qāla* in other languages which view these instances as speech acts are discussed and applied.

The article is divided into two sections. In section 1 the notion of “speech act” is defined according to Searle (1969, 1999) and Austin (1962). Section 2 is divided into three sub-sections according to the verb form of *qāla* (past and imperative), type of discourse (reported dialogues and non-dialogues) and the syntactic environment (*qāla* followed by an imperative or direct speech).

The most common contextual frame for *qāla* can be characterized as a conversation or a verbal exchange involving two participants (the addressor and addressee). This affects the function and meaning of the verb *qāla* since in an interaction between two or more participants the reference to the entity transmitting the message is marked by *qāla*. Furthermore, the content of the message which is introduced by *qāla* and is usually formulated as an asyndetic clause (i.e., one that lacks a conjunction) or as a verb in the imperative form, is stressed by *qāla*. Finally, in interactions people can ask, assert, contradict, argue or command. All these actions are embodied by the verb *qāla*, which performs two illocutionary (i.e., communicative effect) assertive and directive speech acts.

Key words: The verb *qāla*; Speech act; Illocutionary force; Assertive; Directive; Direct Speech; Word-exchange.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es resaltar las funciones y significados del verbo de dicción *qāla* en el texto coránico. Para definir las propiedades de este verbo analizamos cuatro aspectos interrelacionados: el contexto, la pragmática, la semántica y la sintaxis de *qāla*. Discutimos y aplicamos la teoría, la metodología y los conocimientos teóricos de la literatura que trata de los verbos correspondientes a *qāla* en otros idiomas que ven estos casos como actos de habla.

El artículo está dividido en dos secciones. En la sección 1, la noción de “acto de habla” es definida de acuerdo con Searle (1969, 1999) y Austin (1962). La sección 2 está dividida en tres subsecciones, según la forma verbal de *qāla* (pasado e imperativo), el tipo de discurso (diálogos indirectos y sin diálogos) y el entorno sintáctico (*qāla* seguido de un imperativo o estilo directo).

El marco contextual más común de *qāla* se puede caracterizar como una conversación o un intercambio verbal que involucra a dos interlocutores (el emisor y el destinatario). Esto afecta la función y el significado del verbo *qāla*, ya que en una interacción entre dos o más participantes la referencia a la entidad que transmite el mensaje está marcada por *qāla*. Además, el contenido del mensaje que es introducido por *qāla* es generalmente formulada como una cláusula asindética (es decir, una que carece de conjunción) o como un verbo en forma imperativa, es enfatizado por *qāla*. Finalmente, en las interacciones las personas pueden preguntar, afirmar, contradecir, discutir u ordenar. Todas estas acciones son incorporadas por el verbo *qāla*, que realiza dos actos de habla ilocutivos (es decir, efecto comunicativo), asertivo y directivo.

Palabras clave: *qāla*; acto de habla; fuerza ilocutiva; asertivo; directivo; estilo directo; intercambio de palabras.

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Introduction

This article highlights the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic framing roles of the verb *qāla* (“said”) in the Qur’ānic text. The verb *qāla*, which has ca. 1600 occurrences in the Qur’ān (in its various inflections), belongs to what is known as the verbs of saying, where *saying* is defined as the “vocal production of verbal content that is transmitted from one person to another during a communicative circumstance.”¹ Saying does not only involve uttering or producing sounds. There must be a human speaker, there must be something said, and a receiver who understands what is being said.²

The central premise is that every text conveys a message. The Qur’ān as a religious text and a book of guidance for humankind must successfully communicate to people in a dynamic way. It is suggested here that *qāla* plays a key role in the interaction between major speech actors such as God and the prophet Muḥammad, and between the prophet Muḥammad and the unbelievers.

Scant research has been devoted to the meanings of the verb *qāla* in Arabic or specifically in the Qur’ān³, unlike the steady stream of research investigating the meanings and functions of the verb “to say” in English and in Biblical Hebrew that view it as a speech act. Here Shemesh’s (1998) study entitled “Verbs of saying in Mishnaic Hebrew: A Syntactic, Semantic, and Pragmatic Analysis” is used as a framework.

This article explores the syntactic features of *qāla*; i.e., the types of direct object that can follow *qāla* and their effects on the meaning of this verb and the semantic features associated with possible interpretations of the verb *qāla* derived from the speech acts they perform. The pragmatic analysis deals with the uses of the verb *qāla* related to the context of speaking and its features such as the discourse type as well as the identity of the addressor/sender of the message and the addressee/receiver.⁴ This methodology

is designed to better understand the purpose of using this verb in Qur’ānic text and the kinds of acts or activities conveyed by verb *qāla*. I begin by defining the notion of *speech act* before delving into the analysis of *qāla*.

1. What is a Speech Act?

Given that the verb *qāla* is a key component in the way participants communicate in all forms of Arabic discourse, including the Qur’ān, a presentation of the theory of speech acts is in order. As Vanderveken and Kuno (2002) pointed out, any study of communication must take into account the nature of the speech acts involved, as well as the syntactic structure in which these verbs occur, their context and their conversational background.⁵ There are various speech act theories; here, however, I refer to the watershed works of Austin and Searle.⁶

The theory of speech acts starts with the assumption that the minimal unit of human communication is not a sentence or other expressions, but rather the performance of certain kinds of acts, such as asking questions, giving orders, describing, explaining and apologizing. Austin called these types of acts illocutionary acts.⁷ Austin (1962) differentiated between three main kinds of speech acts, which he termed locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. According to Austin, by uttering a sentence speakers actually perform a locutionary act; namely, they utter words with a certain sense and reference. At the same time, they also perform an illocutionary act, such as, for example, asking or answering a question, providing information, announcing a verdict or an intention and or handing down a sentence in court. The illocutionary act is the performance of an act by saying something, as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something. When these actions have an effect on the audience, such as, for example, convincing or pleasing the audience, the speaker is performing a perlocutionary act. These kinds of acts are performed at the time of the utterance by uttering appropriate words in the appropriate context of utterance.⁸

¹ Shemesh, *Verbs of Saying in Mishnaic Hebrew*, p. 5.

² Taylor, “Saying”, p. 31.

³ In my search for scholarly works on the verb *qāla* I only found a few articles discussing the interpretation of this verb in Qur’ānic translations. However, these studies fail to clarify the reasons for the multiple interpretations of *qāla*. See for example: Salaeh, “Translation of Lexicons *qāla*”.

⁴ According to Jakobson, “Closing Statement: Linguistic and Poetics”, p. 353, any speech occurrence in any act of verbal communication is made up of three constitutive factors: the ADDRESSER sends a MESSAGE to the ADDRESSEE.

⁵ See also Vanderveken, “Universal Grammar and Speech Act Theory”, p. 25.

⁶ For a historical review of speech act theory, see Vanderveken and Kuno, *Essays in Speech Act Theory*.

⁷ Searle, *Expression and meaning*, p. 30.

⁸ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 94-95, 99-101. Cf. Vanderveken and Kuno, *Essays in Speech Act Theory*, pp. 3-4.

Austin classified illocutionary acts into five categories: (a) verdictives, which are typified by the giving of a verdict, e.g., “I pronounce”, “I hold that”; (b) expositives, where the main body of the utterance usually has the straightforward form of a statement; e.g., “I argue”, “I conclude” and “I admit”; (c) execratives which involve the exercise of powers, rights or influences; e.g., “I advise”, “I warn”; (d) behabitives, a kind of performative concerned roughly with reactions to behavior and behavior towards others and designed to exhibit attitudes and feelings; e.g., “I apologize”, “I criticize” and “I approve”; and (e) commissives which are typified by promising.⁹ Searle (1999) classified illocutionary acts into the following categories:

- (1) Assertives: We tell people how things are.
- (2) Directives: We try to get people to do things.
- (3) Commisives: We commit ourselves to doing things.
- (4) Expressive: We express our feeling and attitudes.
- (5) Declarations: We bring about changes in the world through our utterance.¹⁰

Searle emphasized that not all verbs are illocutionary. For example, “intend” is clearly not performative and intending is never a speech act. For example, a person cannot fix the roof by saying “I am fixing the roof”. Performatives are statements like any other statement. The only difference is that in a performative statement the speaker is performing some other speech act indirectly by making the statement. For example, the verb “promise” is performative because one can promise a friend to come and visit. In this case, the illocutionary act (of promising) is performed by uttering a sentence containing an expression (i.e., the verb “promise”) that names the type of speech act. In the sentences “Leave the room!” as compared to “I order you to leave the room”, the first constitutes the performance of making an order but is not performative. The second sentence, however, is performative because the speech act of ordering is named or clearly encoded by the verb “order.” In other words, a performative utterance is completely explicit and overt.¹¹ These verbs do not de-

scribe, are not true or false and the utterance of the sentence is part of performing the action.¹²

The verb *qāla*, “said” in Arabic, displays the features of performative verbs. It is not an utterance which can be true or false where by making the utterance the speaker is doing something (ordering, stating, asking, arguing, etc.), and not just reporting or describing. However, there is one grammatical difference between the verb *qāla* and the classical examples of performatives provided by Austin. He queried whether there was some grammatical criterion for distinguishing performative utterances such as “I promise” from non-performative utterances such as “John is running”, which is regarded as a statement. According to Austin, performatives are usually in the first person singular present indicative active. The advantage of the first person singular present indicative form, or likewise the second and third and impersonal passive form (e.g., “you are hereby authorized to pay...”) is what makes the speech situation explicit. Thus, “I bet” is performative as opposed to “I bet” in the past which is not performative but only describes an action.¹³ Here, I show that the first person is not a necessary feature of performative verbs. The verb *qāla* which is usually in the third person perfect, imperfect and imperative form, can be classified as an “expositive” illocutionary act, or according to Searle’s categorization, an “assertive” or “commissive” illocutionary act, as discussed below.

2. The Past Forms of the Verb *qāla* in the *Qur’ān*

This section provides a characterization of the verb *qāla* in terms of its syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features. The verb *qāla* appears in two types of discourse: narratives that include dialogues, and non-conversational discourse.

2.1. The Past Forms of the Verb *qāla* in Reported Speech

In narratives that include dialogues *qāla* is typically used by the speaker/narrator to introduce direct speech in the narrative. However, as

⁹ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 83-93, 150. See Searle, *Expression and meaning*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ Searle, *Expression and meaning*, pp. 12-15. Cf. Searle, *Speech acts*, pp. 66-67.

¹¹ Searle, “How Performatives Works”, pp. 85-87, 89-90, 100. Cf. Searle, *Expression and meaning*, p. 30.

¹² Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 5-6. With respect to the verb “promise”, which is mentioned by both Searle and Austin, according to Austin (p. 11) in the utterance “I promise”, if the intention is absent it does not mean that this utterance is false. This utterance may be misleading or wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement.

¹³ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 57, 61-63.

studies on the verb “to say” have shown, there are three possible functions of this verb:

(a) The foreground information, namely the sequence of events, is realized by the verb *qāla* and hence plays a crucial role in moving the plot forward.¹⁴

(b) Taylor (1980) argued that in sentences such as “Sarah said she didn’t like English”, “John said to his wife that the world is too much with us” and “Crusoe said he was hungry”, the verb “said” does not designate internal properties of a syntactic string. Rather, it denotes the relationship between two successive units of text, where the second unit does not realize the expectation elicited by the first. Rather, it is perceived by the speaker-hearer (writer-reader) as some form of incongruity.¹⁵

(c) Shemesh (2006) considers the Hebrew verb *amar* (אמר) “said” and its infinitive construct form *lomar* (לומר) as direct discourse markers, where *amar* appears at the beginning of an asyndetic content clause that follows a verb of saying, such as “ask”.

However, after analyzing dialogues in which *qāla* is inserted, I identified an additional function. One example is Q 2:30-38:

(1) Qur’ānic excerpt number 1:

*wa-id qāla rabbuka*¹⁶ *li-l-malā’ikati innī gā’ilun fī l-arḍi ḥalīfatan qālū a-tağ’alu fihā man yuḥsidu (...)*

wa-’allama ādama l-asmā’a kullahā tumma ‘araḍahum ‘alā l-malā’ikati fa-qāla anbi’ūnī bi-asmā’i hā’ulā’i in kuntum ṣādiqīna qālū subḥānaka lā’ilma lanā (...)

qāla yā-ādamu anbi’hum bi-asmā’ihim fa-lammā anba’ahum bi-asmā’ihim qāla a-lam aqul lakum innī a’lamu ḡayba s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi (...)

wa-id qulnā li-l-malā’ikati sḡudū li-ādama fa-saḡādū illā iblīsa (...)

wa-qulnā yā-ādamu skun anta wa-zawḡuka l-ḡannata (...)

fa-azallahumā š-ṣaytānu ‘anhā fa-aḡraḡahumā mim mā kānā fihī wa-qulnā hbiṭū ba’ḡukum li-ba’ḡin ‘aduwwun (...)

¹⁴ Mir, “Dialogues in the Qur’ān”, p. 198. Cf. Dror *Linguistic Features of the Qur’ānic Narratives*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵ Taylor, “Saying”, p. 31.

¹⁶ Gilliot, “Narratives”, p. 524 mentions that the particle *id* in the Qur’ānic narratives is followed by the perfect, and the verb is expressing a mode of speaking (*qāla*, *nādā*), a fact which shows that for the Qur’ān, the events are not as important as the rendering of the words. Cf. Mir, “Dialogues”, p. 532; Cuciniello, “Joseph in the Qur’ān, a Prophetic Narrative. Incidents and Specific Language”, pp. 144, 147.

qulnā hbiṭū minhā ḡamī’an (...)

“When your Lord **said** to the angels: I am appointing on the earth a deputy, they **said**: Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein (...) And He taught Adam all the names, then He presented them before the angels, and **said**: Tell Me the names of these if you are right. They **said**: Glory be to You! of knowledge we have naught save what you have taught us (...)

He **said**: O Adam, tell them their names. And when he had told them their names, He **said**: Did I not say unto you that I surely know the unseen things of the heavens and the earth (...) And when We **said** to the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam. They all prostrated themselves except Iblis (...) And We **said**: ‘O’ Adam, dwell you and your spouse in the Garden (...) But Satan caused them to fall from there, and brought them out from the state (of felicity) in which they had been. And We **said**: Get down all of you, and be enemies one of another (...) We **said**: Get you down from it, all together.”¹⁷

In Q 2:30-38 the creation of Adam (the first human) is referred to and the following three fundamental subjects are presented:

1. *Allah* informs the angels about man’s vice-regency on Earth and their questioning of Him.

2. The angels are commanded to prostrate themselves before the first human, Adam.

3. The depiction of the events surrounding Adam and his life in Heaven and the events causing him to be expelled from Heaven, and then his repentance and the order that he and his children were to live on Earth, are described.¹⁸

Perhaps the best way to grasp the function of the verb *qāla* in narratives that include dialogues (including Q 2:30-38) is to read them when omitting *qāla*. In this case, what is immediately striking is how difficult it is to identify the addressor and the addressee. Clearly, the form of the verb (i.e., its inflection and suffixes) helps the hearer to determine who the speaker is. Johnstone (1987), who studied verb tense alternations of the verb “to say” in narratives, noted this function. Johnstone gives the example of a young wom-

¹⁷ The translation of the Qur’ānic verses is taken from the Internet site <<https://www.al-islam.org>> This project is headed by a group of Muslim scholars who have written a modern translation that strives to provide a semantic and syntactic translation accompanied by helpful and very clear commentary on the text. In some cases, I refer to this website to clarify the topic of the verses. Where clarification of the content is needed I usually refer to three authors who produced the mainstream Sunni exegeses: Ṭabarī, Rāzī and Bayḡāwī.

¹⁸ See <<https://www.al-islam.org>> the commentary on Q 2:30-39>.

an who describes an exchange with a police officer who stopped her on the road when she was a new driver. The conversation is reconstructed as a dialogue composed of sentences that begin with “I said” and “he/she said.” As she constructs the dialogue, she signals who is talking with what Johnstone calls “introducers”; i.e., clauses such as “she said”, “I said”. Sometimes these introducers are in the past tense and sometimes in historical present.¹⁹ This description is consistent with Qur'ānic dialogue in which the verb *qāla* functions as a kind of “introducer”,²⁰ such that the verb “to say” (and in our case *qāla*) is a special class of verbs in narratives that should not be expected to function like verbs in narratives, and in fact they do not.²¹

To grasp the role of the verb “to say” or *qāla* as the introducer in the above-mentioned narrative dialogue, imagine the filming of a dialogue for a movie. In films, the characters are shown to be talking as the camera moves from one speaker to the other. In the written text the verb *qāla* takes on the same role as the camera movement. The camera effect in narratives was suggested by Sakaedani (2004), who related topic-shifting in narrative texts to camera angles and staging. In a number of relatively recent works, the Japanese academic Kuno²² analyzed cases where the speaker positions his/her “camera” when describing an event. For example, if the speaker says “John hit Mary” the camera is placed at some distance from both John and Mary, whereas for “John hit his wife” the camera is placed closer to John than Mary. Sakaedani also refers to Kuno’s concept of degree of empathy. To make this concept more explicit, Kuno introduces the idea that empathy can range from 0 to 1. A first person pronoun which is involved in the narrative is the superordinate in Kuno’s chart of pronouns and it has a tendency to be placed closer to the speaker’s camera angle.²³ This explanation may partially clarify why the

verb “say/says/said” is used in narratives; however, there are three additional related issues concerning the usage of *qāla* in narratives that include dialogues. These issues appear throughout Q 2:30-38 as discussed below.

(a) Two instances vs. one instance: When the verb *qāla* occurs twice in a verbal exchange, one mention refers to the addressor and the other to the addressee, as in Q 2:30 *wa-id qāla rabbuka li-l-malā'ikati innī ḡā'ilun fī l-arḍi ḥalīfatan qālū a-taḡ'alu fihā man yuḥsidu*. The addressor is God, the addressees are the angels and the transmitted message is that God is **appointing** a man on Earth as his successor. When the verb *qāla* occurs only once, the addressor, the addressee and the message can be identified. However, in contrast to the first case, the response of the addressee is not expressed.

Miller (1996) termed the reported speech in this type of narrative “interactive reported speech”; in other words, a narrative depiction of a conversation. Dialogues defined as “interactive reported speech” are structured in terms of contiguous, alternative (conversational) turns known as “adjacency pairs” where the first member of the pair produces the expectation of a relevant and acceptable response by the second member.²⁴ In the example above (Q 2:30) the statement in the first part (*qāla rabbuka...*) requires a relevant response in the second part (*qālū...*).

(b) Syntactically the verb *qāla* can be followed by either an asyndetic clause or a verb in the imperative. In both cases the reported clause/direct speech aims to reproduce the exact words that were spoken. Direct speech can be preceded by the verb “said”, whereas the direct speech clause behaves like a main clause in the sense that it can, for example, be a question or a directive, e.g., “Dorothy said, ‘Tell my mother I’ll be over soon’.”²⁵

Furthermore, two components can be inserted between the verb *qāla* and the verb in the imperative or an asyndetic clause; e.g., a prepositional phrase indicating the identity of the addressee. For example, Q 2:34 *wa-id qul-nā li-l-malā'ikati sḡudū* or Q 2:54 *wa-id qāla mūsā li-qawmihi yā-qawmi innakum zalamtum anfusakum* “And (remember) when Moses said to his people: ‘O my people, you have indeed

¹⁹ Johnstone, “He Says...So I Said”, p. 34.

²⁰ Note that there are cases in which *qāla* in narratives that include dialogues does not function as an “introducer”, but rather as a regular verb (with assertive illocutionary force), e.g., Q5:116 *a-anta qulta li-n-nāsi ttaḥidūni wa-ummī ilāhayni (...)* *mā yakūnu lī an aqūla mā laysa lī bi-ḥaqqin in kuntu qultuhu* “Did you **say** to the people: Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? (...) It was not mine to **utter** what I had no right to (say). Had I **said** it.”

²¹ Johnstone, “He Says...So I Said”, p. 43-44.

²² See Kuno, “Subject, Theme, and the Speaker’s Empathy”.

²³ Sakaedani, “The Correlation”, pp. 57-58.

²⁴ Miller, *The Representation of Speech*, p. 235.

²⁵ Quirk et al., *Comprehensive Grammar*, pp. 1020-1023. Cf. Miller, *The Representation of Speech*, p. 143. According to Miller (p. 144), the direct representation of speech adds a sense of vividness and immediacy to biblical narratives.

wronged yourselves'. In other cases, a vocative structure is also inserted, as in Q 2:35 *wa-qulnā yā-ādamu skun*.

(c) Two speech acts are indicated by the verb *qāla*, but the illocutionary force is considered to emerge from the complete linguistic structure. If the verb is followed by a clause, the speaker expresses a statement; hence, the illocutionary force of *qāla* is assertion and can contextually be paraphrased as “state” or “assert”. However, if the verb is followed by a verb in the imperative, the illocutionary force of *qāla* is directive and can contextually be paraphrased as an “order” or “command”. In both cases the verb *qāla* focuses on the content of the statement.

This analysis can be applied to other Qur'ānic passages which are classified as dialogues in narratives:

(2) Qur'ānic excerpt number 2:

wa-ġā'a s-saḥaratu fir'awna qālū inna lanā la-aġran in kunnā naḥnu l-ġālibīna

qāla na'am wa-innakum la-mina l-muqarrabīna

qālū yā-mūsā immā an tulqiya wa-immā an nakūna naḥnu l-mulqīna

qāla alqū fa-lammā alqaw saḥarū a'yuna n-nāsi wa-starhabūhum wa-ġā'ū bi-siḥrin 'aẓīmin (Q 7: 113-116)

“And the sorcerers came to Pharaoh, and they **said**: Verily there will be a reward for us if we are victors. **He said**: Yes! and you will surely be of the near-stationed (to me). They (the sorcerers) said: O Moses! Will you throw, or shall we be the (first) throwers? **He (Moses) said**: Throw (yours)! So when they threw, they bewitched the people's eyes and terrified them and produced a great magic.”

Q 7: 113-116, which is only part of a larger portrayal of an event, describes the meeting or, more precisely, the verbal exchange/interaction between Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers. The verb *qāla* is followed by either a clause or a verb in the imperative. To underscore the illocutionary of *qāla* in the translation of Q 7:113-116, the instances of *qāla* are replaced below by their illocutionary equivalents:

“And the sorcerers came to Pharaoh, they **stated/argued**: Verily there will be a reward for us if we are victors. “**He asserted**: Yes! and you will surely be of the near-stationed (to me). **They (the sorcerers) stated**: O Moses! Will you throw, or shall we be the (first) throwers? **He (Moses) demanded/ordered**: Throw (yours)! So when they threw, they bewitched the people's eyes and terrified them and produced a great magic.”

The utterances in this context can be interpreted as assertions or commands. Shemesh (1998) divided the Mishnaic Hebrew verbs of saying into three categories according to their focus on the pragmatic components of the act of saying. The verbs of saying in the first category deal with the content of the utterance. The verbs in the second category have to do with the relationship between the participants, and characterize the status of the addressor and the addressee and the influence of the message on the addressee. The verbs in the third category reflect the circumstances.²⁶ Most of the occurrences of the verb *qāla* in narratives that include dialogues can be classified under the first category; namely, they all have to do with the message or the content. This is not surprising given the fact that there are usually two parties involved in a dialogue and each side presents an argument, as the following example illustrates:

(3) Qur'ānic excerpt number 3:

qāla fir'awnu wa-mā rabbu l-'ālamīna

qāla rabbu s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa-mā bayna-humā in kuntum mūqinīna

qāla li-man ḥawlahū a-lā tastamī'ūna

qāla rabbukum wa-rabbu ābā'ikum l-awwalīna

qāla inna rasūlakumu llaḍī ursila ilaykum la-maġnūnun

qāla rabbu l-mašriqi wa-l-maġribi wa-mā bayna-humā in kuntum ta'qilūna

qāla la-ini taḥaḍṭa ilāhan ḡayrī la-aġ'alannaka mina l-masġūnīna

qāla a-wa-law ḡi'tuka bi-šay'in mubīnin

qāla fa-ti (فانت) bihi in kunta mina ṣ-ṣādiqīna (Q 26:23-31)

“Pharaoh **said**: And what is the Lord of the worlds? **He said**: (He is) the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them, if you have faith. Pharaoh **said** to those around him: Do you not hear (what he says)? (Moses) **said**: Your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers. (Pharaoh) **said**: Verily your messenger who has been sent unto you is a veritable madman. (Moses) **said**: ‘The Lord of the East and the West and what is between the two, if you have understanding. (Pharaoh) **said**: If you take any god other than me, I will certainly make you one of the imprisoned. (Moses) **said**: Even if I bring unto you something manifest? (Pharaoh) **said**: Bring it then, if you are of the truthful ones.”

This passage (Q 26: 23-31) is part of a larger section which narrates (again) the story of the children of Israel, Moses and Pharaoh. First, it is said that God has sent Moses to the unjust peo-

²⁶ Shemesh, *Verbs of Saying in Mishnaic Hebrew*, p. 22.

ple – the people of Pharaoh, but Moses' immediate reaction is to say that he fears that they will reject him. Furthermore, he fears that the people of Pharaoh may kill him in retaliation for killing one of them. By using the word *kallā* (nay) Allah assures him that this will not happen and he will protect him. God asks Moses to say to Pharaoh that they (Moses and his brother) are the messengers of God and to demand him to release the children of Israel. From this point on, we are informed about the verbal exchange between Pharaoh and Moses. It could be argued that in verse 23 the verb *qāla*, which is followed by a clause, can be paraphrased as “stated” or “claimed”. Whereas Pharaoh states or argues that God's messenger is a madman, Moses asserts that God causes the very rising and setting of the sun in the East and the West and the universe is the sign of His magnificence. Then Pharaoh states that if Moses persists in worshiping other gods he will be imprisoned. Moses, however, rejects this statement by saying that he can produce a manifest sign of God's omnipotence.

The illocutionary force of assertion is not only found in narratives that include dialogues. It can be found in Qur'ānic sections, such as the one in Q 2:113 below, where two opposing parties are having a dispute:

(4) Qur'ānic excerpt number 4:

wa-qālati l-yahūdu laysati n-naṣārā 'alā ṣay'in wa-qālati n-naṣārā laysati l-yahūdu 'alā ṣay'in wa-hum yatlūna l-kitāba

“The Jews **said**: The Christians rest on naught, and the Christians **said**: The Jews rest on naught; yet they (both) recite the (same) Book.”

In this verse, which is formulated as a grammatical parallelism, the Jews have already been mentioned in verse 40 when God addresses them, asking them to remember the favor that He had bestowed upon them, and to fulfill (their obligations to) their covenant with God so that He might fulfill his covenant. In verses 49-61, various events are mentioned showing how God saved them, as in verse 49, where he drowned Pharaoh's army. In verse 62, the Jews and the Christians are both mentioned when it is stated that those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians, and whomever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds, will have his/her reward. Next, Moses and Jesus are mentioned in verse 87, where it is said that God gave Moses and later prophets the book, whereas God gave Jesus, the son of

Maryam, a clear sign. However, whenever a messenger came to them, they refused to listen to his words.

Q 2:113 is part of this plot that has the Jews and Christians as the central figures, yet throughout the parallelism a new twist to the story of the Jews and Christians is presented; namely, the confrontation between them. According to Ṭabarī's exegesis, verse 113 came after the Jews and the Christians had encountered each other in the presence of the prophet Muḥammad, when the Jews renounced Jesus and the New Testament (*al-inḡīl*) and the Christians renounced Moses and the existence of the Old Testament. This event is marked by the statement that God will sentence them on the Day of Judgment for their differences. Immediately after this verse, the narrative involving the Jews and the Christians continues by presenting further elements of the conflict between them.²⁷ In this context, *qāla* can be understood as expressing an assertion that can be paraphrased as “the Jews argued” and “the Christian argued” thus making the content the element that is emphasized.²⁸

Most of the occurrences of *qāla* in narratives that include dialogues have the illocutionary force of either assertion or command. However, one other interpretation can be found where *qāla* can be paraphrased as “asked” or “answered”, as in Q 3:40:²⁹

(5) Qur'ānic excerpt number 5:

qāla rabbi annā yakūnu lī ḡulāmun wa-qad ba-laḡaniya l-kibaru wa-a-mra'atī āqirun qāla ka-dālika llāhu yaf'alu mā yaṣā'u (Q 3:40)

“He said: My Lord! how can I have a son (born) while, indeed, old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren? He **said**: Even so does Allah whatsoever He pleases.”

In Q 3:38 the reader is told about Zachariah, who prayed to his Lord to ask Him to grant him offspring. Then the angels called to him while he was standing praying in the sanctuary, saying that *Allah had* granted him the glad tidings of a son, Yaḥyā, who would confirm the word of *Allah*, and would become a leader and a prophet among the pious. When Zachariah heard this, he asked God how it was possible for him to have a child,

²⁷ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 292.

²⁸ Another example is Q 34:31-33. For a contextual explanation see Dror, “Grammatical Parallelism in the Qur'ān”, p. 178.

²⁹ Another example is Q 19:20.

since he is old and his wife was barren. God answered that it is possible since He does whatever he pleases. According to Shemesh (1998), verbs of saying which have the meaning of asking and answering belong in the second group; i.e., verbs that focus on the relationship between the participants in the dialogue. They characterize the status of the addressor and the addressee and the impact of the message on the addressee.³⁰ This is implied in Q 3:40 where there are three participants: God and the angels (the addressors) and Zachariah (the addressee). The verb *qāla* which refers to Zachariah characterizes his reaction when he heard the words of the angels; namely he was amazed by their announcement. On the other hand, the verb *qāla* that refers to God indicates that His answer is certain.

Thus overall, three aspects of the verb *qāla* were discussed above. Grammatically, the verb occurs in 3rd person of the past tense followed by a verb in the imperative or direct speech. Semantically, it has an assertive illocutionary force indicating that the focus is on the content rather than on the speaker. Some occurrences can be also interpreted as “asked” or “answered”. Pragmatically, had this verb not been used, the addressee would have been difficult to identify in the interaction between the participants.

2.2. The 3rd Person Form of the Verb *qāla* in Non-Conversational Sections

The verb *qāla* can also occur when no speech event is reported; i.e., when no interaction between speech participants is described.³¹ However, the verb *qāla* in non-dialogic passages exhibits the same features of the verb *qāla* as in narratives that include dialogues. Specifically, syntactically it is followed by either an asyndetic clause or an imperative clause, but the nature of the direct object affects the illocutionary meaning of the verb *qāla*. Furthermore, most of the verbs in this type of construction emphasize the message, as in:

(6) Qur’ānic excerpt number 6:
badī’u s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi wa-iḍā qaḍā amran fa-innamā yaqūlu lahū kun fa-yakūnu (Q 2:117)³²

“Originator (is He) of the heavens and the earth and when He decrees a matter to be, He only **says** to it ‘Be’ and it is.”

In this sentence the verb *qāla* is in the imperfect tense, indicating the habitual aspect of God’s omnipotence. The verb of saying is followed by the imperative verb *kun*, but the verb *yaqūlu* is ambiguous in that it can represent two different illocutionary standpoints:

(a) The objective meaning of *yaqūlu* is a verbal command such that the clause might be interpreted as “When He decrees a matter to be, He commands: ‘Be’ and it is.”³³

(b) *yaqūlu* can also take on its basic meaning of “He says”. However, it is associated with another facet of meaning; namely “downtoning”, so that here *yaqūlu* means “He just, only, simply says”. Using the interpersonal particles “just” or “only” in discourse highlights emotions or opinions and are favored in speech characterizing the involvement of the discourse partners in the speech event.³⁴ Q 2:117 is oriented towards God’s omnipotence: when He wills something to exist, it exists without any preparation or effort.

In the following example the verb *qāla* also can have both a directive and an assertive meaning:

(7) Qur’ānic excerpt number 7:
wa-qāla llāhu lā tataḥīdū ilāhayni ṭnayni innamā huwa ilāhun wāḥidun fa-iyyāya fa-rhabūni (Q 16:51)
 “And Allah has **said**: ‘Do not take two gods. Verily, He is only One God; hence, fear Me (and Me alone).’

The message in Q 16:51 is that polytheism is prohibited. God states or commands that the people who believe must not worship two gods or more. The verb *qāla* is commonly used in Qur’ānic polemic language. Polemics in the Qur’ān consist primarily of argumentation directed against pagans, Jews and Christians. However, polemic language can also be employed in other contexts, such as when addressing erring or recalcitrant Muslims.³⁵

³³ This interpretation is strengthened by Ṭabarī’s explanation (*Ġāmi’ al-bayān*, vol. 1, p. 712): *wa-iḍ kāna ḍālika ka-ḍālika fa-amara llāhu ḡalla wa-‘azza iḍā arāda ṭḡādahu wa-takwīnahu irādahu iyyāhu* “[And when it is [i.e., when something unspecified is decreed by God] it is God, may He be exalted and glorified, who commands when He wants to create [something] and to bring it forth.”

³⁴ Aijmer, *English Discourse Particles*, pp. 153-154.

³⁵ Zebiri, “Polemic and Polemic Language”, vol. 4, p. 114. For an overview of the topics and features of polemic

³⁰ Shemesh, *Verbs of Saying in Mishnaic Hebrew*, p. 197.

³¹ Miller, *The Representation of Speech*, p. 234 calls this form “non-interactive reported speech”, i.e., reported speech that is not part of a dialogical exchange or that does not report any actual or putative speech event.

³² Another example is Q 3:59.

There are various stylistic/linguistic features of Qur'ānic writing such as exhortations, curses, declarations of woe and rhetorical and hypothetical questions.³⁶ Arguments and challenges are also mentioned by Zebiri and are characterized by a large number of occurrences of the verb *qāla* because the hypocrites/unbelievers are not fully committed to God and challenge Muḥammad and the message of the Qur'ān repeatedly. However, God guides Muḥammad how to respond to their claims. This suggests that the verb *qāla* in polemic discourse has the illocutionary force of assertion as shown in Q 23:81.³⁷

(8) Qur'ānic excerpt number 8:

bal qālū miṭla mā qāla l-awwalūna (Q 23:81)

“Nay, but they **say** the like of what the ancients said.”

In the previous verses (Q 23:77-80) it is said that God created the people. He created and caused them to multiply in the land and brings about life and death. Nevertheless, those who deny God's oneness imitate their ancestors by using arguments identical to those of their ancestors, who claimed that they denied the signs of God.³⁸

Another structure worth mentioning in this context is constructed with the passive verb *qīla* followed by the active verb *qālu*:

(9) Qur'ānic excerpt number 9:

wa-idā qīla lahum āminū ka-mā āmana n-nāsu qālū a-nu`minu ka-mā āmana s-sufahā`u (Q 2:13)

“Whenever they are **told**: Believe as others believe, they **answer**: Shall be believed as the fools have believed?”

Typically, the subject of the verb *say* (or *qāla*) is the speaker. However, when a verb in the passive (*qīla* in Arabic) is used, the speaker is left out of the picture, although he or she is known and relevant³⁹, as in Q 2:13 where God is defined as the originator of the message. The verb *qīla* is followed by a prepositional phrase

followed by a verb in the imperative. In this contextual frame *qīla* has a directive illocutionary force and thus might be interpreted as “were requested”, “were asked”, while the active verb *qālū* has an assertive illocutionary force and is interpreted as “answered” or “claimed”.

In the following example *qāla* can be paraphrased as an interrogative (“they asked”):

(10) Qur'ānic excerpt number 10:

qālū a-idā mitnā wa-kunnā turāban wa-`izāman a-innā la-mab`ūtūna (Q 23:82)

“They **say**: When we die and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised up again?”

A similar meaning can be found in Q 75:10 where on the day of resurrection the disbelievers seek to escape the burden of sins and fear of torment, and ask where this salvation will come from:

(11) Qur'ānic excerpt number 11:

yaqūlu l-insānu yawma`idin ayna l-mafarru (Q 75:10)

“On that day man **shall inquire**: Where is the escape?”

Finally, *qāla* can be paraphrased solely as “say” or “stated”, and not as an argument:

(12) Qur'ānic excerpt number 12:

wa-wariṭa sulaymānu dāwūda wa-qāla yā-ayyuhā n-nāsu `ullimnā mantiqa ṭ-ṭayri wa-`ūtīnā min kulli ṣay`in inna hādā la-huwa l-faḍlu l-mubīnu (Q 27:16)

“And Solomon made David his heir and he **said**: O people! We have been taught the language of the birds, and we have been granted everything; verily this is a manifest favor.”

Searle (1969) defined an illocutionary act as “assertive” in the case where the addressee is told how things are, and this is exactly what Solomon does in Q 27:16. He stands in front of his people and states the following facts: we understand the language of birds and we have been endowed with this power.⁴⁰

The grammatical, semantical and pragmatic uses of the verb *qāla* in the examples discussed in this section are not very different from their use in section 2.1. Here too, the verb occurs either in the past or imperative form followed by an asyndetic clause. The verb may be interpreted as a command, answer, question or claim and

discourse in the Qur'ān see Azaiez, *Le contre-discourse coranique*, pp. 28-54.

³⁶ Zebiri, “Polemic and Polemic Language”, vol. 4, p. 116.

³⁷ This category can also include Q 2:116 which is mentioned by Azaiez, *Le contre-discourse coranique*, p. 145. In this verse the verb *qālū* introduces the reported direct speech in the counter-discourse (i.e., discourse in which opposing voices are presented).

³⁸ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi` al-bayān*, vol. 10, p. 61.

³⁹ Goossens, “Say: Focus on the Message”, pp. 87-88.

⁴⁰ Searle, *Speech acts*, pp. 12-15.

it is mostly used to emphasize the message expressed in the utterance.

2.3. The Imperative (2nd person) Form of the Verb *qāla*

Radscheit classifies the *qul*-statements into three basic types: (1) The polemic patterns, which concentrate on three issues: the emphasis on God's omnipotence, the legitimizing of the prophet and his revelation, and various themes such as fighting. (2) Instructive patterns. This consists of an indirect question introduced by *yas'alunaka* upon which the *qul*-statement answers. (3) Independent *qul*-statements that appear as prayers, credos, slogans or polemic utterances.⁴¹

These types have a number of features in common. Although the giver of orders is supposed to be God, in many cases the verb *qul* should not be interpreted as a simple request/order from God but rather as an instruction.⁴² The setting of the text seems to imply that God instructs the prophet Muḥammad how to react or how to answer with the verb *qul*.

The use of a verb *qul* first requires addressing the issue of the "narrator". In the previous section where the verb *qāla* (i.e., the verb in the past or habitual present) was analyzed, we saw that the narrator conveys his duties to the participants in the narrative. In this case he can be characterized as an external narrator, who does not explicitly refer to himself as an actor,⁴³ whereas in other instances he becomes a character-bound narrator⁴⁴ who is identified with one of the actors in the story.⁴⁵ Barthes' definition of the narrator concept⁴⁶ suggests that God – the Qur'ānic narrator – can be seen as a sort of omniscient, impersonal consciousness that tells the story from above. This narrator (God) knows everything: the participants in the story, their actions and their ways of thinking. By know-

ing everything, God is responsible for choosing the message to be conveyed. In other words, when the verb *qul* is used, it indicates that God actually puts words in the mouth of Muḥammad. Radscheit mentions that this explanation of *qul*-statements was put forward by Western scholars. He notes that according to Horovitz the function of *qul* is a literary device "to remind the hearer again and again that Allah is the speaker."⁴⁷ This is illustrated in the following examples:

(13) Qur'ānic excerpt number 13:

wa-iḏā qāla lahum āminū bi-mā anzala llāhu qālū nu'minu bi-mā unzila 'alaynā wa-yakfurūna bi-mā warā'ahū wa-huwa l-ḥaqqu muṣaddiḡan li-mā ma'ahum qul fa-li-ma taqtulūna anbiyā'a llāhi min qablu in kuntum mu'minīna (Q 2:91)

"When it is said to them: Believe in what Allah has sent down they said: We believe (only) in what was sent down to us (before). But they disbelieve what is beyond that, while it is the Truth confirming what is with them. **Say**: Why then were you slaying the Prophets of Allah in former times, if you were (indeed) faithful?"

The event described in Q 2:91 is that the children of Israel were asked to believe in what God sent down; namely, the Qur'ān; however, they said that they believed in what had been revealed to them; i.e., the Torah, and not in anything else. In reply God instructs Muḥammad to say to the children of Israel that if they truly believed in the Torah, the Divine Book in which killing is prohibited, they would not have killed the prophets of God.

(14) Qur'ānic excerpt number 14:⁴⁸

wa-qāla llaḡīna kafarū lā ta'tīnā s-sā'atu qul balā (Q 34:3)

"And those who disbelieve say: The Hour (of Judgment) shall not come upon us. **Say**, yes indeed [it will come]".

This verse refers to those who deny God's omnipotence and claim that there will be no resurrection for human beings. However, in view of the fact that the evidence for the hereafter is manifest, God orders the Prophet to declare that the resurrection indeed will take place.

(15) Qur'ānic excerpt number 15:

⁴¹ Radscheit, "Word of God", pp. 33-36; Cf. Neuwirth, "Form and Structure of the Qur'ān", p. 261. Azaiez, *Le contre-discourse coranique*, p. 8, mentions that the form *yaqūlūna... fa-qul* is a prominent character of the Qur'ānic counter-discourse.

⁴² Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān*, pp. 39, 41, 63, 81.

⁴³ Bortolussi and Dixon, *Psychonarratology*, pp. 63-64, call this type of narrator "extradiegetic".

⁴⁴ Bortolussi and Dixon, *Psychonarratology*, pp. 63-64, call this type of narrator "homodiegetic".

⁴⁵ Bal, *Narratology*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives", p. 57.

⁴⁷ Radscheit, "Word of God", pp. 36-37. See: Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, p. 5. Cf. Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān*, p. 67.

⁴⁸ Another example is Q 25:4-8, which is mentioned by Azaiez, *Le contre-discourse coranique*, p. 150.

in tuṣibka ḥasanatun tasu'hum wa-in tuṣibka muṣibatun yaqūlū qad aḥadnā amranā min qablu wa-yatawallaw wa-hum fariḥūna qul lan yuṣibanā illā mā kataba llāhu lanā huwa mawlānā wa-'alā llāhi fa-l-yatawakkali l-mu'minūna (Q 9:50-51)
 “If (any) good befalls you, it vexes them; but if an affliction visits you, they say: We took care of our affairs in advance, and they turn away, rejoicing.
Say: Never shall afflict us (anything) save what Allah has prescribed for us; He is our Master; and on Allah should the believers rely.”

In Q 9:50-51, the Qur'ān refers to one of the other arguments put forward by hypocrites. If something good happens to the Prophet and Muslims, such as a victory on the battlefield, they will be annoyed. They will be troubled if the Prophet overcomes an enemy in war or claims bounty. However, if an affliction befalls the Muslims, such that they fail or are killed, for example, they will rejoice and say that they have ceased criticizing Muḥammad and do not adhere to the beliefs of his enemies.⁴⁹

Ṭabarī interprets the clause which follows the verb *qul* in this verse as follows: *yaqūlu ta'ālā ḍikruhu mu'addiban nabīyyahu muḥammadan* “God Almighty says while teaching his prophet Muḥammad.” This sheds light on the pragmatics of the utterances beginning with *qul* in that they teach or instruct the prophet in his interactions with unbelievers or hypocrites. Thus, in reaction to what was said in Q 2:91, God orders Muḥammad to say or reply as follows: Whatever happens to us, the believers, is dictated by God. We live under the mastership of Allah and we rely on him.

The following examples illustrate another type of discourse in which *qul* is used.

(16) Qur'ānic excerpt number 16:
yas'alūnaka 'ani l-ahillati qul hiya mawāqītu lin-nāsi (Q 2:189)
 “They ask you about the new moons; **say:** They are times appointed for mankind and (for) the Hajj.”

Q 2:189 refers to a series of laws which start with the verb *yas'alūnaka* “They ask you/will ask you”; i.e., *yas'aluka aṣḥābuka yā muḥammadu* “Your company ask/will ask you O Prophet.”⁵⁰

The people come to Muḥammad asking him what the crescent moon is for and its uses. In response, God ordered the Prophet to tell/explain

to them the effects and the different usages of the crescent for all peoples; namely the sighting of the crescent moon tells them when to begin fasting and when the fast ends, when to make pilgrimages, etc.⁵¹ All are timed according to the lunar months and can easily be calculated according to the phases of the moon. In other words, the Moon is a natural calendar for all human beings that can be used to regulate their lives.

(17) Qur'ānic excerpt number 17:
yas'alūnaka 'ani l-ḥamri wa-l-maysiri qul fihimā iṭmun kabīrun (Q 2:219)
 “They ask you about wine and gambling. **Say:** There is a great sin in both of them.”

Q 2:219 also features a question and a divine answer. The question is about wine and gambling. In response, God addresses the Prophet and tells him to say or to answer that both are sins, although certain people derive benefits. According to Ṭabarī, when people drink they get drunk and can hurt others, whereas gambling distracts people from worshiping God and from prayer.⁵²

Q 2:219 illustrates the argument of Gwynne regarding the structure of the law where the structure of the original rule-sentence must imply that in circumstances X, Y is required/ permitted. If it cannot be so restated, it cannot serve as a guide for inference.⁵³ In Q 2:219 it is inferred that under the rule, it is prohibited.

In the following example God instructs Muḥammad to address the associationists, by asking them to acknowledge the act of the giver of sustenance (such as rain from heaven, the light and heat of the sun, the air in the atmosphere of the Earth, that also makes human existence possible and the plants which both people and animals can eat).⁵⁴

(18) Qur'ānic excerpt number 18:
qul man yarzuqukum mina s-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi quli llāhu wa-innā aw 'iyyākum la-'alā hudan aw fī ḍalālin mubīnin (Q 34:24)
 “Say: Who gives you sustenance from the heavens and the earth? **Say:** Allah. And verily we or you are upon right guidance, or in manifest error.”

The question and answer argumentative mode is designed to awake their consciences,

⁵¹ See Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 253.

⁵² Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 2, p. 488.

⁵³ Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 12, p. 114.

⁴⁹ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 6, p. 193.

⁵⁰ See Razī, *maḥāṭib al-ḡayb*, vol. 6, p. 20-21. Cf. Bayḍawī, *Anwār al-tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 499.

and discover the source of their error within themselves.⁵⁵ However, the associationists' reports are not mentioned, perhaps because they were unable to reply satisfactorily.⁵⁶ However, it is noteworthy that without waiting for God to instruct him, Muḥammad knows how to answer to the question: Say/tell them it is Allah who is the origin of all these bounties. That is, the issue is so clear and evident that their answer would have been meaningless.

According to the setting elaborated by the Qur'ānic text Allah is the supreme God, and Muḥammad is his messenger. He has the authority to command or to require from his prophet to execute or say things on Allah's behalf. For this reason, the verb *qul* focuses on the relationship between the participants of the utterance, Allah and Muḥammad, while underscoring the status of each participant. It could be argued that the illocutionary force of *qul* expresses a directive act, when God orders Muḥammad to say/transmit his words.

The key meaning in the verses above is that the unbelievers claim to believe in God when they do not, whereas ultimately, they are powerless and dependent on His grace. The same is true for the legal passages incorporating the verb *qul*, which can be interpreted in this context as "explain" or "state". When people ask the prophet about a certain law and he transmits God's answer, he indirectly explains and guides them what to do and how. This interpretation is also implied in Gwynne's explanation on the usage of the imperative form *qul*: "while human beings may not be entitled to demand explanations from God, they are entitled to know their relation to him. Accordingly, Qur'anic commands and commandments are usually accompanied by explanations of the results God will produce when his orders are obeyed, or of the circumstances which create the obligation to perform a certain action or achieve a certain state. In other words, God's commandments come with answers to the question 'Why?'"⁵⁷

The final example illustrates one exceptional case of the verb *qāla*, which in my opinion acts as a non-illocutionary rather than a locutionary verb:

(19) Qur'ānic excerpt number 19:

wa-l-yahṣa llaḏīna law tarakū min ḥalfihim durriyyatan ḏi 'āfan ḥāfū 'alayhim fa-l-yattaqū llāha wa-l-yaqūlū qawlan sadīdan (Q 4:9)

"And let those fear who, if they left behind them weak children, would fear on their account, so let them be in awe of Allah, and let them **speak** right words."

This verse may refer to the prohibition against outsized donations and bequests rather than entire properties to avoid having young, powerless children be reduced to poverty and misfortune after their death. These people should trust in God and they should speak only right and honest words; namely, to mention helpless children [in their wills].⁵⁸

In all the instances analyzed up to now, three components including the verb *qāla* have been identified in discourse: the addressor, the addressee and the message. In Q 4:9 there is no addressee and no (concrete) message, such that it is not clear who the words are addressed to and in which communicative circumstance they are uttered. The type of direct object also differs. Whereas *qāla* usually introduces direct discourse comprising an exact quotation formulated as either an imperative verb or an asyndetic clause, *qāla* in Q 4:9 is followed by a noun in the accusative. Therefore, the verb *yaqūlū* in Q 4:9 has the basic meaning of 'say' and can be paraphrased as "let them utter". It cannot be paraphrased as "stated" or "argued" unlike most of the forms of *qāla*.

Conclusion

The verb *qāla* can be seen as an ordinary verb which does not differ a great deal from other verbs indicating a certain action. This is illustrated in the Qur'ānic translations, where analysis showed that *qāla* is usually translated simply as "said". For example, the verb *qāla* in Q 3:40 (example 5) and in Q 6:51 (example 7) is translated by Abdel Haleem (2005) as "said", by Rubin (2015) as "*amar* (said)" and by Bobzin (2010) as "sprach". This verb was only translated differently in two cases. In Q 75:10 (example 11) Rubin chose to translate the verb *qālū* as "*yas'alū* (they will ask)" and in Q 4:9 (example 19) *qālū* is translated in English, Hebrew and German as "speak". The question is why the basic translation of *qālū* as

⁵⁵ See <<https://www.al-islam.org> Commentary on Q 34:24>.

⁵⁶ Ṭabarī, *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 12, p. 114.

⁵⁷ Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur'ān*, p. 82.

⁵⁸ See *Ġāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 3, p. 362.

“said” was not maintained in the translation of Q 4:9 and Q 75:10.

Scholars often point out that the verb *qāla* is a prominent feature of polemic discourse in the Qur’ān. However, studies have not clarified why this particular verb is employed in this discourse. There are many other verbs such as *za‘ama* “claim” which could have been used instead.

In various works on verbs of saying in English and Hebrew the verb “say” is considered to belong to a class of verbs related to communication and the transmission of ideas. It communicates a message, whereas its semantic meaning differs with respect to the nature of the message, the way it is communicated, and its sentential complement. This explanation is fully realized in all the verses analyzed in this article. *qāla* as a performative verb usually occurs in two contextual domains: in verbal exchanges between participants as part of a conversation, and in non-conversational contexts. Both domains require a verb that focuses clearly on the message, and this might explain why the verb *qāla* is used frequently in polemic discourse or word-exchange situations.

We also saw that *qāla* performs three elementary illocutionary acts: assertion, question

and orders. Thus, in most cases *qāla* can be paraphrased as “stated”, “argued”, “ordered”, “asked” and “answered” and is only understood as “uttered” in a few cases. Therefore it is plausible to argue that the argumentative feature of Qur’ānic polemical language or any situation of word-exchange in the Qur’ān is the result of the use of the verb *qāla*, since this verb not only signals the word-exchange between the parties but has an illocutionary force and hence it is interpreted by the addressee as “argued”, “claimed” or “stated”.

Thus, to have a better understanding of the usage of the verb *qāla* in the Qur’ān it is not enough to identify its discursive context. Rather approach that associates these semantic, syntax, context and pragmatic components is needed to elucidate the usage of this verb. This association is and summarized in the table below:

The table clearly shows that meaning, context and pragmatics of the verb *qāla* are inseparable. The many occurrences of the verb *qāla* show that it plays an integral role in the Qur’ānic text. It is used as a thread that connects the discourse participants, but primarily this verb, like the chameleon that changes its color as a function of its surroundings, change its meaning according to the context.

Context	Pragmatics	Semantic (illocutionary act)	Syntax
Narratives that include dialogues	(a) <i>qāla</i> is used as an “introducer” for direct speech (example 1-5). (b) <i>qāla</i> expresses the so-called “foreground information” in the narratives. The plot is advanced by this verb. (c) <i>qāla</i> helps track or identify the addressor is and the addressee in the utterance. (d) <i>qāla</i> focuses attention on the message.	<i>qāla</i> can be paraphrased as “asserted”, “stated”, “argued” or “ordered”. The meaning of <i>qāla</i> is affected by the string that follows it.	(a) <i>qāla</i> is usually in third- person perfect. (b) <i>qāla</i> is followed by either an asyndetic clause or a verb in the imperative. (c) If <i>qāla</i> is followed by a verb in the imperative form, it has a directive illocutionary force. If <i>qāla</i> is followed by an asyndetic clause, it has an assertive illocutionary force.
Non-conversational	(a) <i>qāla</i> stresses the verbal exchange between opposing parties. It constitutes a linguistic feature of Qur’ānic polemic language (example 9). (b) There are also non-argumentative/ polemic passages. In both types of discourse <i>qāla</i> emphasizes the message (examples 6,7,8,10,11,12).	The same as in narratives (see above).	The same as in narratives (see above). In a few cases the verb <i>yaqūlu</i> in the habitual present appears.
Non-conversational	(a) In polemic discourse the verb <i>qul</i> is used (examples 13-15,18). The speaker is God and the imperative form indicates God’s guidance. Specifically, Muḥammad is a vehicle for transmitting God’s message. (b) In legal discourse it indicates an explanation of an unclear legal issue (examples 16-17).	<i>qāla</i> can be paraphrased as “assert”, “state”, “say” or “answer”. The meaning of <i>qāla</i> is affected by the string that follows it.	The verb in the imperative form <i>qul</i> is followed by an asyndetic clause.

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