



ISSN: 1994-4217 (Print) 2518-5586(online)

Journal of College of Education

Available online at: <https://eduj.uowasit.edu.iq>

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Keywords:

Optimism, implicature,
speech act, politeness,
Quran, Bible

Article info

Article history:

Received 14.Febr.2023

Accepted 22.Apr.2023

Published 29.May.2023



Optimism in English and Arabic Religious Discourse: A Pragmatic Study

A B S T R A C T

This study attempts to examine linguistic optimism in English and Arabic religious discourses. The language of religious discourse is rich for researchers to study. Optimism is realised through various pragmatic aspects. The study aims to identify the different pragmatic strategies through which optimism is communicated by adopting an eclectic model used to analyse the selected data. It consists of Searle's (1969) speech act theory, Grice's (1975) conversational implicature and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The study uses a qualitative content analysis method to analyse three biblical texts and three Qur'anic texts that contain optimism in the two Holy books. The study shows that optimism is conveyed mainly through the directive, representative speech acts. It is also conveyed through conversational implicature, which is mainly conveyed through words with many connotations. Finally, optimism is mainly exercised through positive politeness strategies such as encouragement, understanding, sympathy and promise to the reader/listener.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol51.Iss1.3170>

التفاؤل في الخطاب الديني العربي والإنجليزي (دراسة تداولية)

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المستخلص

الدراسة الحالية تحاول تقصي مفهوم التفاؤل في الخطاب الديني الإنجليزي والعربي لغويا. وتعد لغة الخطاب الديني لغة غنية يتوجب على الباحثين سبر اغوارها. يتم التعبير عن التفاؤل من خلال استراتيجيات براغماتية مختلفة. هدفت الدراسة إلى التعرف على الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية المختلفة التي تم من خلالها يتم التعبير عن التفاؤل من خلال الانموذج

الانتقائي الذي تم اعتماده لتحليل البيانات والذي يتألف من نظرية فعل الكلام لسيرل (١٩٦٩) ، ونظرية التضمين في المحادثة لجرايس (١٩٧٥) ، ونظرية التأدب لبراون وليفينسون (١٩٨٧). أتبعَت الدراسة أسلوب التحليل النوعي للمحتوى لتحليل (٣) نصوص من الانجيل المقدس و (٣) نصوص قرآنية والتي تضمنت التفاوض في الكتابين المقدسين. وتوصلت الدراسة أن التفاوض ينقل بشكل رئيسي من خلال أفعال الخطاب التوجيهي التمثيلي. وكذلك يتم نقلها أيضًا ضمناً من خلال المحادثة التي تحتوي على كلمات ذات دلالات كثيرة. في نهاية المطاف ، يتم التعبير عن التفاوض بشكل أساسي من خلال استراتيجيات التأدب الإيجابية مثل التشجيع والتفاهم وإظهار التعاطف ووعد القارئ / المستمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجوانب البراغماتية ، الضمنية ، الفعل الكلامي ، الأدب ، التفاوض

1. Introduction

Language is the main mean to communicate peoples' thoughts, ideas and feelings (Gee, 1993). Wardaugh (2006) stated that language identifies peoples' personalities. It is throughout the language of people, one can identify their origin, culture and behavior. Optimism is a psychological behavior that is expressed by language as an explanatory style (Seligman, 1991). Berry and Triands (1980) pointed out that psychological phenomenon should be studied in its culture or between two cultures. The present study is intended to have the data from two religious books as the religious language is regarded as superior to the language of everyday life since it is related to the Devine teachers and their Devine messages (Alston, 1996).

2. Optimism in English Discourse

The word optimism appeared for the first time in the work of "Theodicee" at 1910. It was derived from the Latin word "optimus" which meant the greatest good (James, 2002). Optimism was defined as the good things definitely prevail over evil. Optimism is defined by the New Oxford dictionary of English (1999) as a noun indicates that there is something good to happen in the future. It is the opposite of pessimism and bearishness. Optimism is also defined by Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995) as the tendency to be hopeful, to emphasize the good part rather than the bad ones. It is the feeling that good things are more likely to happen rather than the bad ones. The concept of optimism has been highlighted two decades ago, in spite of its essential role in mankind in general and psychological studies in particular. Seligman (1991) argued that optimism is found in the thinking style by which individuals express themselves in good situations. Furthermore, Peterson (2000) considered optimism as the result of the factual expectation, self-efficacy and the true meaning of life. Optimism in the Holy Bible is considered as the existence of the Christ and the blessings of the Holy spirit for instance, St. Paul said in the Biblical verse (BV. henceforth) "Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice. [5](#)Let your moderation be *known* unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. [6](#)Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [7](#)and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians: 4-7)(KJV, NT).

3. Optimism in Arabic Discourse

Optimism is one of the most prominent beliefs and practices from the early ages. Although Islam is against all the irrational and non-reasonable beliefs that occur in the non-Islamic ages since it has pure monotheistic ideas (Ahmed & Alom, 2014). Linguistically, the word optimism (فأل) (faʿal) is derived from the verb (يتفائل) which means to have a faith that something good is to happen without its reality, it leads to positive thinking in future comings. Generally speaking, optimism is to hear good words and to believe it which is against pessimism (Ibn Atheer, .n.d. p.406). Optimism in the Arabic lexicon is associated with a psychological preparation that prepares for seeing the good side of things and reassurance in life, as it helps to bear the difficulties of life. To sum up, it is the expectation of good by what can be heard from good speech (Alansari, 1998). Optimism in the Arabic lexicon is a psychological preparation that prepares for seeing the good side of things and reassurance in life, as it helps to bear the difficulties of life. (فأل) is the singular noun of the plural (فأول) (faʿaul) which means to have faith that something good is to happen. It is the opposite of (شؤم) pessimism (Omer, ٢٠٠٨). Islam is the religion of optimistic views, being optimistic is the main Characteristics of Muslims. Hence, optimism in Islam is to work hard and hope for Allah's help to live in welfare. As Almighty Allah draws the way to people to be in the right path as in the optimistic Quranic verse (QV henceforth):

(وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَاتَّبِعْنِي فَرَبِّبٌ أَجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِ إِذَا دَعَانِ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ) (البقرة: ١٨٦)

(When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when calleth on me: Let them also with a will, Listen to my call and believe in me that they may walk in the right way" (Ali, Trans.1937.p.137).

4. Pragmatic Aspects of Optimism

4.1 Speech Act

Searle (1969) argued that the theory of speech acts is the theory that analyses the role of expressions in the interpersonal communication behavior of speakers and listeners. The historical background of this theory is traced to the claim that Wittgenstein who is a German philosopher, but Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) later developed it to its form now. Austin (1962) distinguished between statements which he called constatives and performatives. His classification was developed by several attempts. The taxonomy of Searle (1969) was one of the most influential research method of those attempts. Searle (1969) reclassified speech acts more systematically into two types: direct and indirect. A direct speech act is defined as is one where the structure corresponds to the function, that is, a speaker may perform an action by saying something directly. As for instance, he uses an interrogative sentence to ask for something (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). On the other hand, indirect speech acts are speech acts in which the structure do not correspond to its function. Searle (1969) defined direct and indirect speech acts as sentences contain the illocutionary force for one type of illocutionary act may be used to perform another type of illocutionary act. Each sentence has two-illocutionary force utterances which are literal (direct) and non-literal (indirect). Searle classified the speech acts according to the illocutionary points. He classified the following speech acts:

1. Representatives or assertives which are clarified by the speaker's beliefs that something is true. They show a word to world fit. Representative speech acts are like stating, suggesting, boasting and concluding.
2. Commissives are speech acts in which the speaker has commit himself to do something in the future either by promising or by undertaking to do it. Commissives speech acts are promises, vows and pledges.
3. Directives are speech acts by which the speaker (S henceforth) attempts to get the hearer (H henceforth) to do something. Directive speech acts are used for functions such as asking, ordering, requesting, praying, and pleading, begging, inviting, permitting and advising.
4. Expressives are speech acts where the S expresses himself towards the H such as thanking, apologizing, condoling, deploring and welcoming.
5. Declaratives are speech acts where the S changes the world by uttering something. This type of speech acts depend mainly on the context at which the sentence occurs. As for instance, their success depends upon the S and the social community for instance a judge sentences offenders (Archer, Aijmar & Wichmann, 2012).

4.2 Implicature

Grice (1975) contributed the notion of the conversational implicature as one of the types of implicature that cannot be understood unless the participants have the same level of knowledge in a specific situation. Black (2006, p.25) defined conversational implicature as "the combination of language and the context of the situation in which language is used. One utterance, when found in different occasions might not give rise for the same implicature". Mey (2001) stated that conversational implicature is that implied part of meaning which is left to be understood by the listener according to the situation of the speech. As the founder of the implicature, Grice (1975) stated that what a speaker asserts can be divided into what the speaker "says" and what the speaker "implies" by a phrase. The difference between what is said and what is intended is called conversational implicature. Implicature is defined as what can be inferred, interpreted or intended by the speaker as different from what the speaker says. The speakers of an utterance can explicitly or implicitly convey their intended messages. Charles (2002) stated that an implicature is a bridge unconsciously built by the listener and hearer/ reader to link one utterance to some previous utterance. The participants of a conversation should have some kind of a shared background knowledge to understand what is intended to mean. Grice (1975) argued that there are two main categories of implicature: Conventional implicature which is merged from the standard and or conceptual meaning of words in which they take place. Grice (1975) introduces the conversational implicature phenomenon and proved the rules that make it possible for speakers to imply consistently more than what they say. According to Griffiths (2006), conversational implicature is the inferred meaning that rely on the presence of language use requirements. Yule (1996) stated that when the speakers and listeners communicate indirectly about something, they should be in common context so they must therefore be able to draw inferences from the argument that is based on a particular context.

4.3 Politeness

Lakoff (1990, p.34) defined politeness as “the form of behavior which facilitates personal and social interaction to obtain an atmosphere of harmony between interlocutors via minimizing inherent inner conflict in all human interaction”. Actually, Brown and Levinson (1978) developed the technical term “face” to refer to the emotional and social sense of self that everyone needs to be recognized and respected. Yule (1996) pointed out that politeness has a dual nature in the sense of showing closeness and social distance. Brown and Levinson (1987) explained many strategies for positive and negative politeness. The speaker may use different strategies to show a positive face such as:

1. The claim of common ground by (a) the attention to the H’s wants, interests and needs, (b) the use of exaggeration , approval and sympathy with the H, (c) intensify interests to the H, (d) the use of in group identity markers,
2. To convey that the S and H are cooperators by many strategies such as: (a) to offer and promise ,(b) to be optimistic that the H has the same wants, (c) to include the S and the H in the activity, (d) to give and ask for reasons ,(e) to fulfill H’s wants by giving understanding and sympathy.

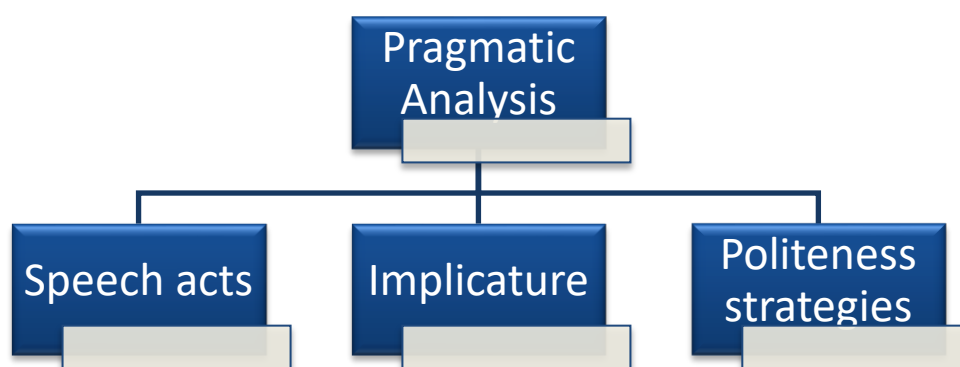
Negative politeness strategies are divided into on record and off record. The on record negative politeness strategies are such as: To be direct that can be done through the use of (a) to be conventionally indirect by the use of hedges and questions, (b) the use of indirect speech acts, (c) to be pessimistic that the H has the same wants. Finally, (d) the use of apologize and beg forgiveness. Off record politeness strategies are such as: Inviting conventional implicature by: (a) giving hints, (b) using words with many connotations (c) using rhetorical questions.

5. Methodology

The present study is a descriptive theoretical qualitative in nature. It is adopted to search the pragmatic aspects of the optimistic religious discourse in Arabic and English languages. Siegle (2002) stated that the advantage of the qualitative method is to emphasize the contextual interpretation of the selected data. Moreover, a qualitative content analysis (QCA henceforth) is adopted to carry out the current study. QCA is defined as “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring, 2000, p.2), and as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.453). As an outcome, the QCA emphasizes the text in a specific situation so as to enable the researcher to have additional information about a particular phenomenon. The selected data is analysed in such subjective and scientific way. The present qualitative research analysis combines between the pragmatic theories which include Searle’s (1969) classification of speech acts, Grice’s (1975) theory of implicature, and Brown and Levinson (1987) theory of politeness. The purpose behind the current analysis is to find out the types of speech acts that are included in the use of such form of language in the Quranic and Biblical verses, to identify implicature and politeness strategies. Regarding the samples selection of the current study, the researcher has taken into consideration the

representativeness of the expressions of optimism and the simplicity in analysing the selected data. Murray and Chamberlain (1998) stated that when selecting a sample in qualitative research, the sample should represent the entire topic under study and also it should be manageable. Lohr (2010) conducted that for a sample to be well-selected, it should present some degree of accuracy. In addition to the characteristics of interest of the entire population. To select a good sample, a researcher should not focus only on the size of the sample in spite of its importance, but that sample should have some degree of accuracy. The data is selected equally as three Quranic verses and three Biblical verses to be analysed. Figure (5.1) represents the theoretical framework of the adopted model for the study.

Figure (1) The adopted model of the current study.



6. Data analysis

In this section, six texts are to be analysed. Three texts are chosen from the holy Bible (KJV) (king James version) which is called as the (AV) (authorized version) by the western churches, and three texts are selected from the Glorious Quran. The Quranic texts are to be translated according to Abdullah Yusuf Ali's (1937) translation for its reliability and familiarity. The data are selected according to the representation of the optimistic expression to represent the topic of the study. The analysis of the texts includes the pragmatic aspects such as speech acts, conversational implicature and politeness strategies.

6.1 Analysis of the Biblical Verses of Optimism

6.1.1 Analysis of Text 1

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.²Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.³I speak not *this* to condemn *you*: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with *you*.⁴Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.” (2Corinthians 7:1, 4) (NT, KJV).

The BV contains explicit optimism that is expressed by certain pragmatic aspects. Optimism is expressed by the illocutionary force of suggestion that is carried out by the direct

directive speech acts which is said by St. Paul in the verses “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” and “perfecting holiness in the fear of God”. He advises the Corinthians to be more faithful because the Lord likes the pure believers. Another explicit optimism is carried through the expressive speech acts in which St. Paul represents his proud feelings of the Corinthians in the verses “Great is my boldness of speech towards you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation”. He expresses his gratefulness for their love and support for him.

Optimism in the BV is also carried out by conversational implicature that is mainly expressed by certain words. The word “filthiness” is identically used in the (1John 3:3) in which it refers to the high ideal to which the believers in Christ are called and the unlimited depth into which they may sink. It implies the pollution of idolatry. St. Paul warns people of the horrible shamed things that he cannot close his eyes to not see such as the impurity of mind and soul. A conversational implicature is also carried by the words (flesh and soul) which implies that there are two types of sins: inward and outward sins. The inward sins are those that are committed by thoughts such as pride, unbelief, and evil thinking. Outward sins in turn, are those that are caused by flesh or bodily parts of man. To be pure and perfect, one should avoid the anger of the creator which is the main aim of the Christians. It is implied by the phrase “perfect in Holiness” (Ellicott, 2021).

Finally, optimism in the BV is carried out by the positive politeness strategies such as: the fulfillment of the listeners’ wants by giving them promises as in the opening of the verse “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved”. The use of the in group marker (we) to indicate that St. Paul is part of them but not a commander. In addition to the use of encouragement and appreciation for the Corinthians as they support and love him.

6.1.2 Analysis of Text 2

“**1**Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: *for* praise is comely for the upright.**2**Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery *and* an instrument of ten strings.**3**Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise.**4**For the word of the LORD *is* right; and all his works *are done* in truth.”(Psalm 30:1, 4) (NT, KJV).

The BV contains explicit optimism that is carried by different pragmatic aspects. As for the speech acts, optimism is carried out by the directive speech acts that are started by the imperative verbs (rejoice, praise, sing and play). As David (pbuh) directs and advises the psalmists to delight themselves by the Lord. As for conversational implicature, Psalm33 is the treasury of David as he says “rejoice in the Lord”. He implies that man should delight himself by the Lord for He is the only One God and forever. The word “rejoice” means to shout and sing of joys. Joy is the soul of praise. To rejoice by in self is foolish and to rejoice by sins is fetal, so man should work sincerely for the God only. As the Lord has the double heavens, He has the right to be served (Jamieson-Fauset-Brown, 2021). Regarding the politeness strategies, optimism is carried by the positive politeness strategy by being adviser, David in this Psalm advises people to feel the joys of having a true God. A God of extraordinary power that cannot be understood. To feel the happiness of his care and protection. He encourages people to work sincerely to satisfy the Lord with their works.

6.1.3 Analysis of Text3

“3Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ, 4Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: 5To whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Gelation 3, 5)

The BV contains implicit optimism that is carried by several pragmatic aspects. As for speech acts, the BV contains implicit optimism that is carried by the illocutionary force of the directive speech act “3Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Chris”. St. Paul prays for the God to keep the good-will towards people in Rome.

As for implicature, the verse contains the implicit meaning that God has the good –will towards people and peace that includes all the inward comfort and the outward prosperity which are the main needs for people. These blessed things come from God through Christ. The word “Grace” comes before peace to imply that no peace without grace. Optimism is carried out by the positive politeness strategy to fulfill the listener wants. St. Paul greets the people at Rome by showing a positive face threatening act. He requests the Lord to give them the good working and the inward and outward peace.

6.2 Analysis of the Quranic Texts of Optimism

6.2.1 Analysis of Text 1

(هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزِدُّوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (الفتح: ٤))

“It is He who sent Down tranquility into the hearts of the believers that they may add faith to their faith .for to God belong the forces of the heavens and the earth; and God is full of knowledge and wisdom” (Ali, Trans.1937. p.1391).

The QV contains explicit optimism that is clear by the use of the word (سكينة) “sakinatun” “tranquility”. As for the pragmatic aspects, optimism is carried out by the use of the representative speech act, Almighty Allah represents the facts that He sends his peace and comfort to the hearts of believers to make them resist and to strength and encourage them against the hardships they face. There are two conversational implicature in the QV: the word “tranquility” has many interpretations. Altabary (2019) stated that the word tranquility may mean peace, safe and comfort but it may refer to the existence of the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) because he is sent also by Allah to guide people to the right ways. The optimistic verse “for to God belong the forces of the heavens and the earth” contains conversational implicature that is implied by the word “forces” which has also many connotations. It may refer to the psychological feelings such as peace and courage that are supported by Allah to the believers, it also may refer to specific people or angles that are related to the will of Allah. As for the politeness strategies, optimism is carried by the positive politeness strategies such as the support, encouragement that almighty Allah never let his followers get down. Also, the use of negative politeness strategy by the use of implicature.

6.2.2 Analysis of Text 2

"أَمَّنْ يَهْدِيكُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَنْ يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ ۗ أَلَيْهَ مَعِ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (النمل:63)"

"Or, who guides you through the depth of darkness on land and sea, and who sends the winds as a heralds of glad tidings going before His Mercy? (Can there be another God besides God? High is God above what they associate with him!" (Ali, Trans., 1937. P.994).

The QV contains explicit optimism that is clear by the use of the term "Bushrah" "glad tidings". Optimism is carried by different pragmatic aspects. As for the speech acts, the QV contains representative speech acts. Almighty Allah makes a type of argument as He represents the truth facts behind creating the universe (Alsaadi, 2002).

As for conversational implicature, His Almighty gives the truths as questions for human to ask himself and to be sure that there is a great God behind such a great systematic universal system. His almighty implies that he guides people in the darkness where they are in land or sea, the word "darkness" conveys conversational implicature, it has many connotations such as disasters, obstacles, hardships and the wrong ways in which a man lives such as losing in the misbeliefs. Optimism in the QV is conveyed through the negative politeness strategies such as the rhetorical questions that are asked by the Almighty Allah in the verse with no intention to be answered. The other strategy is the use of conversational implicature which is a negative politeness strategy that is carried by the use of word with many connotations such as "darkness".

6.2.3 Analysis of Text 3

(قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۗ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ) (الزمر: ٥٣)

"Say 'O my servants who transgress against their souls. Despair not of the Mercy of God'" (Ali, Trans., 1937.p.506).

The QV contains implicit optimism that is clear by the use of the directive speech act "Despair not of the Mercy of God". Almighty Allah commends people who are despaired of repent because they comment a lot of bad things to not despair of His mercy as He names himself as the most merciful, so they ought not to give up. The QV contains conversational implicature by this verse, almighty Allah opens the door for people to repent leaving no reason for them to late. He opens the doors for mercy, light, peace and comfort. As for the politeness strategies, almighty Allah uses a positive politeness strategy by being direct and close to people as He commends them directly to turn back to His mercy to safe themselves (Alsaadi, 2002).

7. Conclusions

The study investigates optimism in the Glorious Quran and the Holy Bible throughout adopting the eclectic model that involved Searle's (1969) speech act theory, Grice's (1975) conversational implicature and Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness theory. It has been concluded that optimism is of two types: explicit and implicit. An optimistic persons tend to carry out optimism through many pragmatic aspects. Concerning speech acts. Directive

speech acts are the most used. Almighty Allah uses directive and representative speech acts in the glorious Quran which indicates that almighty Allah prefers people to be optimistic and prohibited them to be pessimistic. In the Holy Bible, optimism is mostly carried out by directive and Commissive speech acts. As for instance St. Paul commends people to be more optimistic and promises them to be in peace of Christ (see Philippians: 4, 7). Optimism in the two Holy books is mentioned using conversational implicature that is conveyed mainly by the use of words of many connotations. As for Politeness strategies, optimism in the two Holy books was conveyed by positive politeness strategies such as to be direct, to show sympathy, to fulfil the listener/reader's needs, to support and encourage the reader/ listener. Negative politeness strategies were rarely used.

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