Da‘wah as Qur’ānic Rhetoric: A Linguistic Study of Ḥikmah, Maw‘iẓah Ḥasanah, Jadl bi al-Aḥsan, and the Ethos of the Dā‘ī

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ABSTRACT
Da‘wah in Islam is not only a religious duty but also a structured communicative practice grounded in the Qur’ānic rhetoric. This article argues that the three principles articulated in the Qur’ān 16:125: ḥikmah, maw‘iẓah ḥasanah, and jadl bi al-aḥsan, constitute a Qur’ānic communicative triad that can be fruitfully analysed through contemporary linguistics and discourse theory. Through comparative-theoretical hermeneutics, the study reads selected Qur’ānic passages alongside their tafsīr and places the resulting interpretations in structured dialogue with modern linguistic theory, including speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, politeness theory, pragma-dialectics, and Habermasian discourse ethics. Ḥikmah is read as a normatively constrained appeal to reason illuminated through Grice’s Cooperative Principle. Maw‘iẓah ḥasanah is analysed in relation to pathos and politeness theory, showing how the Qur’ānic address forms reduce the face-threatening force of exhortative religious discourse. Jadl bi al-aḥsan is situated within pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, and the Qur’ānic prohibition on reviling false deities (Q 6:108) is interpreted through Habermasian discourse ethics. The analysis proposes a four-dimensional communicative framework,viz., rational-evidential, affective-relational, dialectical-argumentative, and character-constitutive, that resolves the structural asymmetry between the Qur’ānic triad and the Aristotelian logos-pathos-ethos model. The framework offers a model for understanding religious discourse as a form of rhetorical pragmatics applicable beyond the Qur’ānic context.
Keywords: Da‘wah, Qur’ānic rhetoric, speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, politeness theory, pragma-dialectics, discourse ethics, Islamic communicative ethics

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary linguistics and philosophy of language, communication is widely understood as a form of action rather than mere description. Speech act theory, inaugurated by J. L. Austin and developed by John Searle, distinguishes between locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts (Austin 6; Searle 16). Within this framework, da‘wah, the Islamic practice of calling or inviting to the way of God, may be defined as a complex illocutionary act of invitation: a practice that includes enjoining, warning, reminding, counselling, conveying, and giving testimony, all realised through patterned forms of discourse.
The term da‘wah itself, as classical Arabic lexicography and Qur’ānic usage indicate, denotes calling, inviting, and summoning. In the Islamic context, it is directed toward accepting īmān (faith) and living in accordance with the divine will. The semantic range of da‘wah in the Qur’ān is broad: the verbal acts associated with it — tabshīr (glad tidings), indhār (warning),

tadhkīr (reminder), naṣīḥah (sincere counsel), and tablīgh (conveyance of the message) — can each be described through Searle's speech-act categories, as will be discussed in this paper. Da'wah is therefore not merely the transmission of doctrinal content but an organised set of communicative moves that seek to allow and facilitate diverse audiences to shape their beliefs, emotions, and actions.

The Qur'ān supplies a concise normative framework for daʿwah in (Q 16:125): "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom (ḥikmah) and beautiful exhortation (maw'iẓah ḥasanah), and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious (jadl bi al-aḥsan)." Classical exegetes have interpreted these terms primarily in theological and ethical terms. The present study proposes that, without displacing those readings, the three principles can be placed in productive conversation with modern rhetorical and linguistic theory. Specifically, they are read as forming a Qur'ānic communicative triad whose components are functionally analogous, but not structurally identical, to three broad traditions in Western rhetorical and discourse theory: ḥikmah to reason-and-evidence-based discourse; maw'iẓah ḥasanah to emotionally resonant and face-attentive address; and jadl bi al-aḥsan to regulated, audience-oriented argumentation.

The article further demonstrates that the Aristotelian logos-pathos-ethos triad does not map cleanly onto this Qur'ānic triad, because the character-constitutive dimension of da'wah, the ethos of the dā'ī, is distributed across the broader Qur'ānic discourse rather than encoded in any single term of the triad (Q 16:125). The resolution of this structural asymmetry requires expanding the triadic model into a four-dimensional communicative framework. By bringing together classical tafsīr with modern linguistics, discourse theory, and argumentation theory, this study repositions da'wah as a form of rhetorical pragmatics embedded in the Qur'ānic text.

Note on Method and Theoretical Mapping

This study employs comparative-theoretical hermeneutics as its primary method. It combines close reading of selected Qur'ānic passages with analysis of their interpretation in tafsīr literature, then places those readings into dialogue with modern theories of speech acts, pragmatics, politeness, argumentation, and discourse ethics. The aim is not to subordinate the Qur'ānic text to Western frameworks, nor to claim historical derivation, but to use comparison as a heuristic that illuminates under-theorised aspects of the Qur'ānic communicative ethics.

Three criteria govern the analogies drawn in this study. First, the comparison operates at the level of communicative function, not historical setting or cultural origin. The claim is that ḥikmah performs a functionally similar role in the Qur'ānic discourse to that which logos performs in Aristotelian rhetoric,i.e., grounding the message in publicly accessible evidence and sound reasoning, not that the Qur'ānic ḥikmah derives from or is equivalent to Aristotelian logos. Second, the comparison claims family resemblance rather than structural identity. Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance is appropriate here: two concepts may share several significant features without sharing all features, and the overlap may be explanatorily valuable precisely because it is not total. Third, the comparison is governed by a principle of falsifiability: where the Qur'ānic concept demonstrably exceeds or diverges from its Western analogue, that divergence is noted explicitly rather than suppressed. Aristotle's rhetorical categories were formulated for civic rhetoric addressed to bounded political communities, whereas prophetic discourse addresses humanity under a claim of divine authority; the analogy, therefore, holds at the level of communicative function, not historical

setting. Grice's Cooperative Principle is descriptive rather than inherently normative, so it is used here as an analytical vocabulary rather than an external evaluative standard (45-46). Brown and Levinson's politeness model has been criticised for universalising culturally specific assumptions about face and individualism (Watts 19–23; Mills 6–11), and its use here is therefore explicitly heuristic and limited.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on the Qur'ān as discourse has expanded significantly in modern linguistic studies. Hussein Abdul-Raof's Qur'ānic Stylistics (2006) and Text Linguistics of Qur'ānic Discourse (2010) offer systematic frameworks for analysing the Qur'ānic Arabic at the levels of cohesion, coherence, foregrounding, argument structure, and pragmatic force. Boullata's Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān (2000) shows how literary form and semantic architecture carry religious meaning in the text. Johnstone's Discourse Analysis (2008) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how discourse constitutes social action through patterned linguistic choices — a framework applicable to the Qur'ānic address as a form of socially situated language use. The present article builds on this scholarship but shifts the emphasis from general stylistics to da'wah-specific communicative strategy.

Work on rhetoric and Islamic preaching has demonstrated that Muslim preaching traditions employ sophisticated strategies of persuasion, audience adaptation, and emotional framing. Studies of the Friday sermon (khuṭbah) as a genre of institutional religious discourse show that persuasion in Islamic contexts has long been structured rather than merely spontaneous (see, e.g., the studies collected in Boullata, 2000). Yet a focused linguistic-rhetorical study of the Qur'ān (Q. 16:125) and its associated da'wah passages remains underdeveloped. Most existing scholarship either treats da'wah theologically, as a duty with prescribed conditions, or sociologically, as a missionary practice with measurable outcomes, without subjecting its constitutive rhetorical principles to close linguistic scrutiny.

Speech act theory and pragmatics have also opened important avenues for analysing religious discourse. Austin and Searle established the core framework for understanding utterances as actions, while Grice and later post-Gricean theorists provided tools for analysing cooperative inference (Austin 94; Searle 23; Grice 45). Brown and Levinson developed politeness theory as a framework for understanding how speakers manage face in potentially threatening communicative situations (61). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst proposed the pragma-dialectical model as a normative and descriptive account of regulated argumentation (135-157). Habermas offered communicative action theory as a framework for distinguishing genuine reason-giving from strategic manipulation (85-101). The present study brings these tools into dialogue with the Qur'ānic tafsīr and daʿwah literature to theorise da'wah as a form of rhetorical pragmatics.

Classical Islamic scholarship on daʿwah methodology provides the theological grounding for this study. Ibn Bāz in al-Daʿwah ilā Allāh wa Akhlāq al-Du'āh explicitly identifies the ethics and character of callers as an independent subject within da'wah studies, placing conduct alongside calling as co-equal concerns (23-25). Iṣlāḥī's exegetical work on the narratives of the prophets illuminates the procedural dimensions of the Qur'ānic argumentation. Al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Ṭabarī provide the authoritative classical interpretations of the key āyāt (verses of the Qur'ān). Together, these sources constitute the tafsīr evidence base against which modern linguistic analogies are tested.

METHODOLOGY

The primary textual data consists of the Qur'ānic passages central to daʿwah practice, including (Q. 16:125, 2:258, 3:64, 6:108, 20:44, 2:256, 5:99, 10:99, 4:63, 41:33, 41:34, 3:159, and 33:21). Tafsīr interpretations of these passages are read alongside modern linguistic and rhetorical frameworks, and the interpretations are placed in structured dialogue to identify communicative principles embedded in the Qu'ānic text. The study does not present corpus statistics and does not claim frequency-based conclusions about the whole Qur'ān. It is therefore interpretive and theoretical rather than quantitative.

Three distinct falsifiability conditions govern the claims of the study. First, **textual falsifiability**: if the Qur'ānic passages can be shown to systematically endorse coercion, deception, or irrational disputation in daʿwah, the communicative-ethics reading advanced here would be undermined. The study acknowledges that passages addressing persistent rejecters use strong language (e.g., labelling them kāfirūn), but argues that these belong to a different communicative register, i.e., final dissociation rather than invitational daʿwah, and that they do not constitute counter-evidence against the framework. Second, **analogical falsifiability**: if the functional parallels between the Qur'ānic concepts and Western categories can be shown to rest on no deeper structural similarity than superficial surface resemblance, the comparative framework collapses. Each section, therefore, identifies both the points of genuine overlap and the points where the Qur'ānic concept diverges from or exceeds the Western analogue. Third, **interpretive falsifiability**: if classical exegetes interpret ḥikmah, mawʿiẓah ḥasanah, and jadl bi al-aḥsan in ways that are systematically incompatible with the communicative functions attributed to them here, the tafsīr evidence would refute the paper's central mappings. The consistent emphasis of classical exegetes on proof, gentleness, and regulated disputation supports rather than refutes the proposed mappings, but the condition remains a genuine constraint on the argument.

The following analysis proceeds through the four dimensions of the proposed Qur'ānic communicative framework, beginning with the rational-evidential dimension of ḥikmah before moving through the affective-relational, dialectical-argumentative, and character-constitutive registers. A dedicated sub-section then addresses the principle of non-compulsion, which establishes the ethical conditions presupposed by all four dimensions.

Dimensions of Da'wah

The study emphasises that daʿwah in the Qur'ān is elaborated through multiple semantic fields. The terms associated with da'wah practice, such astablīgh, indhār, tabshīr, tadhkīr, naṣīḥah, show that daʿwah is not reducible to missionary propagation in a narrow sense. In speech-act terms, this lexical range indicates that da'wah is a complex network of directives, expressives, assertives, and commissives embedded in a larger illocutionary project of invitation. The Qur'ānic expression al-amr bi al-maʿrūfwa al-nahyʿan al-munkar further indicates that daʿwah has both invitational and reformative dimensions. The table below maps each principal daʿwah term onto Searle's (1969) speech-act taxonomy with one Qur'ānic reference per entry.

Daʿwah Term	Searle Category	Communicative Function	Quranic Reference
Tablīgh (conveyance)	Assertive	The speaker claims truth on behalf of the message as received from the divine authority.	Q 5:99
Indhār (warning)	Directive + Expressive	The speaker urges the hearer to avoid harmful actions (directive) and conveys urgency and concern (expressive).	Q 26:214
Tabshīr (glad tidings)	Expressive	The speaker conveys positive emotional content — hope, joy, assurance — to move the hearer toward receptivity.	Q 2:25
Tadhkīr (reminder)	Directive	The speaker prompts the hearer to recall prior knowledge or covenant, urging a corresponding response.	Q 87:9–10
Naṣīḥah (sincere counsel)	Commissive + Assertive	The speaker commits to the hearer's well-being (commissive) while asserting a truth the hearer may resist (assertive).	Q 7:68

Table 1. Da'wah terms mapped onto Searle's illocutionary taxonomy.

Ḥikmah as Cooperative Rational Discourse

Classical Exegetical Foundations

Classical exegetes define ḥikmah in ways that emphasise proof, clear evidence, sound knowledge, insight, and the removal of doubt. Al-Rāzī describes it as "clear-cut proof in favour of admitted beliefs" (332). Qārī Muḥammad Ṭayyib describes it as compelling evidence that leaves no room for doubt in the invitee's heart. Ibn Bāz stresses "clear insight grounded in evidence and proof" (p. 14). These definitions converge on a conception of ḥikmah as evidentially responsible and cognitively disciplined discourse — discourse that grounds its claims in publicly accessible reasoning rather than in rhetorical force or emotional pressure alone.

Close Reading Through Grice: Q 2:258

Grice's Cooperative Principle proposes that participants in discourse ordinarily orient themselves to maxims of quality (say only what you believe to be true and have evidence for), quantity (say enough but not too much), relation (be relevant), and manner (be clear and orderly) (45-46). While Grice did not formulate these maxims for prophetic discourse, they provide a precise analytical vocabulary for describing the communicative discipline implied by ḥikmah. The narrative of Prophet Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) and the tyrant ruler in the Qurʾān (2:258) provides the strongest Qur'ānic illustration.

When the ruler responds sophistically to Prophet Ibrāhīm's claim that God gives life and death, countering that he too can give life and death by executing and pardoning, Ibrāhīm does not contest the sophistry directly. Instead, he shifts to the observable phenomenon of the sun rising from the east and challenges the ruler to bring it from the west. The ruler, the āyah states, was confounded. Analysed through Grice's maxims:

Quality: Ibrāhīm's argument relies exclusively on an empirically verifiable astronomical phenomenon. He does not resort to assertion without evidence or to rhetorical embellishment. The argument is offered as something the interlocutor cannot contest, satisfying the maxim of quality rigorously.

Quantity: The argument is stripped to its minimum: one phenomenon, one challenge. There is no elaboration, no supporting argument, no rhetorical expansion. The quantity is calibrated precisely to what is needed to produce epistemic closure in the interlocutor.

Relation: The relevance of the astronomical argument is perfect: the issue is divine power, and the rising of the sun from the east, an event no human ruler controls, is directly relevant as evidence of divine governance of the cosmos.

Manner: The argument is expressed with exemplary brevity and clarity. No ambiguity, no complex subordinate clauses, no hedging. The challenge is stated simply and its logic is immediately transparent to any competent hearer.

The narrative thus illustrates ḥikmah not as mere logical validity but as a pragmatic discipline of evidential responsibility, strategic relevance, and maximal clarity, a practice of cooperative rational discourse that treats the interlocutor as a rational agent capable of following evidence rather than as an object to be overwhelmed.

Close Reading Through Grice: (Q 20:44)

The command to Prophet Mūsā and Prophet Hārūn (peace be upon them) to speak gently to Fir'awn — "speak to him a gentle word (qawlanlayyinan), perhaps he may take heed or fear [God]" (Q 20:44) — adds a second layer to the analysis of ḥikmah that the (Q. 2:258) case does not foreground. Here, the manner of speech is itself constitutive of the wisdom of address. A maxim-by-maxim analysis reveals how the āyah extends rather than repeats the Gricean dimension of ḥikmah:

Quality: The instruction does not modify the propositional content of what Prophet Mūsā and Prophet Hārūn are to say. They are to deliver the truth of divine lordship, but it regulates the manner in which truth is expressed. A harsh tone does not change the propositional content of a truthful assertion, but it may produce a pragmatic distortion: the hearer's defensive response to harshness may make them incapable of evaluating the content. The maxim of quality, therefore, has a pragmatic corollary.Truth must be expressed in a way that allows the hearer to receive it.

Quantity: Gentleness (layyinan) functions as a constraint on excess.The speaker says what is needed, without the rhetorical intensification (denunciation, hyperbole, accusation) that would make the message more confrontational than the communicative situation requires. This is a quantity constraint applied to affective and rhetorical register, not just propositional content.

Relation: The āyah specifies the communicative aim: "perhaps he may take heed or fear." The relevant register — gentleness — is chosen precisely because it is calculated to maximise the chance of the desired perlocutionary effect. A harsh address would be less relevant to the aim of producing reflective receptivity in the interlocutor, because it addresses Fir'awn's capacity for defensive arrogance rather than his capacity for reason.

Manner: Clarity and gentleness are, in this āyah, fused. The word layyinan denotes softness, pliancy, absence of harshness. It is a manner specification par excellence.It constrains not what is said (quality) or how much (quantity) or to what end (relation) but how the saying is performed — its texture, its emotional register, its relational posture. Ḥikmah therefore includes not only the logical and evidential dimensions of discourse but the manner in which proof is rendered hearable and receptible by a particular hearer in a particular situation.

Mawʿiẓah Ḥasanah as Pathos and Politeness

Classical scholars describe mawʿiẓah ḥasanah in terms of targhīb (encouragement through glad tidings), tarhīb (encouragement through warning), sincere advice, and the softening of the heart. This makes the category particularly suitable for analysis through rhetorical pathos and politeness theory. It is the dimension of daʿwah most closely tied to emotional receptivity and relational tact.

Politeness Theory and Its Limits

Brown and Levinson distinguish positive face (the desire to be approved of and included) and negative face (the desire to be autonomous and unimposed upon), and analyse how speech acts mitigate threats to these forms of face (61). Daʿwah often threatens both forms of face simultaneously.It urges the hearer to abandon existing beliefs (threatening negative face by imposing on their autonomy) and to acknowledge that their current path is in error (threatening positive face by implying inadequacy). Yet many Qur'ānic forms of address, especially in early Makkan discourse, employ inclusive formulations — "O mankind" (yāayyuha al-nās), "O people" (yāqawm), rather than immediately hostile labels. These can be read as functionally analogous to positive-politeness strategies because they foreground commonality and shared dignity rather than accusation or humiliation.

This claim, however, must remain carefully limited. Brown and Levinson's model has been criticised for imposing culturally specific assumptions about face and individualism on non-Western discourse. Watts argues that the Brown-Levinson model's conception of face as an individual psychological property fails to account for how face is co-constructed in social interaction (19–23). This is a critique particularly relevant for the Qur'ānic discourse, where address forms construct a communal rather than individual relational space. Mills shows from a feminist discourse perspective that the model's universalising claims mask gendered assumptions about who performs what politeness work and why (6–11). The application of Brown and Levinson's model to the Qur'ānic mawʿiẓah ḥasanah is therefore illustrative rather than universal.It shows that some Qur'ānic daʿwah passages reduce the face-threatening force of admonition through solidaristic and dignifying address, without claiming that the Brown-Levinson framework fully describes or explains this rhetorical practice.

Counter-Evidence and the Limits of Softening

Counter-evidence must be taken seriously. The Qur'ān sometimes addresses persistent rejecters directly and forcefully, as kāfirūn, and the Makkansuwar (singular: surah) addressed to the Holy Prophet Muḥammad's (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) opponents do not always privilege softening strategies. The implication is not that mawʿiẓah ḥasanah governs every communicative situation identically, but that it governs daʿwah in its invitational mode, when the communicative aim is to open hearts rather than to announce final dissociation from those who have definitively rejected the message. The command to address even Fir'awn gently (Q. 20:44) suggests that mawʿiẓah ḥasanah governs even the most difficult communicative situations, though the principle does not eliminate the possibility of firm and clear rebuttal when sophistry makes it necessary, as the (Q. 2:258) analysis above illustrates.

Jadl bi al-Aḥsan as Regulated Argumentation

The Internal Islamic Distinction

The revised argument adopts a weak comparative claim with respect to pragma-dialectics. It does not argue that the Qur'ānic jadl is identical with modern pragma-dialectical critical discussion, but that the two share a family of procedural and ethical norms that makes the comparison explanatorily illuminating. An important internal Islamic distinction already

anticipates this issue: the difference between jadl, oriented toward truth and munāẓarah oriented toward victory. Iṣlāḥī's exegetical analysis of Prophet Ibrāhīm's method (as interpreted in Q. 2:258) shows that the prophetic argumentation avoids combative disputation and moves to decisive rebuttal only when the opponent's evasion becomes unmistakable. This closely resembles the pragma-dialectical distinction between reasonable critical discussion and eristic argument.

Pragma-Dialectical Rules and Qur'ānic Evidence

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst formulate ten rules for critical discussion that constitute the normative standard for regulated argumentation (208). The table below systematically measures Qur'ānic jadl bi al-aḥsan against each rule, identifying points of strong overlap, partial overlap, and genuine divergence.

Rule	Pragma-Dialectical Norm	Quranic Evidence	Overlap	Assessment
1. Freedom Rule	Parties must not prevent each other from advancing standpoints or casting doubt.	(Q. 2:258) shows Prophet Ibrāhīm allowing the ruler to advance his counter-claim before responding. (Q. 3:64) invites the People of the Book to "come to a common word" — a mutual, non-coerced process of standpoint comparison.	Strong	Full overlap. The invitation structure of daʿwah presupposes the hearer's freedom to accept or reject.
2. Burden of Proof Rule	A party that advances a standpoint must defend it if asked.	(Q. 21:24) — "Bring your proof if you are truthful" — explicitly invokes the burden of proof. The Qur'ānic narratives consistently show prophets responding to challenges rather than dismissing them.	Strong	Full overlap, with the qualification that in Qur'ānic discourse, the ultimate burden of proof is discharged through revelation.
3. Standpoint Rule	Attack must relate to the standpoint actually advanced, not a distortion.	In (Q. 6:108), the prohibition on reviling deities reflects awareness that misrepresenting the opponent's position (by	Strong	Overlap holds. The Qur'ānic polemical passages address the actual theological claims of opponents.

Rule	Pragma-Dialectical Norm	Quranic Evidence	Overlap	Assessment
		attacking their objects of worship rather than their arguments) destroys legitimate discourse.		
4. Relevance Rule	A party may defend a standpoint only with relevant argumentation.	Prophet Ibrāhīm's shift to the astronomical argument (Q. 2:258) is a model of relevance.He selects the most directly relevant evidence for the issue of divine power rather than introducing tangential arguments.	Strong	Full overlap in the examples analysed.
5. Unexpressed Premise Rule	A party may not falsely attribute unexpressed premises to the opponent.	The Qur'ānic disputations generally reconstruct opponents' positions accurately before rebutting them. (Q. 21:22) addresses the implicit premise that multiple gods would lead to cosmic disorder.	Partial	The rule is observed in prophetic argumentation, but the Qur'ānic text also attributes unstated motivations (e.g., arrogance, envy) to opponents, a tension worth acknowledging.
6. Starting Point Rule	A party may not present a premise as accepted when it is disputed.	(Q. 3:64) explicitly seeks common starting points shared with the People of the Book ("a word common between us") before advancing distinctive claims.	Strong	Full overlap. The search for shared premises is a structural feature of the Qur'ānic dialogical passages.
7. Validity Rule	Reasoning must be logically valid.	The Qur'ānic narratives consistently model formally valid argument structures. In (Q. 2:258), the astronomical argument is a reductio:	Strong	Overlap holds for the prophetic arguments modelled in the text.

Rule	Pragma-Dialectical Norm	Quranic Evidence	Overlap	Assessment
		if the ruler could command the sun as God commands it, he would he cannot; therefore, God's power is distinct.		
8. Argument Scheme Rule	A standpoint may not be defended by a non-conclusive argument scheme presented as conclusive.	The Qur'āniccritique of invalid taqlīd (blind imitation of ancestors, e.g., Q. 2:170) explicitly rejects the argument from tradition as conclusive when used to deflect from evidence. This mirrors the pragma-dialectical concern about invalid argument schemes.	Partial	Overlap in the critique of fallacious argument from authority/tradition; however, appeal to divine revelation functions as a non-standard conclusive argument scheme with no pragma-dialectical parallel.
9. Concluding Rule	A failed defence must result in retraction; a successful defence must result in the other party retracting their doubt.	(Q. 2:258) ends with the ruler being confounded (buhita), a perlocutionary outcome the Qur'ānic narrative presents as the appropriate response to a completed argument.	Partial	Overlap at the ideal level; the Qur'ānic discourse also recognises that interlocutors may refuse to concede despite failed arguments, attributing this to arrogance (kibr) rather than legitimate ongoing doubt.
10. Language Use Rule	Parties must not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous.	The Gricean maxim of manner (analysed above) maps directly onto this rule. In(Q. 16:125), the instruction to argue bi al-aḥsan (in the best/clearest way) encodes a clarity requirement. The	Strong	Full overlap. Clarity is a constitutive requirement of ḥikmah and jadl bi al-aḥsan alike.

Rule	Pragma-Dialectical Norm	Quranic Evidence	Overlap	Assessment
		command to speak qawlanlayyinan (Q. 20:44) reinforces it.		

Table 2. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (2004) ten rules for critical discussion measured against the Qur'ānic jadl bi al-aḥsan.

A full structural identity between secular pragma-dialectics and the Qur'ānic jadl bi al-aḥsan cannot be maintained, because revealed authority remains a substantive premise in religious discourse in a way secular argumentation models do not generally accept. Rules 2, 8, and 9 are the points of greatest tension. Divine revelation discharges the burden of proof (Rule 2) in a way that lies outside pragma-dialectical norms; appeal to revelation constitutes a non-standard conclusive argument scheme (Rule 8); and interlocutors are sometimes held to be blameworthy for non-concession rather than simply unconvinced (Rule 9). These divergences are genuine and theoretically important. They do not, however, eliminate the explanatory value of the pragma-dialectical comparison at the seven other rules, where the Qur'ānic argumentation demonstrably instantiates the same communicative norms.

The Invitation to a Common Word: Qur'ān (3:64)

Qurʾān (3:64) particularly illustrates pragma-dialectical Rules 1, 6, and 7 simultaneously: "Say: O People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we shall serve none but God." The use of shared starting points (monotheism as the common theological premise), the freedom extended to the interlocutor to accept or decline the invitation, and the validity of the reasoning from shared premises to the conclusion of exclusive divine service all converge in a single āyah. The āyah also illustrates what Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca call "audience adaptation", the speaker selects arguments whose premises are already held by the intended audience (65).

Da'wah and the Principle of Non-Compulsion

The ethical conditions that govern all three dimensions of the Qur'ānic communicative framework and that distinguish da'wah structurally from coercion, propaganda, or manipulation, are most directly encoded in three Qur'ānic āyāt that establish freedom of belief as a constitutive condition of authentic da'wah: (Q. 2:256): "There is no compulsion in religion. The right way has become distinct from error."(Q. 5:99): "The Messenger's duty is only to convey (tablīgh) — it is not to compel."(Q. 10:99): "Had your Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed. Would you then compel people until they become believers?"

These āyāt establish non-compulsion not as a pragmatic concession to social diversity but as a structural feature of da'wah as a communicative act. (Al-Farūqī 171) states this precisely, that forced faith is theologically void because īmān requires the free assent of a rational agent. An act of "conversion" produced by coercion is not a communicative achievement but its destruction.It produces the appearance of belief without the reality.

This principle maps precisely onto Habermas's concept of communicative action as action oriented toward mutual understanding through reason-giving that is free from coercion. (99) For Habermas, a speech situation distorted by threats, manipulation, or institutional power asymmetry that forecloses genuine deliberation is a situation of strategic action, not

communicative action. (Q. 2:256), (Q. 5:99), and (Q. 10:99) collectively establish that da'wah must remain within the domain of communicative action.It proceeds through the offering of reasons, the invitation to deliberate, and the hearer's free response, not through compulsion. This is not merely a moral constraint on an otherwise unconstrained practice; it is a constitutive condition of da'wah as such. A da'wah that proceeds through coercion has ceased to be da'wah and has become something else, like domination, coercion, or strategic manipulation, which the Qur'ānic framework explicitly forecloses.

Discourse Ethics and the Conditions of Legitimate Da'wah

Communicative Action and Strategic Action

Habermas distinguishes between communicative action — action oriented toward mutual understanding through the raising and evaluation of validity claims — and strategic action — action oriented toward producing desired outcomes through the most efficient means, including manipulation and deception (85–101). Da'wah, as analysed in this paper, belongs structurally to the domain of communicative action.It proceeds through the offering of reasons (ḥikmah), the appeal to shared emotional and relational goods (mawʿiẓah ḥasanah), and the regulated exchange of standpoints and counter-standpoints (jadl bi al-aḥsan). Each of these dimensions is a form of reason-giving oriented toward the hearer's free evaluation and response.

Validity Claims

Habermas argues that communicative action involves the raising of three validity claims: truth (the claim that the propositional content of the utterance corresponds to facts about the world), rightness (the claim that the utterance is normatively appropriate in the communicative situation), and sincerity (the claim that the speaker means what they say and their subjective expression is genuine) (99). All three validity claims are operative in the Qur'ānic da'wah: ḥikmah is the dimension through which the truth claim is raised and supported through evidence; jadl bi al-aḥsan is the dimension through which the rightness claim is tested in regulated exchange; and the character-constitutive dimension (the ethos of the dāʿī, analysed in the following section) is the dimension through which the sincerity claim is embodied and made credible.

The Ideal Speech Situation

Habermas's concept of the herrschaftsfreie Kommunikation — the ideal speech situation, free from domination, distorted communication, and power asymmetry — provides the most illuminating parallel for the structural framework of the Qur'ānic daʿwah. The ideal speech situation is characterised by four conditions: (1) comprehensibility — all participants can understand what is being said; (2) truth — claims are subject to rational evaluation; (3) sincerity — speakers mean what they say; (4) legitimacy — no participant is excluded from the discourse by illegitimate power (Habermas 99–100).

Each of these conditions has a Qur'ānicanalogue. Comprehensibility maps onto ḥikmah's requirement of clarity and the Gricean maxim of manner. Truth maps onto ḥikmah's requirement of evidential responsibility and the maxim of quality. Sincerity maps onto the ethos of the dāʿī — the requirement that the dā'ī's conduct be consistent with the message they convey. Legitimacy maps onto the non-compulsion principle: (Q. 2:256), (Q. 5:99), and (Q. 10:99) collectively establish that no interlocutor may be excluded from the communicative space of daʿwah by coercion. The Qur'ānic communicative framework thus anticipates, at the level of theological normativity, what Habermas' discourse ethics articulates at the level of

philosophical reconstruction — though the grounds are entirely different: Qur'ānic theology versus post-metaphysical philosophy.

The anachronism involved in applying Habermasian categories to the Qur'ānic course must be explicitly acknowledged. Habermas' framework is a post-metaphysical, secular reconstruction of the conditions of legitimate communication, formulated in response to modernity's challenges. The Qur'ān addresses these conditions from within a framework of revealed divine authority. The comparison is therefore cross-traditional and heuristic rather than historical or genealogical.

Non-Revilement and Discourse Ethics: Qur'ān(6:108)

Qur'ān (6:108) forbids Muslims from reviling the deities of others lest those others revile God in enmity and ignorance. The āyah can also be analysed more precisely through Habermas's distinction between communicative and strategic action. Revilement (sabb) does not raise validity claims for rational testing; instead, it functions as symbolic domination and predictably produces retaliatory degradation. In Habermasian terms, Q 6:108 protects the minimal discursive conditions within which daʿwah can proceed as non-coercive reason-giving. The comparison with modern hate-speech theory must remain careful: sabb al-ālihahn its specific early Islamic context is not equivalent to modern statutory hate speech doctrine. The relationship is functional rather than identical — both concern forms of speech that destroy the conditions for legitimate public discourse.

The Ethos of the Dāʿī: Character, Credibility, and Communicative Authority

The Asymmetry in the Proposed Triad

The mapping of ḥikmah, mawʿiẓah ḥasanah, and jadl bi al-aḥsan onto logos, pathos, and pragma-dialectical argumentation, respectively, leaves one of Aristotle's three canonical appeals unaccounted for: ethos — the appeal to the speaker's character, credibility, and trustworthiness as a condition for persuasive success (Aristotle 1.2). For Aristotle, ethos is in fact the most authoritative of the three means of persuasion: audiences are more readily persuaded by speakers they trust and admire than by the same arguments delivered by a speaker whose character they distrust. The absence of a corresponding category in the Qur'ānic triad of (Q. 16:125) is therefore not a minor gap. It is a structural question that must be addressed if the rhetorical-communicative reading of the āyah to be complete and defensible.

The resolution pursued here is to show that the Qurʾān does address the character and moral conduct of the dāʿī extensively, but distributes this concern across the text rather than encoding it in a single term of Q 16:125. What the verse leaves implicit, the broader Qur'ānic discourse on daʿwah makes explicit, and together they constitute a four-dimensional communicative framework rather than a three-part triad.

Three Paradigmatic Passages

Q 3:159: "It is by God's mercy that you were gentle with them; had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you." This āyah explicitly links the Prophet's moral character — his gentleness (lintalahum) — to the perlocutionary outcome of his daʿwah: the retention of his community of followers. In Austin's terms, the conditions for the felicity of a daʿwah speech act include what may be called speaker-constitutive conditions: the moral and affective qualities of the person performing the act (14–15). Harshness (fazzan) and hardness of heart (ghalīẓ al-qalb) are named as communicative disqualifiers — they would have caused the message to fail not through logical inadequacy but through the speaker's failure to embody the qualities the message itself commends.

Q 41:33: "Who is better in speech than one who calls to God, does righteous deeds, and says: I am of those who submit?" This āyah identifies three components of the most excellent daʿwah: the verbal act of calling, the embodied practice of righteous deeds (ʿamilaṣāliḥan), and the sincere self-identification with the message being conveyed. The inclusion of righteous deeds makes explicit that daʿwah is not reducible to speech acts alone: the speaker's conduct constitutes a communicative act in its own right, one that either corroborates or undermines the verbal message. In Habermasian terms, this is the validity claim of sincerity: the speaker's life must be consistent with what their speech claims, and any visible inconsistency between word and deed destroys the communicative conditions for genuine daʿwah (Habermas 100).

Q 33:21: "You have in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern of conduct (uswah ḥasanah)." The concept of uswah ḥasanah functions in the broader Islamic tradition as the primary ethos resource for daʿwah: the dāʿī is not constructing a rhetorical persona — as Aristotle's ethos permits, being primarily a discursive construction occurring within the speech (Aristotle 1) — but embodying, as faithfully as possible, the moral character that the message itself describes. This maps precisely onto Habermas's sincerity validity claim: the Prophet's conduct constitutes a public claim of consistency between word and deed, performed not through speech but through lived practice. Ibn Bāz explicitly identifies akhlāq al-duʿāh (the ethics and character of callers) as an independent subject within daʿwah studies (23), and Thānwī and Nadwī's discussions of the dāʿī's sincerity, love for the madʿū, and freedom from self-interest point in the same direction. (353)

The Four-Dimensional Communicative Framework

Dimension	Quranic Term/Concept	Western Parallel	Primary Function
Rational-evidential	Ḥikmah	Logos / Gricean cooperative pragmatics	Grounding the message in publicly accessible evidence and sound reasoning, governed by the maxims of quality, quantity, relation, and manner.
Affective-relational	Mawʿiẓahḥasanah	Pathos / Politeness theory	Moving the hearer's emotions and protecting their face through dignifying address forms, empathetic register, and emotionally resonant framing.
Dialectical-argumentative	Jadl bi al-aḥsan	Pragma-dialectics / New Rhetoric	Resolving objections through regulated, truth-oriented disputation that respects the interlocutor's rational agency and avoids coercive or eristic moves.

Dimension	Quranic Term/Concept	Western Parallel	Primary Function
Character-constitutive	Akhlāq al-dāʿī / Uswah ḥasanah	Ethos / Habermasian sincerity claim	Grounding the credibility of the message in the embodied moral conduct of its bearer, such that word and deed constitute a unified communicative act.

Table 3. The four-dimensional Quranic communicative framework for daʿwah.

Interdependence and Hierarchy of the Four Dimensions

The four dimensions are not independent parallel categories but an integrated system in which each dimension presupposes and conditions the others. Qurʾān(3:159) is the clearest case of all four dimensions converging in a single āyah. The Prophet's gentleness (lintalahum) is simultaneously a character-constitutive condition (ethos), an affective-relational register (mawʿiẓah ḥasanah), and a pragmatic presupposition of the rational-evidential dimension (ḥikmah — whose arguments become receivable only when harshness does not pre-emptively close the hearer's rational faculties). The subsequent instruction to "consult them in the matter" (washāwirhum fi al-amr) introduces the dialectical-argumentative dimension: the community's participation in deliberation is a form of regulated exchange.

The character-constitutive dimension is foundational in the following sense: if the dāʿī's conduct is inconsistent with the message, the sincerity validity claim is defeated, and the other three dimensions lose their communicative validity. A harsh, self-interested, or dishonest caller may deploythe arguments of ḥikmah, the emotional register of mawʿiẓah ḥasanah, and the procedural fairness of jadl, but the hearer's perception of insincerity will undermine the perlocutionary effect of all three. The dimensions also have context-sensitive hierarchy: in a situation of sustained objection, the dialectical dimension (jadl) becomes foregrounded; in a situation of grief or distress, the affective dimension (mawʿiẓah ḥasanah) takes precedence; in a situation of scholarly debate, the rational dimension (ḥikmah) dominates. The character-constitutive dimension, however, is invariant across contexts: it is always operative, because the dāʿī's embodied credibility is always a condition of communicative trust.

CONCLUSION

This article has proposed a four-dimensional communicative framework for theQur'ānic daʿwah, arising from the structural analysis of (Q. 16:125) and its relationship to the broader Qur'ānic discourse on the conditions and ethics of calling. The three terms of the āyah — ḥikmah, mawʿiẓah ḥasanah, and jadl bi al-aḥsan — constitute the rational-evidential, affective-relational, and dialectical-argumentative dimensions of a communicative practice that is governed throughout by a fourth, character-constitutive dimension: the ethos of the dāʿī, encoded not in (Q. 16:125) itself but distributed across the broader Qur'ānic moral discourse on the qualities required of those who call.

The four dimensions are not parallel categories but an integrated system. Ḥikmah grounds the message in publicly accessible evidence and Gricean cooperative discipline. Mawʿiẓah ḥasanah

addresses the emotional and relational conditions of receptivity, protecting the hearer's face while moving their affective response. Jadl bi al-aḥsan regulates the dialectical exchange when objection or resistance requires argumentation, ensuring that disputation remains oriented toward truth rather than eristic victory. The character-constitutive dimension — the dāʿī's akhlāq and uswah — grounds the sincerity validity claim, without which all three discursive dimensions lose their communicative authority. The non-compulsion principle (Q. 2:256, (Q. 5:99), (Q. 10:99) establishes the ethical frame within which the entire system operates, making daʿwah structurally a form of non-coercive communicative action in Habermas's sense.

The contribution of the framework to Islamic studies lies in providing a systematic communicative theory grounded in the Qur'ānic text and classical tafsīr, which moves beyond purely theological or sociological accounts of daʿwah toward a linguistically rigorous account of its rhetorical principles. Its contribution to linguistics lies in offering a non-Western case study for speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, politeness theory, pragma-dialectics, and discourse ethics — a case study in which the Western frameworks are both illuminated and challenged by their encounter with a different communicative tradition.

Several questions remain open and invite future research. First, an empirical corpus study of contemporary daʿwah discourse — sermons, digital media, missionary texts — would test whether the four-dimensional framework describes actual rhetorical practice or only the normative ideal encoded in the Qur'ānic text. Second, a cross-textual comparison with Biblical prophetic rhetoric or Buddhist dhamma-duta discourse would determine whether the framework has comparative explanatory power beyond the Quranic context. Third, the relationship between the four dimensions across different daʿwah genres — the Friday sermon, the scholarly refutation, the personal counselling session, the digital video — merits analysis, since different genres foreground different dimensions while presupposing all four.

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