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Interpreting the Hadith on Leprosy Through the Lens of Intentionality: A Textual Linguistic Approach

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ABSTRACT

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Keywords:

Text linguistics; Intentionality; Prophetic Discourse; Leprosy

1. Introduction

Prophetic Hadith constitutes the second most authoritative source in Islam after the Qur'an and plays a central role in the formulation of Islamic legal rulings, while simultaneously serving as a

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comprehensive guide for shaping the morals, civilization, and way of life of Muslims worldwide, as emphasized by al-Siba'i [1] and al-Qaṭṭan [2]. Given its normative function and elevated status within the Islamic intellectual tradition, every hadith text must be interpreted with accuracy, scholarly rigor, and methodological integrity. A sound understanding of hadith can only be achieved through an interpretative process that adheres to the established methodologies developed by classical hadith scholars, particularly those grounded in linguistic competence and contextual awareness.

A fundamental prerequisite for such interpretation is mastery of the Arabic language, since hadith texts are transmitted in Arabic and embody complex linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural features that require careful scholarly examination. Classical scholars have long emphasized that accurate interpretation depends on competence in Arabic linguistic disciplines such as syntax (naḥw), morphology (ṣarf), semantics, and rhetoric (balaghah), as articulated by Ibn al-Salaḥ [3]. Nevertheless, Tamam Ḥassan [4] argues that linguistic analysis in hadith interpretation should not be restricted to structural aspects alone but should instead be expanded to include a holistic examination of the text. Such an approach enables a more refined understanding, as each text contains specific linguistic indicators that contribute to the construction of meaning and conceptual coherence, a view further supported by Abd Gani and Ali [5].

In this regard, the textual-linguistic approach has been recognized as a valuable analytical framework due to its capacity to facilitate critical, systematic, and holistic text analysis, including the analysis of hadith texts. This approach extends beyond structural examination to consider how meaning is constructed through the interaction of linguistic elements, context, and communicative purpose. Within this framework, De Beaugrande [6] proposed seven fundamental elements of textuality that determine textual completeness, namely cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativeness, situationality, and intertextuality.

Among these elements, intentionality, commonly referred to as (qasdiyyah) in Arabic, occupies a particularly significant position. This element denotes the intention, purpose, and communicative objective underlying an utterance or action and plays a decisive role in shaping interpretation, meaning, and textual relevance. In the context of hadith, intentionality assumes heightened importance because it is closely linked to the Prophet's communicative intent when delivering a statement, instruction, prohibition, or action, thereby directly influencing both correct understanding and practical application in Muslim life.

Accordingly, this paper examines the influence of intentionality on the interpretation of the hadith on leprosy through the lens of textual linguistics. By situating intentionality within the broader framework of hadith interpretation and elucidating its connection to textual-linguistic theory, this study seeks to provide a more comprehensive and authoritative understanding of the meanings, objectives, and practical implications of the hadith. Beyond offering a more precise explanation grounded in the communicative intent behind the Prophet's statements, this approach also contributes to the development of contemporary methodologies for hadith interpretation, particularly in relation to hadiths addressing health, medical concerns, and social interaction in modern society.

1.1 Intentionality as a Textuality Standard in Text Linguistics

The concept of intentionality is widely recognized as one of the principal components of textuality within the framework of text linguistics, as outlined in the foundational model of textual standards proposed by De Beaugrande and Dressler [7]. Within this framework, intentionality refers to the communicative intention of the text producer in shaping messages, purposes, and functions through linguistic expression. A text is considered complete and meaningful only when it is deliberately

planned and produced with a clear communicative intention, which subsequently influences the organization of linguistic structures, lexical selection, and the development of cohesion and coherence, as emphasized in text-linguistic theory. From this perspective, intentionality is not merely an internal psychological state of the speaker, but rather a textual principle that governs how meaning is conceptualized, structured, and conveyed.

From a pragmatic perspective, intentionality is closely associated with speech act theory, which views utterances as actions performed through language. This perspective maintains that every utterance carries an illocutionary force reflecting the speaker's communicative purpose, as demonstrated in the works of Austin and later refined by Searle [8-9]. Accordingly, the meaning of an utterance cannot be determined solely by its linguistic form but must also account for the underlying intention and communicative strategies embedded in the speech act. This view aligns with discourse-based approaches which assert that textual interpretation necessarily involves reconstructing speaker intention as part of the cognitive processing of communicative events, as argued in discourse studies by van Dijk [10].

Within the Islamic scholarly tradition, a closely related concept is intentionality, which reflects the importance of intention and purpose in textual interpretation. Classical scholars consistently emphasize that accurate understanding of religious texts requires careful consideration of intention, objectives (maqasid), and contextual background. This principle is evident in the works of scholars such as al-Shatibi [11] and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah [12]., who stress that meaning cannot be properly derived without examining the underlying purposes and contexts of Prophetic statements and actions. In a similar vein, methodological discussions in hadith sciences highlight the necessity of relating the meaning of a hadith to its circumstances of utterance (asbab al-wurud), socio-historical context, and intended objectives, as articulated in classical hadith scholarship.

Contemporary hadith studies that integrate textual-linguistic approaches further demonstrate that understanding intentionality can be refined through three principal analytical dimensions. The first dimension involves linguistic context, encompassing situational background, social dynamics, and communicative relationships that shape the formulation of a hadith. Contextual analysis assists in determining the scope of meaning and clarifies whether an instruction functions as general, specific, literal, or preventive in nature. The second-dimension concerns speech act interpretation, which focuses on identifying the illocutionary force of the Prophet's utterances, such as whether they operate as normative commands, precautionary guidance, or advisory statements, in line with established speech act classifications by Searle [13]. The third dimension relates to rhetorical features, including stylistic choices, emphatic expressions, structural patterns, and persuasive strategies employed within the hadith text. Rhetorical analysis reveals how communicative effectiveness is achieved through concise formulations, emphatic constructions, or metaphorical language, depending on the intended purpose of the message.

Taken together, the literature affirms that intentionality constitutes a critical determinant in meaning construction in both modern linguistic theory and classical hadith methodology. The integration of text-linguistic theory, speech act analysis, and rhetorical inquiry with the Islamic concept of intentionality provides a holistic analytical framework. This integrated approach enhances the precision of hadith interpretation while ensuring the continued relevance and applicability of Prophetic guidance in contemporary contexts. Accordingly, examining intentionality through linguistic context, speech acts, and rhetorical strategies forms an essential foundation for producing interpretations of hadith that are comprehensive, methodologically sound, and academically robust.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in document analysis, with a particular focus on textual examination through the framework of text linguistics. This approach was selected because it enables an in-depth investigation of the structure, context, and communicative purpose of a text—an essential requirement for understanding the hadith concerning the Prophet's instruction to avoid individuals afflicted with leprosy. Within this framework, the study explores how the element of intentionality or the communicative purpose of the text functions in shaping meaning and determining the legal and interpretive implications embedded within the hadith.

2.2 Data Collection

The data for this study consist of hadith texts related to leprosy, obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise authoritative hadith collections that are widely recognized by hadith scholars for their authenticity, particularly *sahih Bukhari*, which was selected due to its established authority within the Islamic scholarly tradition. Secondary sources include classical and contemporary hadith commentaries, writings by modern scholars, as well as previous academic studies that address hadith interpretation and the application of modern linguistic approaches in the analysis of religious texts.

Data selection was conducted using purposive sampling, guided by thematic and analytical criteria, namely hadiths that directly or indirectly convey instructions, prohibitions, or attitudinal stances related to leprosy. This approach ensures that the selected data are relevant, representative, and analytically significant for examining the role of intentionality and the features of textuality in the construction of meaning and the interpretation of hadith texts.

2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a text-linguistic analytical approach, focusing on key textual elements such as linguistic context, the relationship between structure and meaning, speech acts, and rhetorical features employed in the articulation of prophetic directives. The analytical process involved a systematic and staged interpretation of the hadith texts, considering both the situational context and the context of language use.

This analysis aims to identify and explicate the implicit element of intentionality embedded within the hadiths on leprosy, and subsequently to interpret these texts within a broader and integrated semantic framework, in accordance with the principles of text linguistics and established methodologies of hadith interpretation. The analytical process adopted in this study can be outlined as follows:

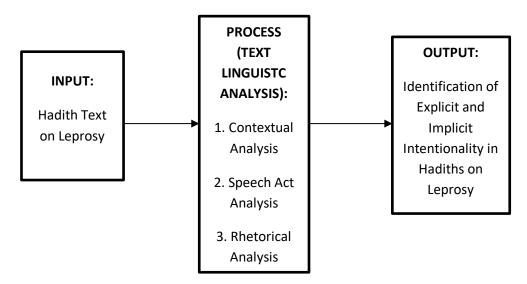


Fig. 1. The Process of Text-Linguistic Analysis in Identifying Explicit and Implicit Intentionality in Hadiths on Leprosy

3. Results

The findings of this study address four main thematic areas, namely the general meaning of the hadith, linguistic context, interpretation of speech acts, and rhetorical aspects of the directives contained in the hadith. The discussion of these themes is presented as follows:

3.1 General Meaning of The Hadith on Leprosy

There is a hadith that records a directive of the Prophet Muhammad regarding the avoidance of individuals afflicted with leprosy, a disease that was regarded, within the social context of the time, as dangerous and potentially contagious. This hadith was narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) as follows:

The Prophet Muhammad said: "And flee from the one afflicted with leprosy as you would flee from a lion." (Narrated by al-Bukhari [14]).

This hadith generally emphasizes the Prophet's directive to adopt a cautious attitude by keeping a distance from individuals afflicted with leprosy. The directive is reinforced through the analogy of "fleeing from a lion," which serves to illustrate the level of danger that warrants serious attention. The use of this analogy functions as a rhetorical emphasis, highlighting the importance of preventive measures and self-protection, particularly in contexts involving risks that may threaten human safety and well-being.

3.2 Linguistic Context

This hadith literally conveys the meaning: "Flee from the one afflicted with leprosy as you would flee from a lion." From the perspective of linguistic context, the text of this hadith contains several significant linguistic elements that function to reinforce the force of the directive conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad ...

From a morphological and syntactic perspective, the verb "

is employed in the form of (fi'il amr) imperative verb, which fundamentally carries the meaning of a direct and emphatic command. The use of this imperative form indicates that distancing oneself from individuals afflicted with leprosy is not merely optional advice, but rather a directive that calls for compliance. Within Arabic grammatical and pragmatic tradition, the imperative form is commonly used to convey obligations related to safety, precaution, or the prevention of harm, as discussed in classical Arabic grammatical works such as *Mughni al-Labib* by Ibn Hisham [15].

The term "التُجْذُوم" refers to an individual suffering from leprosy (Hansen's disease), a chronic infectious condition. In the historical context of early Arab society, leprosy was a disease greatly feared due to its severe physical effects and the social stigma associated with it. In the historical context of early Arab society, leprosy was widely feared due to its severe physical consequences and the social stigma associated with the disease. From a modern medical perspective, as stated by the Ministry of Health Malaysia [16], leprosy is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium leprae* and may affect the skin, peripheral nervous system, and limbs if left untreated, as documented in contemporary public health and medical literature. This medical understanding further strengthens the linguistic and pragmatic rationale underlying the use of this term in the hadith.

The comparative phrase "كَمَا تَفِرُّ مِنَ الْأَسَدِ" functions as an element of tashbih (simile) and carries strong rhetorical force. In Arab cultural symbolism, the lion (al-asad) represents danger, ferocity, and an imminent threat that necessitates immediate action. This simile not only conveys the intensity of fear but also emphasizes the element of urgency embedded in the directive. Through this comparison, the Prophet Muhammad employs an effective communicative strategy by evoking a vivid mental image that reinforces the message of prevention and self-protection.

Overall, the linguistic context of this hadith demonstrates that the Prophet's directive is conveyed through a combination of imperative forms and rhetorical comparison to underscore the importance of preventive measures in the face of health-related risks. This linguistic approach reflects the element of intentionality, namely the communicative intention to safeguard individual and communal well-being, in accordance with the principle of preserving life (hifz al-nafs) within the framework of magasid al-shari'ah.

3.3 Interpretation of Speech Acts

Every utterance produced, whether in spoken or written form across various communicative media, inherently contains a specific action. This indicates that any expression employed by a speaker is not merely a linguistic structure or a sequence of words, but rather conveys an underlying meaning, intention, and communicative purpose. Through utterances, speakers perform various communicative functions such as issuing commands, making requests, posing questions, offering suggestions, or eliciting responses from listeners or readers.

In the field of pragmatics, this phenomenon is conceptualized as speech acts, an analytical framework that examines language use based on the functional variation of utterances across different social contexts. Scholars such as Searle [17], emphasize that the meaning of an utterance is not determined solely by its linguistic form, but is also shaped by contextual factors, the speaker's intention, and the effects produced on the recipient.

The theory of speech acts was systematically introduced by J. L. Austin [18] in his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*, in which he distinguishes between constative and performative utterances and proposes three fundamental components of speech acts, namely locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. This theoretical framework was later expanded by John R. Searle [19] in *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, where he classified illocutionary acts into five main categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

Within this framework, a locutionary act refers to the act of producing an utterance with a specific linguistic structure and literal meaning. An illocutionary act, refers to the communicative intention or function underlying the utterance, such as giving instructions, issuing warnings, offering advice, or making requests. Meanwhile, a perlocutionary act refers to the effect or outcome produced by the utterance on the listener, which may manifest in emotional reactions, psychological responses, or subsequent actions.

In summary, the distinction between these three components can be understood as a communicative process in which a speaker produces an utterance with a particular literal meaning (locutionary act), conveys it with a specific communicative intention (illocutionary act), and thereby generates a certain effect on the listener or reader (perlocutionary act).

Therefore, the hadith directive to avoid individuals afflicted with leprosy, as articulated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), can be understood through the elements of speech acts, as presented in the following table:

Table 1Description of Speech Acts in the Hadith on Leprosy

Speech Act	Description
Locutionary Act	The hadith explicitly conveys an instruction to "flee" from individuals afflicted with leprosy, using the danger posed by a lion as a point of comparison. In this context, the expressions "flee" and "lion" function as locutionary elements that directly communicate the literal meaning of the utterance.
Illocutionary Act	At the illocutionary level, the hadith functions as a directive act, in which the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) issues guidance with the intention of advising the Muslim community on appropriate conduct when interacting with individuals afflicted with leprosy.
Perlocutionary Act	At the perlocutionary level, the hadith may raise public awareness regarding the importance of preventive measures in addressing infectious diseases. Additionally, it may influence social attitudes by encouraging the prioritization of public health, while simultaneously prompting reflection on ways to avoid stigmatization of affected individuals.

3.4 Rhetorical Aspects of The Directives Contained in The Hadith

The hadith that instructs avoidance of individuals afflicted with leprosy contains several significant rhetorical elements that warrant closer examination to uncover its implicit meanings. First, the directive is conveyed through rhetorical simile, whereby the act of avoiding a person with leprosy is likened to fleeing from a lion. In the tradition of Arabic rhetoric (*balaghah*), this technique is known as tashbīh tamthīlī, which involves the comparison of two situations to highlight a shared characteristic or effect, as explained by classical rhetoricians such as Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani [20].

Within this simile, the image of "fleeing from a lion" functions as a powerful representation of imminent danger and intense fear that necessitates immediate action. This image is then paired with the act of avoiding individuals afflicted with leprosy to emphasize the seriousness of the directive. The point of similarity between the two situations lies in the necessity for swift action without hesitation when confronted with a threat that poses a real risk to life. Through this comparison, the hadith evokes a sense of vigilance and encourages prompt preventive action, reflecting not only individual self-care but also collective responsibility for public health within society.

Second, the simile employed in this hadith also demonstrates the rhetorical technique of *tajṣīm* (concretization), as defined by Nawas [21], which serves to give tangible form to abstract or less perceptible concepts. This technique is commonly employed in classical Arabic discourse to facilitate audience comprehension by presenting ideas through concrete and sensory imagery, as discussed in modern studies of Arabic rhetoric. In this context, leprosy represented a health threat that, although known to exist in early Islamic society, was not scientifically understood in terms of its causes or modes of transmission, despite its observable social and physical consequences.

Historical studies by Nasr [22], indicate that leprosy was present and had spread across several regions of the Arab world prior to and during the advent of Islam, including Greater Syria and the Arabian Peninsula, where it was associated with fear and social stigma. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad employed a concrete and universally recognizable image—the lion—as a symbol of danger that required no further explanation. Unlike disease, whose harmful effects may not be immediately visible, the lion represents a threat that can be readily visualized and instinctively feared.

Moreover, the selection of the lion as a symbolic element in this simile does not appear to be arbitrary. From a medical perspective, advanced stages of leprosy can result in pronounced facial changes, including skin thickening and nodular formations, a condition clinically referred to as *leonine facies*. These changes, as stated by al-Muwail [23], may cause the facial appearance of affected individuals to resemble that of a lion, a phenomenon documented in modern clinical literature [20]. Although such scientific explanations may not have been fully understood in the Prophet's time, the congruence between the symbolic imagery and observable physical reality highlights the precision of prophetic communication in conveying preventive guidance.

Overall, the use of the lion simile in this hadith reflects the communicative wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who articulated a concise yet meaning-laden message capable of producing a strong visual and emotional impact. This rhetorical strategy reinforces the element of intentionality, namely the communicative intention to promote vigilance, preventive behavior, and the protection of both individual and communal well-being.

4. Conclusions

By analyzing the hadith that instructs avoidance of individuals afflicted with leprosy through the lens of intentionality, encompassing linguistic context, speech act interpretation, and implicit meaning, this study contributes to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the hadith. The

findings demonstrate that the hadith should not be interpreted solely at the literal level but rather examined in terms of its communicative intention and functional purpose. Through the framework of speech act theory, the analysis shows that the directive operates not only at the locutionary level, but also conveys a clear illocutionary intention aimed at safeguarding the health and well-being of the Muslim community, while simultaneously producing perlocutionary effects in the form of heightened awareness and preventive health practices.

Furthermore, the use of rhetorical devices such as simile and vivid imagery in the prophetic directive reflects an effective communicative strategy for conveying the potential dangers of leprosy. These rhetorical techniques enhance the clarity and impact of the message by providing a strong visual and emotional appeal, thereby encouraging appropriate preventive action within the sociocultural context of the audience. Overall, this study underscores the importance of approaching religious texts not only in terms of what is stated, but also why it is articulated in a particular manner and how it influences recipients. By integrating intentionality with text-linguistic and pragmatic analysis, the study highlights the potential of this approach to enrich hadith interpretation in a manner that is contextually grounded and socially relevant.

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