

Analyzing the Epistemological Sermons of Imam Ali (AS) Based on Searle's Speech Act Theory (Case Study: Assertive Speech Acts)

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Abstract

John Searle's speech act theory, as one of the foundational approaches in pragmatic analysis of language, enables the examination of texts beyond the grammatical and semantic levels, uncovering the speaker's hidden intentions and the impact of speech on the audience. The present study aims to analyze assertive speech acts in the epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS) based on Searle's speech act theory. Epistemological sermons refer to those delivered with the purpose of raising awareness, enhancing insight, and guiding audiences toward truth. This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, examining samples from the epistemological sermons of Nahj al-Balagha to analyze assertive speech acts as the dominant type of speech acts in these sermons. The findings indicate that Imam Ali (AS), through the extensive use of declarative and descriptive structures, elucidates religious truths, clarifies the nature of opposing movements, portrays the condition of society and true believers, classifies various groups of people, and warns against the consequences of following whims and desires. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam seeks to explain and reveal reality as it truly is for the audience. Furthermore, assertive speech acts in these sermons function beyond mere information transmission and serve as a fundamental tool for intellectual enlightenment, correcting beliefs, and fostering insight among the audience, which aligns perfectly with the epistemological nature of these sermons and the Imam's primary goal of intellectual guidance and social reform.

Keywords: Nahj al-Balagha, Speech Act Theory, John Searle, Imam Ali (AS), Assertive Speech Acts, Epistemological Sermons.

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Introduction

Discourse, in its modern sense, transcends a mere collection of sentences and linguistic expressions; it is an arena for the production of meaning, identity formation, and the exercise of power within the context of social relations. The study of discourse as a mechanism that transforms language into a social and ideological act has gained a fundamental position in textual analysis in recent decades. In this approach, every utterance is considered not merely a reflection of external reality, but rather a factor in constructing reality, directing public opinion, and delineating the boundaries of "self" and "other." From this perspective, discourse analysis enables the recognition of hidden layers of meaning, power relations embedded in the text, and the speaker's persuasive strategies, demonstrating how language, within historical, social, and political contexts, acquires a function beyond the mere transmission of information.

One of the most effective theories in the pragmatic analysis of discourse is John Searle's speech act theory, which, inspired by the ideas of John Austin, regards language as an arena for performing various acts. Searle classifies speech acts into five main categories: assertive (representative) acts, which express belief and describe reality; directive acts, which call upon the audience to perform an action; commissive acts, which commit the speaker to a future action; expressive acts, which reflect the speaker's psychological and emotional states; and declarative acts, which, by virtue of the speaker's authority, bring about a change in the state of the world. This classification demonstrates that every linguistic act, in addition to its informational content, contains a communicative intention and a specific effect on the audience, and the speaker's choice of each of these acts is made based on the situational context, audience analysis, and the ultimate goal of communication.

Nahj al-Balagha, as one of the most prominent religious-literary texts in Islamic civilization, is replete with clear and authentic examples of the purposeful application of speech acts. The epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS)—that is, those sermons delivered with the aim of raising awareness, enhancing insight, critiquing deviant intellectual movements, and guiding audiences toward truth—constitute one of the central sections of Nahj al-Balagha. These sermons, particularly those delivered by the Imam in confrontation with groups such as the Kharijites, or amid the socio-political crises of his caliphate, are excellent examples of committed, argumentative, and impactful discourse that, through a notable diversity of linguistic acts, seeks to persuade both the intellect and the heart of the audience. In this article, we aim to analyze speech acts in the epistemological sermons of Nahj al-Balagha based on John Searle's theoretical framework, and to

demonstrate how Imam Ali (AS), with a profound understanding of the situational context and communicative intentions, employed various types of speech acts to achieve his guiding and reformative objectives.

Research Background

After reviewing and scrutinizing scientific journals and specialized online databases, to the best of our knowledge, no independent research has yet been found that has examined the epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS) from the perspective of John Searle's speech act theory. This fact adds to the added value of the present study in terms of innovation and originality of the topic. Nevertheless, numerous studies have investigated Quranic texts, prophetic traditions, religious orations, and sometimes poetic texts in light of this theory, indicating the presence of this pragmatic approach in the field of contemporary criticism. Among the most prominent of these studies, the following can be mentioned:

Blawi and Hazabizadeh, in a study entitled "The Pragmatics of Speech Events in the War Sermons of Imam Ali (AS): An Analysis of Action Types Based on Searle's Fivefold Speech Acts," published in the journal **Contemporary Studies in Nahj al-Balagha**, examined the military discourse of Imam Ali (AS) in Nahj al-Balagha. The results show that the war sermons of Imam Ali (AS) possess a high density of speech act applications and a remarkable capacity for utilizing speech acts to achieve communicative purposes and profound impact; a matter that is consistent with the status of jihad, invitation, and homiletic aesthetics based on truthfulness, clarity, and reasoning.

Amir Hussein Rasoulnia and colleagues, in an article entitled "A Textological Analysis of the Shaqshaqiyyah Sermon Based on Searle's Speech Act Theory," published in the **Journal of Nahj al-Balagha Studies**, examined the Shaqshaqiyyah Sermon from the perspective of linguistic functions. The findings indicate that assertive and expressive acts are the dominant types in this sermon; furthermore, the emotional structure of the sermon is dedicated to expressing the anger, grief, and protest of Imam Ali (AS) regarding the usurpation of the caliphate, and here language carries a high emotional and protest-oriented burden.

Abbas and Meshkin-Fam (2022), in a study entitled "Speech Acts in Surah Al-Hijr Based on Searle's Theory: Assertive Speech Acts as a Case Study," analyzed assertive acts in this Surah and concluded that assertive speech acts in Surah Al-Hijr belong to a pattern of action formed with the aim of conveying doctrinal, historical, and moral concepts to the audience, and despite their declarative appearance, they function as guiding and signifying acts within the Quranic context. Furthermore, assertive speech acts in religious texts, although at the sentence level possess a declarative and descriptive structure, at the pragmatic layer they fulfill

a guiding and orienting function, calling the audience to reflect upon and revise their beliefs.

Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

Pragmatics, as one of the modern fields of linguistics, examines the ways in which language is used in concrete situations and real social contexts. The fundamental distinction of this branch from other areas of linguistics lies in the fact that it defines meaning not at the level of vocabulary and syntactic structures, but in relation to the speaker's intention and purpose, the situational context, and the audience's reaction (Yule, 2010: 19). In other words, pragmatics is concerned with the quality and manner of meaning transmission, and in this way, regards language as a dynamic, active, and purposeful phenomenon that is formed within the context of human interactions. In this approach, what makes a linguistic expression meaningful is not merely its grammatical and lexical components, but rather the conditions in which the expression is used and the intentions the speaker pursues behind it. Pragmatics, by emphasizing context, enables the understanding of hidden layers of meaning and demonstrates how a single sentence can have different functions in various situations.

Out of this same socio-functional perspective, a field called discourse analysis has emerged. Discourse, as language in action and performance, possesses a structure beyond the sentence that contains layers of power relations, dominant ideologies, and communicative intentions (Wodak, 2001: 66). From this viewpoint, discourse analysis seeks to reveal how language is used in various contexts for public persuasion, resistance to the status quo, legitimization of political actions, or expression of protest; and every utterance or text is produced in a specific context and pursues certain objectives (Maingueneau, 1996: 15). Therefore, in the discourse analysis approach, language is not merely a tool for transmitting informational data, but a social act with various consequences in political, cultural, and religious arenas, reflecting complex human relations and structures of domination in society. Discourse analysts believe that every linguistic expression, whether in the form of writing or speech, is formed in a specific context, and without understanding this context, one cannot achieve a proper understanding of its meaning and function.

Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory is considered one of the main pillars of applied language analysis and is founded on the fundamental principle that speech is not merely a tool for describing the world, but rather a social act accompanied by intention, awareness, and semantic weight (Weber, 2013: 33). Social action also refers to behavior in which others are taken into consideration and the action is performed

in accordance with their presence (Charon, 2000: 64). This theory was first proposed by John Austin and then systematized by John Searle, in such a way that Austin emphasized more on the speaker's intention and purpose, while Searle focused on the role and reception of the audience (Khalifah, 2007: 107; Shams, 2021: 51). By completing Austin's ideas, Searle classified speech acts into five main groups: assertive, directive, expressive, declarative, and commissive acts (Searle, 2006: 33). Each of these types has a specific function in the communication process, and the speaker selects one of them according to the communicative intention, situational context, and characteristics of the listener.

a) Assertive (Representative) Acts: An assertive act refers to the expression or description of a situation in which the speaker declares his view regarding the truth or falsity of a proposition and demonstrates his commitment to the correctness or incorrectness of his speech (Searle, 2006: 217). This type of speech includes stating opinions, claims, conclusions, emphasis, descriptions, and the expression of facts, and its application becomes apparent in reporting, defining concepts, and reasoning. In this type of act, the direction of fit is "word-to-world," meaning that the speaker strives to align his speech with external reality.

b) Directive Acts: This group of acts are those by which the speaker attempts to persuade the audience to perform or refrain from an action (Blanchet, 2007: 70). Examples of these acts include commands, prohibitions, requests, pleas, recommendations, and warnings, the ultimate goal of which is to persuade the listener to perform an action in the future (Ahmad, 2002: 80). In these acts, the direction of fit is "world-to-word," meaning that the speaker expects the audience to change the external world in accordance with his will and command.

c) Commissive Acts: A commissive act is a type of speech act in which the speaker commits and obligates himself to perform an action in the future (Alam, 2003: 206). To put it more clearly, in this type of act, the speaker undertakes the responsibility of carrying out an action in the future (Searle, 1999: 14). Examples of these acts include swearing, undertaking, promising, vowing, and guaranteeing. The direction of fit in these acts is also "world-to-word," because the speaker obligates himself to change the world in accordance with his promise.

d) Expressive Acts: This category of acts reflects the speaker's spiritual and emotional state in relation to specific conditions or propositions (Yule, 1996: 53). In this type of act, the speaker does not seek to align speech with the external world or prove its truth or falsity; rather, the main goal is to represent his beliefs, feelings, and inner states (Searle, 1999: 15). Therefore, these acts include expressing sympathy, congratulations, doubt, submission, gratitude, concern, and regret. The presupposition of these acts is the existence of a specific emotional state in the speaker.

e) Declarative Acts: The ultimate goal of this category of speech acts is to bring about a change in the external world solely through verbal expression (Searle, 2006: 219). The distinctive feature of declarative acts lies in the success of their realization; for example, if a person who possesses legal competence declares war, the war is considered to have actually begun (Ahmad, 2002: 79). Prominent examples of declarative acts include condemning, appointing, declaring divorce, dismissing and appointing, and issuing judicial rulings. The realization of these acts requires that the speaker possess the necessary authority and power to effect change in the state of the world.

Analytical Section

In the epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS), assertive acts are considered among the most fundamental linguistic tools for enlightenment and insight enhancement. In these sermons, the Imam employs declarative and descriptive structures to elucidate religious truths, warn against intellectual deviations, and clarify the nature of opposing movements, and by presenting argumentative propositions, he makes the audience aware of existing realities. Concrete examples of these acts in the Imam's discourse include: describing the condition of society and the times, explaining the attributes of true believers and hypocrites, reporting historical events and drawing lessons from the fate of predecessors, and defending the righteousness of his position against opponents—all of which are prominent manifestations of the application of assertive acts in the epistemological sermons.

Assertive Acts in the Epistemological Sermons of Nahj al-Balagha

In the epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS), assertive acts are among the most fundamental linguistic tools for enlightenment and insight enhancement. In these sermons, the Imam employs declarative and descriptive structures to elucidate religious truths, warn against intellectual deviations, and clarify the nature of opposing movements, and by presenting argumentative propositions, he makes the audience aware of existing realities. Concrete examples of these acts in the Imam's discourse include: describing the condition of society and the times, explaining the attributes of true believers and hypocrites, reporting historical events and drawing lessons from the fate of predecessors, and defending the righteousness of his position against opponents—all of which are prominent manifestations of the application of assertive acts in the epistemological sermons. In the following, examples of assertive acts in the epistemological sermons of Nahj al-Balagha are presented:

وَبَقِيَ رَجَالٌ غَضَّ أَبْصَارَهُمْ ذِكْرُ الْمَرْجِعِ وَارْأَقَ دُمُوعُهُمْ خَوْفُ الْمَحْشَرِ فَهُمْ بَيْنَ شَرِيدٍ نَادٍ وَخَائِفٍ مَقْنُوعٍ
وَسَاكِتٍ مَكْعُومٍ وَدَاعٍ مُخْلِصٍ وَتُكْلَانٍ مُوجِعٍ قَدْ أَحْمَلَتْهُمْ التَّقِيَّةَ وَشَمَلَتْهُمْ الدَّلَّةُ فَهُمْ فِي بَحْرِ أَجَاجٍ أَفْوَاهُهُمْ
ضَامِرَةٌ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ قَرِحَةٌ قَدْ وَعْظُوا حَتَّى مَلُّوا وَفُهِرُوا حَتَّى ذُلُّوا وَقَتَلُوا حَتَّى قُلُّوا (Sermon 32).

Translation: "And there remained men whose eyes were lowered by the remembrance of the return (to God), and whose tears were shed by the fear of the gathering (on the Day of Judgment). They are between a fugitive running away, a frightened silenced one, a quiet restrained one, a sincere supplicant, and a grieved bereaved one. Dissimulation (taqiyyah) has rendered them obscure, and humiliation has encompassed them. They are in a bitter sea, their mouths are parched, and their hearts are wounded. They have preached until they became weary, they were overpowered until they were humiliated, and they were killed until they became few."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant type of speech act. The Imam employs declarative and descriptive structures to depict the condition of a group of true believers, presenting propositions about their characteristics in which he demonstrates his commitment to the truthfulness of his claims. The description of men whose eyes were lowered by the remembrance of the return and whose tears were shed by the fear of the gathering, and their classification among various types of pious people—including fugitives, fearful ones, silent ones, supplicants, and bereaved ones—all fall under the category of assertive acts that, through impactful and image-creating language, depict the reality of the state of pure believers amid the hardships and pressures of the time. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to explain and reveal the existing reality as it truly is for the audience. Furthermore, the sentences referring to their obscurity due to dissimulation, the prevalence of humiliation, their being in a bitter sea, their parched mouths, their wounded hearts, and their preaching until weariness, being overpowered until humiliation, and being killed until scarcity, all serve the purpose of enlightening regarding the difficult conditions of believers and explaining the depth of their suffering and oppression. The Imam's primary goal in this description was to create insight and awareness in the audience regarding the status and condition of true believers and to depict them as a model for the people of faith.

فَإِنْ أَبَوْا أُعْطِيَتْهُمْ حَدَّ السَّيْفِ وَكَفَى بِهِ شَافِئاً مِنَ الْبَاطِلِ وَ نَاصِراً لِلْحَقِّ وَ مِنَ الْعَجَبِ بَعْثُهُمْ إِلَيَّ أَنْ أَبْرَزَ
لِلطَّعَانِ وَ أَنْ أَصْبِرَ لِلْجَلَادِ هَبْلَتْهُمْ الْهَبُولُ لَقَدْ كُنْتُ وَ مَا أَهْدَدُ بِالْحَرْبِ وَ لَا أَرْهَبُ بِالصَّرْبِ وَ إِنِّي لَعَلَى يَقِينٍ مِنْ
رَبِّي وَ غَيْرِ شُبْهَةٍ مِنْ دِينِي (Sermon 22).

Translation: "If they refuse, I will give them the edge of the sword, and it suffices as a healer of falsehood and a supporter of truth. And it is a matter of wonder that they send to me (demanding) that I come out for the fight and that I be patient for combat. May they be bereft of their mothers! I have always been one who is not threatened with war nor frightened by blows. And indeed, I am upon certainty from my Lord and without any doubt regarding my religion."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant type of speech act. The Imam employs declarative structures to express facts about his position against opponents, presenting propositions regarding his readiness for confrontation, his astonishment at their demand for war, and his heartfelt certainty in the righteousness of his path, in which he demonstrates his commitment to the truthfulness of his claims. The phrases referring to giving the edge of the sword and its sufficiency as a healer of falsehood and a supporter of truth all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and decisive language, reveal the truth of the Imam's position against the opposing front. Furthermore, the sentences referring to his certainty from his Lord and the absence of doubt regarding his religion serve the purpose of explaining reality and enlightening regarding the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of the Imam. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to depict the existing reality as it truly is for the audience.

أَلَا وَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ قَدْ ذَمَّرَ حِزْبَهُ وَاسْتَجَلَبَ جَلْبَهُ لِيَعُودَ الْجَوْرُ إِلَى أَوْطَانِهِ وَيَرْجِعَ الْبَاطِلُ إِلَى نِصَابِهِ وَاللَّهُ مَا أَنْكَرُوا عَلَى مُنْكَرٍ وَلَا جَعَلُوا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَهُمْ نَصِيفًا (Sermon 22).

Translation: "Behold! Satan has indeed rallied his party and summoned his forces so that injustice may return to its abode and falsehood may return to its place. By God, they have not denied me any (just) objection, nor have they placed any fair judge between me and themselves."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant type of speech act. The Imam employs multiple declarative structures to describe and express an external reality concerning the movements of Satan and his forces and their goal of returning injustice and falsehood to their places, and with statements containing an oath, presents a proposition about the behavior of his opponents, in which he demonstrates his commitment to the truthfulness of his claim. The description of the preparation and summoning of forces by Satan, the expression of the goal of this preparation—the return of injustice and falsehood to their former positions—and also the rejection of the opponents' claims with emphasis that they have not raised any valid objection against the Imam nor placed any just arbiter between themselves and the Imam, all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and decisive language, clarify the truth of the Imam's position and the unjust nature of the opposing front for the audience. In these assertive acts, the direction of fit is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to explain the existing reality as it truly is for the audience, and through reasoned expression, reveals deeper layers of the enemy's conspiracy and the righteousness of his own position. The oath-taking, in its pragmatic context, serves to emphasize the truthfulness of the assertive

proposition and to strengthen the assertive act. The Imam's primary goal in these descriptions was to create insight in the audience regarding the nature of the falsehood front, to make them aware of the enemy's conspiracies, and to enlighten them regarding the righteousness of his position against opponents.

وَالنَّاسُ عَلَى أَرْبَعَةِ أَصْنَافٍ: مِنْهُمْ مَنْ لَا يَمْنَعُهُ الْفُسَادُ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَهَانَةُ نَفْسِهِ وَكِلَالَةُ حَدِّهِ وَنَضِيبُ وَفَرِهِ. وَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُصْلِتُ لِسَيْفِهِ وَ الْمُغْلِبُ بِشَرِّهِ وَ الْمُجْلِبُ بِخَيْلِهِ وَ رَجُلُهُ قَدْ أَشْرَطَ نَفْسَهُ وَ أُوْبَقَ دِينَهُ لِحُطَامٍ يَنْتَهَرُهُ أَوْ مِقْتَبٍ يَقْوُوهُ أَوْ مَنِيرٍ يَفْرَعُهُ وَ لَيْسَ الْمُتَجَرُّ أَنْ تَرَى الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْسِكَ ثَمَنًا وَ مِمَّا لَكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَوَضًا. وَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَطْلُبُ الدُّنْيَا بِعَمَلِ الْآخِرَةِ وَ لَا يَطْلُبُ الْآخِرَةَ بِعَمَلِ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ طَامَنَ مِنْ شَخْصِهِ وَ قَارَبَ مِنْ خَطْوِهِ وَ شَمَّرَ مِنْ ثَوْبِهِ وَ رَخَّرَفَ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ لِلْأَمَانَةِ وَ اتَّخَذَ سِتْرَ اللَّهِ ذَرِيعَةً إِلَى الْمَعْصِيَةِ. وَ مِنْهُمْ مَنْ أَبْعَدَهُ عَنِ طَلَبِ الْمُلْكِ ضُنُوءُهُ نَفْسِهِ وَ انْقِطَاعُ سَبَبِهِ فَقَصَرَتْهُ الْحَالُ عَلَى خَالِهِ فَتَحَلَّى بِاسْمِ الْقَنَاعَةِ وَ تَزَيَّنَ بِلِبَاسِ أَهْلِ الزَّهَادَةِ وَ لَيْسَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فِي مَرَاكِحٍ وَ لَا مَغْدَى (Sermon 32).

Translation: "People are of four categories: Among them is one whom nothing prevents from spreading corruption on earth except the abasement of his soul, the dullness of his edge, and the scantiness of his wealth. And among them is one who has unsheathed his sword, openly declares his evil, and brings his cavalry and infantry; he has pledged his soul and ruined his religion for a paltry gain he seizes, or a troop he leads, or a pulpit he ascends. How bad is the trade when you see the world as the price for yourself, and what you have with God as the compensation! And among them is one who seeks the world through the work of the Hereafter, but does not seek the Hereafter through the work of the world; he has lowered his stature, shortened his steps, rolled up his garments, and adorned himself for trustworthiness, and has taken God's cover as a means to disobedience. And among them is one whom the meanness of his soul and the severance of his means have kept from seeking dominion, so circumstances have confined him to his state; he has adorned himself with the name of contentment and decorated himself with the garment of the ascetics, though he is not at ease in that, morning or evening."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant type of speech act. The Imam employs declarative and descriptive structures to classify and describe four groups of people, presenting propositions about the characteristics and motivations of each group in which he demonstrates his commitment to the truthfulness of his claims. The description of the first group, who are restrained from corruption only by the abasement of their souls and their inability; and the second group, who have openly declared their evil and mobilized their forces, selling their souls and religion for a paltry gain, a troop they lead, or a pulpit they ascend; and the third group, who seek the world through the work of the Hereafter but adorn themselves for trustworthiness and use God's cover as a means to sin; and the fourth group, who, due to their inability to attain dominion, adorn themselves with contentment and ascet-

icism outwardly while not being so inwardly—all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with enlightening and critical language, depict the social and psychological realities governing society. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to explain and analyze the existing reality as it truly is for the audience.

وَأَنَّهُمْ لَيَطْلُبُونَ حَقًّا هُمْ تَرَكَوهُ وَدِمًا هُمْ سَفَكُوهُ، فَلَنَنْ كُنْتُ شَرِيكَهُمْ فِيهِ فَإِنَّ لَهُمْ لَنَصِيبَهُمْ مِنْهُ وَلَنْ كَانُوا وَلَوْهُ دُونِي فَمَا التَّبِعَةُ إِلَّا عِنْدَهُمْ وَإِنْ أَغْظَمَ حُجَّتَهُمْ لَعَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ. يَرْتَضِعُونَ أَمَّا قَدْ فَطَمْتُ وَ يُحْيُونَ بِذَعَةٍ قَدْ أُمِيتَتْ، يَا خَيْبَةَ الدَّاعِي مَنْ دَعَا وَ الْإِمَامَ أُجِيبَ وَ إِنِّي لَرَاضٍ بِحُجَّتِهِ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَ عِلْمِهِ فِيهِمْ (Sermon 22).

Translation: "Indeed, they seek a right that they themselves have abandoned, and a blood [revenge] that they themselves have shed. So if I am their partner in it, then they have their share of it; and if they assumed it (the caliphate) without me, then the pursuit (of it) is only with them. And indeed, their greatest argument is against themselves. They suckle from a mother who has been weaned, and they revive an innovation that has been abolished. O, how disappointing is the caller who calls, and to what is he answered! And indeed, I am satisfied with God's argument against them and His knowledge of them."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant and central type of speech act. The Imam employs multiple declarative structures to explain facts about the contradictions and reprehensible behaviors of his opponents, presenting propositions in which he demonstrates his commitment to the truthfulness of his claims. The reference to the fact that the opponents seek a right they themselves have abandoned and demand blood they themselves have shed, and also the emphasis that their greatest argument is against themselves, all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and decisive language, clarify the truth of the Imam's position and the unjust nature of the opposing front for the audience. The metaphorical description of returning to the bosom of a mother who has been weaned and reviving an innovation that has been abolished serves to explain reality and enlighten regarding the opponents' regression and innovation-mongering. Furthermore, the exclamatory sentence expressing regret and concern over the fate of the callers and those who respond to falsehood, and the final sentence indicating the Imam's satisfaction with God's argument against them and His knowledge of them, although at the grammatical level have expressive (emotional) structures, in the pragmatic context and given the dominance of the assertive act throughout the passage, serve to emphasize the assertive message and reinforce the enlightenment regarding existing realities. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to explain and reveal the existing reality as it truly is for the audience. The Imam's primary goal in these descriptions was to create

insight and awareness in the audience regarding the contradictions of the opposing front, to make them aware of the return to obsolete matters and dead innovations, and to enlighten them regarding the righteousness of his position against opponents; a matter fully consistent with the epistemological nature of the sermon and the Imam's main goal of intellectual guidance and social reform.

أَلَا فَاعْمَلُوا فِي الرَّغْبَةِ كَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ فِي الرَّهْبَةِ. أَلَا وَ إِنِّي لَمْ أَرِ كَالْجَنَّةِ نَامَ طَالِبُهَا وَلَا كَالنَّارِ نَامَ هَارِبُهَا. أَلَا وَ إِنَّهُ مَنْ لَا يَنْفَعُهُ الْحَقُّ يَضُرُّهُ الْبَاطِلُ وَ مَنْ لَا يَسْتَقِيمُ بِهِ الْهُدَى يَجُرُّ بِهِ الضَّلَالُ إِلَى الرَّدَى. أَلَا وَ إِنَّكُمْ قَدْ أُمِرْتُمْ بِالظَّنِّ وَ ذُلِلْتُمْ عَلَى الزَّادِ. وَ إِنَّ أَخَوْفَ مَا أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ اثْنَتَانِ: اتِّبَاعُ الْهَوَى وَ طَوْلُ الْأَمَلِ. فَتَرَوُا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحْزَنُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدًا (Sermon 28).

Translation: "Behold! So act in desire as you act in fear. Behold! I have never seen one who seeks Paradise sleeping, nor one who flees from Hell sleeping. Behold! Whoever is not benefited by the truth is harmed by falsehood, and whoever is not set right by guidance, misguidance drags him to destruction. Behold! You have been commanded to depart (from this world) and have been guided to the provision. And indeed, the two things I fear most for you are: following whims and hoping for a long life. So take provision in this world from this world for what will preserve your souls tomorrow."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant and central type of speech act. The Imam employs declarative structures and emphasizes with "Ala" (Behold!) to express facts about the condition of people in relation to truth and falsehood, guidance and misguidance, and also to depict an image of Paradise and Hell. The propositions referring to the fact that no seeker of Paradise has ever slept, and no one fleeing from Hell has ever slept, and also that whoever is not benefited by the truth is harmed by falsehood, and whoever is not set right by guidance is dragged by misguidance to destruction, all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and cautionary language, explain the existing reality for the audience. Furthermore, the reference to the fact that people have been commanded to depart and guided to provision, and the expression of the two frightening things—following whims and hoping for a long life—serve to enlighten regarding the realities of the path of life and the Hereafter. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to depict the existing reality as it truly is for the audience and to reveal the truth with decisive and reasoned expression.

أَمَّا بَعْدُ، فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَ أَذْنَتْ بِوَدَاعٍ وَ إِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَ أَشْرَفَتْ بِاطِّلَاعٍ. أَلَا وَ إِنَّ الْيَوْمَ الْمِضْمَارَ وَ غَدًا السَّبَّاقَ وَ السَّبْقَةَ الْجَنَّةَ وَ الْغَايَةَ النَّارَ. أَفَلَا تَأْتِبُ مَنْ خَطِيئَتِهِ قَبْلَ مَنِيَّتِهِ؟ أَلَا عَامِلٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَبْلَ يَوْمِ بُؤْسِهِ؟ أَلَا وَ إِنَّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامٍ أَمَلٍ مِنْ وَرَائِهِ أَجَلٌ فَمَنْ عَمِلَ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَلِهِ قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ فَقَدْ نَفَعَهُ عَمَلُهُ وَ لَمْ يَضُرَّهُ أَجَلُهُ وَ مَنْ قَصَرَ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَلِهِ قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ عَمَلُهُ وَ ضَرَّهُ أَجَلُهُ.

Translation: "To proceed: Indeed, the world has turned away and announced its farewell, and indeed, the Hereafter has advanced and come near with its approach. Behold! Today is the racecourse, and tomorrow is the race, and the prize is Paradise, and the goal is Hell. Is there not a repentant one from his sin before his death? Is there not a worker for himself before the day of his hardship? Behold! You are in the days of hope behind which is the appointed term. So whoever acts in the days of his hope before the arrival of his term, his action benefits him and his term does not harm him; and whoever falls short in the days of his hope before the arrival of his term, his action is lost and his term harms him."

In this passage from the words of Imam Ali (AS), the assertive act is identifiable as the dominant and central type of speech act. The Imam employs multiple declarative structures and emphasizes with repeated warnings to explain facts regarding the world's turning away and the Hereafter's approach, and also to depict the atmosphere of competition and racing to reach Paradise or Hell. The propositions referring to the world's turning away and the Hereafter's approach, and the sentence introducing today as the racecourse and tomorrow as the race, and Paradise as the prize and Hell as the ultimate goal, all fall under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and cautionary language, explain the existing reality for the audience. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to depict the existing reality as it truly is for the audience and to reveal the truth with decisive and reasoned expression.

The interrogative and directive sentences that invite repentance from sin before death and action for oneself before the day of hardship, although at the grammatical level have interrogative and directive structures, in their pragmatic context and given the dominance of the assertive act throughout the passage, serve to emphasize the assertive message and reinforce the enlightenment regarding the necessity of repentance and action before the arrival of death and the day of hardship. Furthermore, the sentence that presents the outcome of two groups of people—those who act in the days of their hope before the arrival of their term and benefit from their action, and those who fall short and suffer loss from their action—falls under the category of assertive acts that, with argumentative and decisive language, clarify the reality of foresight and negligence for the audience. The Imam's primary goal in these descriptions was to create insight and awareness in the audience regarding the truth of the world and the Hereafter, to make them aware of the necessity of utilizing opportunities before the arrival of death, and to enlighten them regarding the fate of two groups of people—namely, the actors and the negligent; a matter fully consistent with the epistemological nature of the sermon and the Imam's main goal of intellectual guidance and social reform.

Results

Based on the analysis conducted on the epistemological sermons of Imam Ali (AS) in *Nahj al-Balagha*, it was determined that the assertive (declarative) act, with a significant margin, is the most frequent and dominant type of speech act in these sermons. The Imam, through the extensive use of declarative and descriptive structures, elucidates religious truths, enlightens regarding the nature of opposing movements, and portrays the condition of society and true believers. The propositions presented in the form of describing Satan's movements and his forces, classifying people into four groups, expressing the characteristics of pure believers amid hardships, and depicting an image of Paradise and Hell, all indicate the fact that the Imam, with argumentative, decisive, and reasoned language, seeks to create insight and awareness in the audience. The direction of fit in these acts is "word-to-world," meaning that the Imam strives to explain and reveal the existing reality as it truly is for the audience, and by presenting a truthful and credible picture of the subject in question, to reveal the hidden layers of the enemy's conspiracy and the righteousness of his own position. In all the examined examples, the Imam's primary goal in employing the assertive act was intellectual enlightenment and the creation of insight in the audience regarding religious and social truths.

The examination of the studied samples demonstrates that the assertive act in the epistemological sermons functions beyond the mere transmission of information and serves as a fundamental tool for intellectual enlightenment and the correction of the audience's beliefs. In passages where the Imam describes various groups of people, expresses their behavioral contradictions, and warns against the consequences of following whims and desires, he employs impactful and image-creating language not only to express objective realities, but also by depicting the image of true believers as a model for the people of faith and explaining the fate of the negligent, invites the audience to reflect upon and revise their beliefs and behaviors. This indicates that the assertive acts in the Imam's discourse, at their pragmatic layer, possess a guiding and directive function, and with a declarative appearance, pursue deeper goals such as awareness-raising, creating insight and vision, and reforming the audience's attitudes—which is fully consistent with the epistemological nature of these sermons and the Imam's main goal of delivering them, namely intellectual guidance and social reform.

Given that the present study has specifically examined the assertive act in the epistemological sermons, the results indicate that this type of act constitutes the main axis of the Imam's epistemological discourse, and other speech acts, including directive and expressive acts, are either rarely found in these sermons or are employed on the margins of the assertive act and in service of reinforcing it. The

decisive and clear dominance of the assertive act in all the examined samples suggests that the Imam's communicative strategy in the epistemological sermons was based on the rational and argumentative explanation of realities, and he sought to enhance insight and intellectually reform the audience by relying on the truthful and reasoned expression of facts. This finding is consistent with previous research in the field of speech act analysis in religious texts, including the study of Surah Al-Hijr, which demonstrated that assertive acts in religious texts, despite their declarative appearance, possess a guiding and directive function, and emphasizes the fundamental role of this type of act in religious-guiding discourses.

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