The Use of 'Praise' Speech Act
In Selected Texts of the Holy Bible *

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Abstract

Human beings living in a community interact with each other everyday and friction becomes inevitable. In order to reduce friction and maintain peace and social harmony, each society has developed certain sets of rules. These rules, as called by Lakoff (1979); are "politeness rules". Praise is, in fact, part of the positive politeness strategies which people always need to give them support and confidence. It represents a social strategy in that the speaker attempts to create rapport with the addressee by expressing approval.

For the sake of presenting and discussing the act of praising whether explicit or implicit, this research aims at proving the linguistic devices of praise in selected texts of the Holy Bible focusing on three aspects: pragmatics, semantics and syntax.

1.0 Preliminaries

Praise is considered as one of the subgroups of speech act of 'expressive'. It is used to express the speaker's feelings and attitudes. Therefore, praising someone means expressing his/her approval and commendation.

To investigate the linguistic phenomenon at hand, the researchers will tackle the main points about this speech act, its definition, types, structures and functions (its relation to some other speech acts). Moreover, an applicable study will be held to a number of Biblical verses from the "Book of Psalms". The choice of these texts can be attributed to the distinguishing feature of the Psalms, i.e., their devotional character with individual diversities of style and subject. Whether their matter be didactic, historical, prophetical or practical, it is made the ground or subject of prayer, or praise or both.

1.1 Praise: Pragmatic Perspectives

The word 'praise' according to Hyper-Dictionary of English (2003:190) (s.v. praise), has two different senses: the first one means " an expression of approval and commendation for worth or excellence"; while the second means " offering words of homage as an act of worship or the act of glorifying God or god". These two senses can be illustrated by the following examples:

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1. He always appreciated praise for his work.

2. Praise ye him, all his angles; praise ye him, all his hosts! (psalm, cxiviii)

Etymologically, 'praise' comes from the Middle English word 'preyse', from the verbs 'preisen', 'praisen', which come from the Late Latin 'pretiare' , to value , prize, from the Latin 'pretium', price(Mifflin, 2000:303).

Generally, the English word 'praise' with its synonymous verbs such as 'acclaim', commend, extol and laud' mean to express approval or admiration. Therefore, 'praise' could be for any persons or objects that one sees excellence or worth in.

Praising and other speech acts such as offering ,thanking, greeting and congratulating whose illocutionary force coincides with social goals are intrinsically polite and take the form of positive politeness. Leech (1983:104) calls such speech acts as 'convivial'. This relates to Austin's class of behabitive and Searle's expressive.

Austin (1962:159) is the first who states that behabitives have to do with attitudes and social behaviour. Searle (1979:15), however, in his classification of speech acts employs a slightly different label than that of Austin (though both of them express feelings and attitudes). Expressives have the function of expressing the speaker's psychological attitude specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content which the illocution presupposes. Examples : thanking, apologizing, blaming, praising …etc.

Mey (1993:165) mentions that these speech acts express an inner state of the speaker which insofar as it is essentially subjective says nothing about the world. Speaking about the absence of direction of fit, Searle (1979:15) writes:

> **In performing an expressive, the speaker is**
> **neither trying to get the world to match**
> **the words nor words to match the world;**
> **rather the truth of the expressed proposition**
> **is presupposed**

To illustrate the null direction of fit, Mey (1993:165) refers to Searle's example 'Excuse me' when stepping on person's toe has nothing to do with the act of stepping as such: these words do not change anything here, done is done, and both stepper and steppee will have to live with the consequences of this particular change in world conditions: a stepped-on toe.

Leech (1983:206) believes that expressive verbs normally occur in the construction SV (Prep) (O) (Prep) XN, where (Prep) is an optional preposition, and where XN is an abstract noun phrase or a gerundive phrase. For example:

3. I acclaim you for your wonderful work. (Searle, 1971:20)

4. I praise you for making a good decision. (Ibid.)

However, the speech act of 'praising' can be uttered by some group or someone else other than the first person singular as illustrated in:

5. They praise the movie.

6. the teacher praises the works of his students. (Akmajian,1979:295)

Moreover, the act of 'praising' can be expressed differently by the progressive aspect as in (7); past tense (8); passive (9); and it can be expressed by the negative performative as in (10):

7. **She was enthusiastically praising the beauties of Gothic Architecture.**

8. **The judge commended the jury for their hard work.**

9. **The film was highly acclaimed by many critics.**

10. **We praise not Hector, though his name, we know, is great in arms. (Dryden cited in Mifflin,2000:305)**

In addition, the illocutionary act of 'praising' can be effectively performed by a type of 'hedged performative'. 'Hedged performative' refers to the performance of a speech act indirectly, even though a performative verb is present. Such a type of sentences contains a modal or a semi modal which may carry the illocutionary force(Fraser, 1975:187)

11. **They who seek the Lord will praise Him.(Psalm,22:26)**

12. **I will extol the Lord with all my heart.(Psalm,111:7)**

1.2 Types of Praise

Mueller and Dweck (1998:33) mention two types of praise: praise for being and praise for doing. The first type can be used to let one know that he/she is worthwhile and good. This can be exemplified by the following Psalm which is directed to our God because God is worthy of praise:

13. **Praise the Lord.**
   Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
   His love endures forever. (Psalm,106:7)

The second type means praising someone for something he/she has done. This type lets one know that one is pleased with his/her behavior and efforts. An example of this type is the following:

14. **You worked really hard on that project.**

Bell(2004:1-4), on the other hand, suggests three different types of praise depending on the fact that 'praise' contributes to a person's attitude about himself or herself. The first type of praise is the social compliment. Such compliments are designed to make someone feel good and to express friendship. The second type is used by many people, teachers with their students, parents and employers with their employees. It is designed to build self-esteem, to motivate, and to help build character as praise, commendation, and appreciation are crucial in the development of their self-images. The last type of praise is to build relationships and encourage cooperation. It is possible to create a set of circumstances to develop the type of relationships which cause people to cooperate. Therefore, praise, commendation, and appreciation help to bring such relationships.

1.3 Structure of Praise
1.3.1 The Semantic Structure

Since praise is an expansion of positive evaluation, every praise should embody at least one term which is loaded with positive semantic evaluation(Manes and Wolfson,1980:106). Throughout many examples, the researchers have noticed the use of a highly restricted set of Adj , V, N and AV that are used to express commendation.

Although there are many adjectives which can be used for offering praise, yet speakers prefer to choose a very restricted set(Reborts,1968:35). The researchers can classify them into semantic classes(sets) as below:

1.Adj related to appearance. The most common are: neat, new, beautiful, attractive and luxurious.

2.Adj related to performance: good, wonderful, great and well-organized.

3.Adj related to manners: polite, kind, wise and delicate.

4. Adj related to intelligence: intelligent, smart and clever.

5.Adj related to food: delicious, tasty, excellent and marvelous.

6.General adjectives: nice, terrific, fantastic and fine.

Examples:

15. He is such a wonderful writer. (Grajaseni,1994:60)

16. That's a nice dress. (Manes,1983:96)

17. What a clever boy! (Martine,2000:55)

In addition to the adjectives mentioned above, the researchers have also encountered praise which make use of verbs. The most common verbs that contain a semantically positive evaluation are 'love, like, delight, amaze and enjoy'. Some other less common verbs are: 'admire and impress' (Wolfson, 1989:50):

18. I love/like the seaside.(Eastwood and Mackin, 1982:127)

19. I enjoyed the lecture you gave at University last Tuesday.(Tannen, 1986:34).

The examples have also shown that speakers make use of nouns. Mostly, such nouns occur separately such as 'bride, queen, princess, flower and moon'. Billmyer (1990:82) mentions that these nouns are metaphors whose syntactic structures have undergone ellipsis. Moreover, nouns are also used in similes. Thus, the use of similes is very common in praise through the use of 'like' and 'as if'. For instance:

20. Angel-like!

21. You car looks as if a queen!

Moreover, in giving praise, speakers make use of adverbs such as 'well' Sinclair(1980:180) states that 'well' performs the role of adjective if it combines the past participle. For instance, if someone is described as 'well-behaved', this means that he/she behaves in a way approved of:

22. You always seemed so neat and clean and well-behaved.

Capone (2001: 35) points out that from the earliest Old English 'well' (with its comparative and superlative forms better and best) has been an adverb of approval or commendation satisfactorily in a manner or to an extent that fulfils a need, desire or expectation:

23. Everybody spoke well of him. (Clark, 1958: 71)

24. She dances better than I had expected . (Ibid.)

1.3.2 The Syntactic Structure

According to Vanderveken (1994: 83; 1999: 14), the illocutionary force of expressives, in which praise is one of their performative verbs, is realized syntactically by exclamatory sentences. Exclamatives are classified as one of the four types of sentences which are distinguished in meaning, intonation and to a greater extent in form, from both declaratives and interrogatives. Exclamatives are primarily speaker-oriented, their main purpose being to express his/her strong feelings or attitudes.(Nesfield, 1961:2)

Below are some patterns of exclamatory sentences, classified by the researchers, in which praise is used to express the speaker's approval /praise of someone or something:

First: What+(a/an)+Noun Phrase

An exclamatory sentence is made by combining an exclamatory phrase with a subject and a verb beginning with 'what a' or 'what an' followed by a singular noun(Dart 1982: 25):

25. What a glamorous woman your mother is!

Second: How+an Adjective or Adverb

Adverbs as well as adjectives may appear in exclamatory sentences beginning with 'how':

26: How well George writes! (Eckersley and Eckersley, 1960:316)

Third: How+an Adjective+of+Noun/Pronoun+to-infinitive

This is another pattern of exclamatory sentences which consists of 'how' followed by an adjective and preposition followed by either a noun or a pronoun with the infinitive:

27: How polite of you and Sally to thank Sarah again by telephone! (Mackin and Seid, 1979: 57)

Fourth: Such or such a (an) and so.

Exclamatives such or such a (an) replace what a (an) in an exclamatory sentence. This means that a function fulfilled by 'what a' can be similarly fulfilled by 'such a', and almost the same function that is fulfilled by 'how' may be fulfilled by 'so'. When this takes place, 'such a (an)' and 'so' follow the subject and the verb in the sentence (Dart,1982: 25). This can be achieved by the following examples:

28. You have such a good library! (Leech and Svartvik,1994: 275)

29: She sings so beautifully! (Platzack and Rosengren, 1998: 777)

The constructions with 'such' and 'so' are similar to those with 'what' and 'how' as the words 'such' and 'so' indicate extreme positions on scales, and the sentences are to be regarded as Exclamatives.

Fifth: Exclamatives with a Negative Question Form

Some Exclamatives have the form of a negative question. These are questions in structure, and the most characteristic form being that of a negative yes/no-question with a final falling instead of rising tone(Graustein, 1987:227 and Eastwood, 1994: 24)

30. Wasn't it a marvelous concert!

The meaning of this form is positive which indicates that the speaker has strong feelings and invites the listener's agreement.

Sixth: Exclamative with an Interrogative Tag Form

Another minor type of exclamative is that which takes only reversed polarity tag, i.e., the exclamative is usually positive and the tag is negative(Huddleston, 1988: 139).

Seventh: Nonsentence

An exclamative can also be just a phrase which does not contain a subject or a verb; it usually ends with an exclamatory mark, and it may be used to express approval(Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990:245)

31. Charming couple! (Quirk et. al., 1985: 850)

32. (A) good idea! (Ibid.)

In addition to exclamatives, praise can be realized syntactically by using declaratives since declarative sentences can perform all five of speech acts: Declaratives, Representatives ,

Directives, Commissives and Expressives. Thus, declarative sentences are used to realize the explicit as well as implicit speech act of praising(Vanderveken,1999:15).

This can be demonstrated by the following examples:

33. I praised the speech you gave yesterday.(Bennet, 2003:47)

34. They are doing the right thing. It's a good idea.(Eastwood and Mackin,1982:139)

1.4 Praise and Related Terms

There are some terms in language which may share certain features. One of these terms is compliment. Newton and Burgoon(1990:509) define complaints as "statements that are intended to make the other feel good about him/herself." As for Kodma(1996:59), compliments are " intricate combination of positive evaluation, displayed good feelings, implicit friendliness, and half –admitted desire to please ".

Although the words 'praise' and 'compliment' are actually synonyms for expressing approval or admiration, yet there are some slight differences between them. Tannen(1993:37) regards 'compliment' as interpersonal and interactive speech act whereas 'praise' as a statement of absolute value with or without interpersonal and/or interactive functions. Therefore, all compliments are considered praise but some instances of praise are not categorized as compliments. Similarly, Lewandowska-Tomaszezyk(1989:73) mentions that compliments appear only in face to face interaction "complimenting always involves a human addressee"(Ibid.:74). Praising, on the other hand, may not be necessarily directed to others. Thus, when one says:

35. We have a good teacher.

In his/her absence, one is not complimenting the teacher, rather one is praising him. However, there is another possibility when the praise implies a compliment. In:

36. You have a clever boy;

and one is praising the boy, and at the same time complimenting the parents for their contribution or personal involvement in the object complimented(Ibid.:75).

In addition, compliments can be considered as a Face Threatening Act while praise cannot. The utterance:

37. I like your pen.

implies a face threatening act since the comment would threaten the addressee's face. The latter may understand that the complimenter wants his/her pen. However, a sentence like:

38. X has a nice pen.

does not imply a Face Threatening Act since X is passive, i.e., not on the scene(Rodriquez et. al., 1998:323) . Above all, one may conclude that it is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between these two terms because they often overlap.

Another related term to 'praise' is flattery. A praise differs from flattery in that the former is assumed to be sincere, objective and is given without thought of gain whereas the latter implies an element of deceit or visible exaggeration (accompanied by a hidden purpose) (Robyn, 2002:35). A flattery may be used as a pre-act to prepare the ground for another act, most frequently requests and questions.(Rubin et. al., 1994:50). In such a case, the speaker uses them as a 'path facilitation' for the real act; they are produced more often from lower to upper status. The addressee, however, is aware that the flatterer has something to gain by creating favorable impression (Manes, 1983:96).

In fact, the difference between praise and flattery lies mostly in sincerity of the speaker which no one can judge accurately and cannot explore his intentions.

1.5 Application

Text 1

"and the words of the Lord are flawless,
Like silver refined in
a furnace of clay, purified seven times."(Ps.12:6)

The Prophet David penned this verse in Saul's reign, when there was a general decay of honesty and piety both in court and country. Here, he complains to God, and very feelingly, for he himself suffers by the treachery of his false friends and the insolence of his enemies. Though men are not to be trusted and speak vanity and flattery, yet the words of the Lord are true and pure like silver in a furnace of earth or a crucible(Henry,1710:84).

Pragmatically, this verse conveys the illocutionary force of praising expressing Searle's expressives speech act. Semantically, this verse makes use of a noun with a simile to denote the implicit praise of God's words. The preciousness of God's word is of great and intrinsic value like silver refined to the highest degree that has nothing depreciate it. Syntactically, this verse uses a declarative sentence to convey the illocutionary force of praising.

Text 2

" O Lord, the king rejoices in your strength.
How great is his joy in the victories you give!" (Ps.21:1)

This verse expresses a thanksgiving for the success God had blessed the King David with and to congratulate him on his victories and the honor he had achieved.

The pragmatic aspect of this verse implies David's praise to God for his salvation when proclaims that his joy is in God's support not in the success of his armies. Then, he gives God all the glory of the victories he had obtained. At the syntactic structure , this verse uses an exclamatory sentence beginning with how+an adjective, i.e., 'how great ' to express the implicit praise of the King David to God.

Text 3

"The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his
temple all cry, 'Glory!'" .(Ps.29:9)

Some of the very good interpreters state that David penned this verse on occasion, at the time of a great storm of thunder, lightning, and rain. Then, he calls people to glorify God, and to convince them of the Goodness of that God when they were to adore (Fauss et. al.,1871:78)

The pragmatic aspect of this verse implies the speech act of praising for David praises implicitly the glory of God which shines most brightly in His Kingdom of grace, His temple and His church where people attend. So every one speaks of His glory and honor.

Syntactically, the structural form of this verse consists of an exclamatory phrase without a subject and verb i.e., Glory! To express commendation.

Text 4

"I will extol the Lord at all times;
his praise will always be on my lips."
(Ps.34:1)

In this text, the Prophet David gives thanksgiving to God and engages himself to praise Him. Though it was his fault that he changed his behavior, it was God's mercy was so much greater as God did not deal with him according to the desert of his dissimulation(Henry, 1710:138).

Pragmatically, this text conveys the illocutionary force of praising since it is performed by a type of hedged performative that consists of a modal and a verb 'will extol' to express David's praise to God for the experience which he and others have had of His goodness. He resolves that he will praise

God constantly on all occasions .Syntactically speaking, the form of this text comprises a declarative sentence to express the illocutionary force of praising.

Text 5

"Better is one day in your court, than a thousand elsewhere; I would be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked."(Ps. 84:10).

The psalmist in this verse, complains that nothing proved to him a source of great distress than his being banished from the assembly of the saints, where God was called upon. At length, he expresses his desire to be resorted to the tabernacle of God(Calvin,2004:89).

At the semantic implication, this verse indicates the implicit act of praising through using the adverb of approval well with its comparative form 'better'. Since the Prophet David testifies that the end which he proposed to himself in living was not only to serve God, but to set a higher value on one day which he could spend in the divine service than upon a long time passed among the men of the world whose society from true religion is banished. Syntactically, the structural form of this verse is represented by a declarative sentence.

Text 6

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is love for those who fear him."(Ps.103:110)

The psalmist here stirs up himself and his own soul to praise God for His favor to him in particular and to the church in general, and to all good men to whom He is just, kind and constant.

Pragmatically speaking, the Prophet David implicitly praises God's love and mercy which are so much above and beyond those who fear Him and not toward those who trifle with Him. Therefore, one must fear the Lord and His goodness. This verse, at the semantic implication, is expressed by the adjective 'great' to laud the greatness of God's love for those who faithfully worship Him. Syntactically, in this verse the structural form 'so' exclamative is used to mean the word 'so' may perform the function of 'how' in an exclamatory sentence. Then, it can be read: How great his love is!

Text 7

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."(Ps.139:14)

This verse, in the opinion of some of the Jewish doctors, is the most excellent verse in the Psalms of David and very pious which devouts to the mediation of the doctrine of God's omniscience.(Henry,1710:20).

Pragmatically speaking, this verse expresses the explicit speech act of praising since it belongs to Austin's class of behabitives and Searle's class of expressives by using the explicit performative verb "praise". Semantically, this verse makes use of the adjective 'wonderful' to express David's approval of the admirable contrivance of God's work, the composition of every part, and the harmony of all together.

Text 8

"How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!"(Ps.147:1).

This is another praising verse of Psalm. Some doctors think it was penned by David after the return of the Jews from their captivity. The Septuagint divides it into two parts; the first part is devoted to praising God as the God of nature is very great and the second one id

furnished with matter for glorifying and thanking God as the God of grace comforting His people(Supurgean,2003:120). This verse, from a pragmatic point of view, is used to express the illocutionary force of praising since praising God has its own wages and values. Syntactically, the Prophet David in this verse implicitly praises God by using exclamatory phrases beginning with 'how' and adjectives, i.e., 'how good' and 'how pleasant' for it is good and pleasant to praise and glorify God.

Conclusions :
        The analysis of the English religious texts clarify that:
1. 'praise' can be applied to these texts by analyzing the pragmatic, semantic and syntactic aspects.
2. Praise can be expressed in more than one form explicitly and implicitly.
3. As far as the tense of the performative verb is concerned, praise can be expressed by using the present as well as the past tenses.
4. Praise cannot only be determined by declarative sentences but also by other types such as exclamative and interrogative.

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الخلاصة

الكائنـات البشرية التي تعيش في مجتمع بها حاجـة إلى الاتصـال بعضـها بعض ، ولكن هذا الاتصال قد يؤدي إلى الاحتكاك والصدام . ولكي لا يقع هذا ، وحفاظاً على السلام والتوافق الاجتماعي تخلق هذه المجتمعات مجموعة أنظمة تسمى " قواعد التأدب " .

ويمثل المدح جزءاً من استراتيجيات التأدب الإيجابية التي يحتاجها الناس ، دائماً ، لخلق جوٍ من الثقة والتشجيع . فالمدح يعبر عن التواصل الاجتماعي الذي يحاول المتكلم من خلاله خلق نوع من العلاقة مع المُخاطب ، عن طريق تعبيره عن إعجابه أو استحسانه .

ولغرض دراسـة المدح ومناقشته بشكله الظـاهر أو الخفيّ ، يسـعى البحـث الحـالي إلى إثبـات الأساليب اللغوية للمدح في نصوص مختـارة من " الكتـاب المقدس " ، عن طريـق التركيز على ثلاث نواح : تداولية ودلالية وتركيبية .