

## Commissive Speech Acts in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness

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### Abstract :

In human life, communication is extremely essential. Because the main function of language is communication, people require a language in order to convey their thoughts and emotions. Speaking is a kind of communication that allows people to express their thoughts, facts, and emotions. It is about much more than simply the sound; it is also about the aim and meaning of that sound. Commissive speech acts are ones whereby the speaker commits to do something in the future. The data for the study was obtained from the utterances made by the characters in Joseph Conrad's novel '*Heart of Darkness*' and they were categorised using speech acts theory created by Searle (1979) and Yule (2000). This study is a descriptive qualitative study. The aim of this study is to find out what commissive speech acts are commonly used by the characters in Joseph Conrad's novella "*Heart of Darkness*". In additions, it tries to examine how commissive speech acts are represented in the novella.

The findings of the study revealed that all kinds of commissive speech acts are used in Conrad's novella with different percentages. It is concluded that refusal is the most widely used commissive speech act in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Refusals have been presented in order to show how the characters' contempt of the listeners and to show their rejection to do many things. By contrast, volunteer is used only once in the novella. Concerning the speech act of promise, it is concluded that the verb 'promise' and the modal verb 'will' are used for delivering a promise in the novella, but 'will' is the dominant form used for giving a promise. Guarantee and offer have been utilized with the same percentages.

**Keywords:** (Commissive speech acts, speech acts, Joseph Conrad's novel, Heart of Darkness).

أعمال الكلام المفوض في قلب الظلام لجوزيف كونراد  
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المخلص :

في حياة الإنسان ، التواصل ضروري للغاية. لأن الوظيفة الرئيسية للغة هي التواصل ، يحتاج الناس إلى لغة للتعبير عن أفكارهم وعواطفهم. التحدث هو نوع من التواصل يسمح للناس بالتعبير عن أفكارهم وحقائقهم وعواطفهم. يتعلق الأمر بأكثر من مجرد الصوت ؛ إنه يتعلق أيضاً بهدف ومعنى هذا الصوت. أفعال الكلام التبادلية هي تلك التي يلتزم فيها المتحدث بفعل شيء ما في المستقبل. تم الحصول على بيانات الدراسة من أقوال الشخصيات في رواية جوزيف كونراد "قلب الظلام" وتم تصنيفهم باستخدام نظرية أفعال الكلام التي أنشأها سيرل (١٩٧٩) ويول (٢٠٠٠). هذه الدراسة عبارة عن دراسة وصفية نوعية. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو معرفة أفعال الكلام التبعية التي يشيع استخدامها من قبل الشخصيات في رواية جوزيف كونراد "قلب الظلام". في الإضافات ، تحاول دراسة كيفية تمثيل أفعال الكلام التصالحية في الرواية.

كشفت نتائج الدراسة أن جميع أنواع أفعال الكلام التفسيرية مستخدمة في رواية كونراد بنسب مختلفة. استنتج أن الرفض هو أكثر أعمال الكلام التبادلي استخداماً في قلب الظلام لكونراد. تم تقديم الرفض من أجل إظهار مدى ازدياد الشخصيات للمستمعين وإظهار رفضهم لفعل أشياء كثيرة. على النقيض من ذلك ، يتم استخدام المتطوع مرة واحدة فقط في الرواية. فيما يتعلق بفعل الكلام الوعد ، استنتج أن الفعل "الوعد" والفعل النموذجي "سوف" يستخدمان لتقديم الوعد في الرواية ، لكن "سوف" هي الصيغة السائدة المستخدمة في إعطاء الوعد. الضمان والعرض تم استخدامهما بنفس النسب المئوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (أفعال الكلام التبادلي ، أفعال الكلام ، رواية جوزيف كونراد ، قلب الظلام)

## 1. Introduction

One of the main branches of linguistics is pragmatics. Pragmatics is concerned with what speakers and writers do with their words and what makes this intention clear. It is simply concerned with the study of the intended meaning (Cook, 2003: 53). Speakers not only convey words but also an action in their speech in order to achieve communication goals. Speaking is an action that is carried out through utterances,. People can act in this situation by speaking. The activity need not be physically performed by the speakers. The words spoken would be adequate to carry out a task. When people apologize, greet, ask, criticize, invite, congratulate,

or refuse, we are engaging in speech act. This study specifically focused on commissive speech acts (Yule, 1996: 47).

Austin observes that there are three types of acts that occur with everything people say: the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary acts. The literal meaning of the actual words is referenced in the locutionary act. The speaker's intention when speaking the words constitutes the illocutionary act. The impact this utterance has on one's ideas or behaviour is known as the perlocutionary act (Paltridge, 2006: 55).

Following these speech acts, the focus of this study is commissive speech act. The speech act is a linguistic process in which the speaker uses words to really accomplish something in addition to simply saying it. Therefore, a speech serves as both a symbol of meaning and a source of force.. The act of doing something is referred to as an illocutionary act. The illocutionary act is carried out with the intention of conveying the intended meaning of the utterance. Searle has set up a classification of illocutionary speech act: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Commissive speech acts: refer to how to make a promise or an offer. They include the following acts: warning, guaranteeing, threatening, promising and offering (Direven and Verspoor, 2004: 152 as cited in Aslam, 2010).

The interest of this study is to analyze the speech delivered in Joseph Conrad's novella 'Heart of Darkness' and to see the types of commissive speech acts used in his novel. It also tries to describe the functions of these speech acts and how they are employed in the novella.

## 2. Literature Review

One of the pragmatic studies is speech acts. Speech acts are included as a topic in pragmatics. Speech acts are the many actions people carry out by using words, and when a speech act is performed, a specific act is carried out. According to Reiter (2002), when someone uses the words to create sentences, they are also carrying out an activity..

Austin (1975 as cited in Bayat 2013) observed utterances and classified them into three categories: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and the perlocutionary act. The literal meaning of the actual words is referenced in the locutionary act. The speaker's intention when speaking the words constitutes the illocutionary deed. The perlocutionary act is the impact of this statement on the addressee's thoughts or behaviour (Paltridge, 2006: 55). This was done as part of the speech act theory. A taxonomy of speech acts was developed by Searle (1969) based on his development of the speech act theory and in particular the notion of illocutionary acts. This taxonomy is divided into five different kinds of speech acts: declarative acts, representative acts, expressive acts, commissive acts, and directive acts.

Yule (1996) stated that commissive is an illocutionary act that the point is to compel the speaker to take a specific action in the future. This category was once employed to connect the speaker's words to the actions they inspired. Vanderveken (1985) stated that commissive acts are primarily hearer-directed, implying that a speech act should be directed at a particular hearer and can be addressed to anybody or no one. Hearer-directed acts, on the other hand, in which the hearer is not the same as the speaker, must be conducted as explicit public acts, meaning that their intent is directed at anyone.

## 2.1 Types of Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive speech acts are recognized and categorized based on the speech acts theory created by Searle (1979) and Yule (2000). According to this theory, commissive speech acts are classified into six types : promise, guarantee, refusal, threat, volunteer, and offer.

### a. Promise

A promise is a verbal or written commitment to do or refrain from doing something. It is a statement used to remind the speaker of a task that needs to be completed in the future. The Random House Dictionary of English Language (1966:1151) defined a promise as a statement that someone will or will not do something in the future. Searle (1976) maintained that for delivering a valid promise speech act, there must be five prerequisites. The speaker must first aim to do what he promises, and then believe that the action is in the best interests of the hearer. The speaker must then assume that he is capable of performing the action. The speaker should predict a future action, and then he must predict his own action.

### b. Guarantee

Gea (2020) claims that the speaker's assurance that they will succeed in their goals in the future is the guarantee speech act. In most cases, a guarantee is used to persuade someone of the truth and perform a responsibility for a future action.

### c. Refusal

When a speaker explicitly or implicitly declines an invitation or request, this is referred to as a speech act of refusal (Tanck, 2002: 2). As Searle and Vanderveken (1985) claimed, refusal is an illocutionary conflict that occurs when a speaker interprets what he intended to say as acceptance when speaking in that setting. As a

result, when given the choice between acceptance and rejection, the illocutionary contradiction of an acceptance is refusal, which then has the extra preparatory.. Ghazanfari (2012) claimed that refusals are negative reactions to invitations, requests, ideas, and other common forms of communication

#### **d. Threat**

According to Allan (2014), a promise has two components: a threat and a promise-truth. If the statement involves the goal to create harm, scandal, or punishment, the issue transforms the promise into a threat. Threat is a non-performative verb according to Allan's definition of promise and truth.

A threat is a declaration of a desire to hurt or punish someone. If the listener refuses to follow the speaker's order, it implies to intimidate him. It is frequently used to scare a listener because the speaker feels the listener is beneath him or her and is therefore driven by hatred and mistrust (Al-Bantany, 2013 : 26). It is a declaration of intent to cause harm, punishment, or evil (Mifflin, 2003). It is a statement in which you threaten to harm or trouble someone if they do not comply with your wishes.

#### **e. Volunteer**

Volunteering is defined as making a voluntary offer to perform a task. It is to do a service or offer to do so of one's own free will. It refers to deciding to freely offer or contribute without being asked (Husain, 2018: 43).

#### **f. Offer**

Offering stands out from other commissive speech acts and is seen as conditionally illocution of commissive speech acts. An offer is described as a conditional promise made solely upon acceptance by the hearer (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Consequently, an offer only has legal force when it is accepted, and anyone may accept an offer as long as it has been made and is still in effect.

### 3. Data and Methodology

According to Searle (1969), this study is descriptive qualitative one. In descriptive qualitative study, there is no calculation or enumeration. The writer's aims in using a descriptive method are to determine the study's purpose, the data source, and the data analysis process. Using procedures such as finding, gathering, classifying, and evaluating data, the descriptive qualitative strategy comprises seeking, collecting, categorising, analysing, and finally drawing conclusions. A qualitative method is deemed to be the most appropriate since the data are commissive utterances.

The data were grouped into forms of commissive speech acts: promise, guarantee, refusal, threat, volunteer and offer. The data were analyzed qualitatively by applying Commissive speech acts based on the speech acts theory created by Searle (1979) and Yule (2000) to identify kinds of commissive acts in Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*.

### 4. Research Questions

The present study tries to answer the following question:

1. What are the commissive speech acts used by the characters in Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* "?
2. What is the most common commissive speech act used in Conrad's novella?
3. To what extent does Joseph Conrad employ the commissive acts in his novella?

### 5. Data Analysis and Discussions

The characters in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* primarily employ all types of commissive speech acts, as determined by our

research. These acts include: warning, promise, threat, offer and rejection. This can be shown in the following table.

NO	Type of Commissive Speech Acts	Total	Percentage
1	Promise	7	17.9 %
2	Guarantee	3	7.6 %
3	Refusal	16	41%
4	Threat	9	23%
5	Volunteer	1	2.5%
6	Offer	3	7.6%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100%</b>

All types of commissive speech acts are explained in the following sections. Only eight selected examples are presented in the discussion.

### 5.1 Promise

Promise speech acts is used in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. The characters of the novella use different forms for delivering a promise such as using the verb 'promise' and the model verb 'will', but the dominant form used for delivering a promise is the model verb 'will'. The following examples show the way the speech act of promise is delivered in the novella:

1. *I promised a complete discretion with great gravity.*

In the above utterance the speech act of promise is achieved through the use of the verb 'promise'. The verb 'promise' is found only in this sentence. It is used only one time throughout the whole novella.

2. *'When I grow up I will go there.'*

In the above data the verb 'will' is used for delivering the speech act of promise. The speaker here promises that he will go to the blank spaces on the earth that looked particularly inviting on a

map. The verb 'will' is used more than the verb 'promise' which is used only once in the novella. In the utterance above the Swede is saying to Marlow that he will send his things up.

## 5.2 Guarantee

Guarantee as a commissive speech act is also found in Joseph Conrad's novella. It is used only three times by the characters in the novella.

3. *By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded, ' etc.,'*

As the above utterance shows the speaker is compelled to take the action by himself. He guaranteed that they can do many good things by exerting a power.

## 5.3 Refusal

The commissive speech act of refusal is used frequently in Conrad's novella. Different forms are used for performing the speech act of refusing by the characters in the novel:

4. *'I refuse to take any,*

The above example from the novella shows the use of the commissive speech act of refusal. In this data the ship was about to drown and Marlow was asked to take a risk, but Marlow refuse to take any risk and said that *'I refused to take any'*. Refusal here is performed by using the performative verb 'refuse'. There are other forms used in the novella to show refusal such as 'don't', 'can't. ect.

5. *'I don't want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz, '*

The above utterance is Marlow's answer for the admirer of Mr. Kurtz who was telling him about the ceremonies they were making when they approach Mr. Kurtz. Marlow was angry for hearing about such ceremonies and that is why he shouted that he does not want to hear anything about them. Here the speech act of refusal is performed by using 'not'.

#### 5.4 Threat

The speech act of threat is also used by Conrad in his novella '*Heart of Darkness*'. It is clear that this commissive speech act is used many times by the characters of the novella:

6. "*if you try to shout I'll smash your head with... I will throttle you for good*"

In this utterance Marlow threatens Kurtz that if he shouted again Marlow will smash his head, then he remembered that there is nothing to smash Kurtz's head; so he threatened him again by saying '*I will throttle you for good*'. This is a hard threat from Marlow to Kurtz.

#### 5.5 Volunteer

The speech act of volunteer is rarely used in Conrad's novella '*Heart of Darkness*'. There is only one example of volunteer in the novella:

7. *I am ready to do anything, anything for you.*

The above utterance shows that Marlow's aunt freely offers to do anything or contribute without being asked to do so. She voluntarily offers her help.

#### 5.6 Offer

The speech act of offer is used in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* but not as much as the other types of commissive speech acts like threat and refusal. In some situations there are some offers delivered by the characters by using the performative verb 'offer' such as:

8. *I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede's ship's biscuits I had in my pocket.*

The above utterance is an example of the speech act of refusal by using the performative verb 'offer'. Here Marlow has only one of his good Swede's ship's biscuits to offer for the young man.

## Conclusions

Characters have utilized all kinds of commissive speech acts: promise 17.9 %, guarantee 7.6%, refusal 41%, threat 23%, volunteer 7.6%, offer 7.6%. A promise is a phrase used to remind the speaker of an action that needs to be taken in the future. The verb 'promise' and the modal verb 'will' are used for delivering a promise in Joseph Conrad *'Heart of Darkness'*, but 'will' is the dominant form used for giving a promise. It is clear that refusal is the most widely used commissive speech act in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Refusals have been presented in order to show how the characters' contempt of the listeners and to show their rejection to do many things. Volunteer by contrast is used only once throughout the whole novella. Guarantee and offer have been utilized with the same percentages. Furthermore, threat is utilized many times in the novella. It is used to convey the speakers' anger and unpleasant feelings to the listeners. As a result, in Joseph Conrad's novella, commissives play an essential part.

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