

Commissive Speech Act in Abu-Obaida's speeches: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

The current study delves into an in-depth examination of Abu-obeida's speeches through the lens of Speech Act Theory, with a particular emphasis on the role of commissive speech acts within his discourse. The study aims at analyzing Abu-obeida's communicative intentions, focusing on instances where he commits to future actions, promises, or undertakes obligations in his speeches. By employing a comprehensive framework rooted in Speech Act Theory, this research seeks to identify, categorize, and analyze commissive speech acts embedded in Abu-obeida's oratory. Understanding the interplay between language and action in the context of commitments made within his speeches provides valuable insights into the rhetorical strategies employed by Abu-obeida and their potential impact on the audience. Furthermore, the study explores the societal implications of commissive speech acts, shedding light on their role in shaping perceptions, building trust, and influencing social dynamics within the broader cultural and political landscape. The findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of the persuasive and transformative power of commissive speech acts within Abu-obeida's speeches.

1. Pragmatics

in linguistics refers to the study of how context influences the interpretation of language. It focuses on the way speakers use language in real-world situations, considering not just the literal meaning of words and sentences, but also the implied meaning, intentions, and social aspects of communication. Pragmatics, within the realm of linguistics, delves into the intricate relationship between language and context, examining how the surrounding circumstances shape the interpretation of linguistic expressions. Unlike syntax or semantics, which primarily concern themselves with the formal structure and meaning of language, pragmatics delves into the dynamic and multifaceted nature of communication in real-world scenarios. The discipline emphasizes the role of speakers in using language as a tool to navigate the complexities of social interaction (Levinson, 1983, 12).

perspective on pragmatic principles can be found in Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, emphasizing the role of relevance in communication. Pragmatics, by acknowledging the dynamic and interactive facets of language use across various social contexts,

significantly contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic analysis (Sperber, & Wilson, 1986,23).

Another insightful perspective on pragmatics is offered in George Yule's book "Pragmatics" (1996). Yule delves into the intricate ways language is employed in social contexts, presenting a comprehensive overview of pragmatic principles. His work not only explores the theoretical foundations of pragmatics but also provides practical insights into how language functions within various social settings. By acknowledging the dynamic and interactive aspects of language use across diverse social contexts, Yule contributes to a more nuanced understanding of linguistic analysis. This source serves as an invaluable reference for those seeking a deeper comprehension of how pragmatics operates within the broader landscape of language and communication (Yule,1996,17).

2. Types of Pragmatics

2.1 Conversational Pragmatics

Examines how people use language in everyday conversation, including aspects like turn-taking, politeness, and the use of implicatures. (Levinson,1983,24).

2.2 Deixis

Deals with the way words and expressions depend on contextual factors for their interpretation, such as pronouns (e.g., "this," "that") whose referents rely on the context. (Lyons,1977,43)

2.3 Imperative for Successful Communication

Pragmatics is crucial for effective communication, as understanding the context and intentions behind utterances is necessary for accurate interpretation. (Mey,1993,51).

2.4 Context Dependence

The meaning of an utterance often depends on the context in which it is used. Pragmatics helps to unravel the context-specific aspects of language. (Levinson,1983,61).

2.5 Speech Acts

Pragmatics studies how utterances can perform acts beyond conveying information, such as making requests, giving orders, or expressing emotions. (Austin, 1962,51).

2.6 Politeness Strategies

Examines how speakers use language to maintain social harmony and show politeness in different cultures. (Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C.1987).

2.7 Presupposition

Focuses on the background assumptions that speakers and listeners share, influencing the meaning of utterances. (Stalnaker,1974,72).

2.8 Grice's Maxims

Paul Grice proposed four conversational maxims (quantity, quality, relation, and manner) that speakers generally follow for effective communication. (Grice,1975,112).

3. Relationship between pragmatics and speech act theory

Pragmatics and speech act theory are closely connected within the field of linguistics. Speech act theory, introduced by J.L. Austin and further developed by John Searle, is a branch of pragmatics that focuses on the study of utterances as actions with intended effects. (Levinson, 1983,78).

Let's explore the relationship between pragmatics and speech act theory:

3.1 Connection

Pragmatics is the broader field that examines language use in context, considering how communication is influenced by social, cultural, and situational factors. Speech act theory is a specific aspect of pragmatics that focuses on the illocutionary acts performed through language, emphasizing the actions carried out by utterances. (Levinson,1983,81).

3.2 Integration

Speech act theory is integrated into the study of pragmatics to understand how language is used to perform actions, convey intentions, and achieve communicative goals. Pragmatics incorporates insights from speech act theory to analyze the illocutionary force behind utterances. (Austin,1962,98).

3.3 Illustration

Pragmatics provides a contextual framework for understanding the broader aspects of communication, encompassing speech acts as one component of language use. Speech acts, as studied in speech act theory, exemplify specific instances of language use within the broader pragmatic context. (Searle,1969,103).

4. Speech act

A speech act, according to the philosophy of language, refers to an utterance that not only conveys information but also performs a specific action. The meaning of an utterance goes beyond its literal content, as it can bring about changes in the beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors of the speaker or the listener. (Austin,1962,96).

5. Types of Speech Acts

5.1 Assertive Speech Acts:

Utterances that express beliefs or provide information. These speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of the proposition. (Austin,1962,115).

5.2 Directive Speech Acts

Utterances that aim to get the listener to do something. They include requests, commands, and suggestions. (Searle,1969,137).

5.3 Commissive Speech Acts

Utterances that commit the speaker to a future course of action. Promises, vows, and pledges fall under this category. (Searle, 1979,129).

5.4 Expressive Speech Acts

Utterances that convey the speaker's emotions, attitudes, or psychological state. Apologies, congratulations, and condolences are examples. (Austin, 1962,163).

5.5 Declarative Speech Acts

Utterances that bring about a change in the external world simply by being uttered. Examples include pronouncing someone married or resigning from a position. (Searle,1969,198).

Our research focuses on speech act, especially on one of its types, which is the commissive speech act.

6. Commissive Speech Act

A commissive speech act is a type of utterance in which the speaker commits to a future course of action, expressing intentions, promises, refusal, threat, guarantee, or volunteer. It involves the speaker taking on a commitment or obligation, often influencing the future behavior of the speaker (Bach, & Harnish, 1979,211).

7. Types of commissive speech act

7.1 Promise:

A promise is a commissive speech act where the speaker commits to performing a specific action or fulfilling a particular obligation in the future (Bach,& Harnish,1979,211).

7.2 Refusal:

Refusal is a commissive speech act where the speaker declines or rejects an offer, invitation, or request, committing to not undertake a suggested action (Cohen,1992,113).

7.3 Threat:

A threat is a commissive speech act involving the speaker's commitment to causing harm, punishment, or negative consequences if a certain action is or is not performed (Austin, 1962,214).

7.4 Guarantee:

A guarantee is a commissive speech act where the speaker commits to ensuring a certain outcome, providing assurance or certainty about the occurrence of an event (Levinson, 1983,276).

The Analysis of some selected Speeches

These sentences were selected from Abu- Obaida's speeches from this site (<https://www.palestinechronicle.com/tag/abu-obeida/>) and analyzed according to the types of commissive speech act as mentioned below:

1. “We are ready for a long battle with this occupier”

”اننا مستعدون لمعركة طويلة مع هذا المحتل“

This sentence is considered as a commissive speech act since there is a speech act verb which is “اننا مستعدون” , “we are prepared” . Since Abu-Obaida is considered as spokesman of the Hamas’s military wing. Abu-Obaida has to give such guarantee to his people to comfort them and to his enemy to inform them that they are ready for a long term battle, by the assistant of Allah. The battle between Palestine and Israel is long-standing because of the intertwining of historical, cultural, religious and political factors, coupled with the complexities of security and regional and international interests, which makes it difficult to achieve comprehensive and durable solutions, making the battle continue and reappear regularly.

2. “This aggression will soon break and fail by the power of Allah”

”ان هذا العدو سوف ينكسر و يفشل قريبا بقدره الله“

This sentence constitutes a commissive speech act due to the presence of a speech act verb which is “سوف ينكسر و يفشل” , “will break and fail” . Abu-Obaida, recognized as the spokesperson of Hamas's military wing. He has to give such guarantee to his people. In this sentence, "will break and fail" means it's certain the aggression will be stopped. When he says "This aggression will soon break and fail by the power of Allah," it is a promise that Allah will make sure the aggression doesn't succeed. This way of talking shows strong belief and confidence that Allah will intervene, offering reassurance and hope from Abo-Obaida to the Palestinian people's.

3. “The occupation will pay a price for its crimes”

”سيدفع هذا العدو ثمن جرائمه“

This sentence is considered as a commissive speech act since there is a speech act verb which is “سيدفع” , “will pay” . He has to give such a threat to the enemy. In the sentence, "would pay" serves as a commissive speech act. Here, he used it as a threat, implying that consequences will be exacted upon the occupation for its perceived crimes. This framing suggests a willingness to retaliate or impose punitive measures as a response to the actions of the occupation, highlighting a sense of determination or resolve to hold it accountable.

4. “We tell the enemy that we are still waiting for him to test new kinds of death”

”نقول للعدو اننا ما زلنا في انتظاره لنذيقه انواعا جديدة من الموت“

This sentence qualifies as a commissive speech act by virtue of containing a speech act verb, namely “لنذيقه” , “to taste”. He has to give such a threat to the enemy. In the given sentence, "to test" functions as a commissive speech act, particularly as a veiled threat towards the enemy. Here, he is by stating "we are still waiting for him to test new kinds of death," it implies that he is ready to unleash deadly measures or weaponry against the enemy if provoked. This use of language conveys a sense of warning and intimidation, indicating Abu-Obaida's firm resolve to respond forcefully to any aggression or provocation from the enemy, thereby emphasizing the potential consequences of their actions.

5. “We will rebuild what the nazi occupation has destroyed”

”سنعيد بناء ما دمره الاحتلال النازي“

This sentence is considered as a commissive speech act since there is a speech act verb which is “سنعيد بناء” , “we will rebuild”. Since Abu-Obaida is considered as spokesman of the Hamas’s military wing. He has to give such a promise to the people. In this sentence, "will rebuild" means promising to fix things in the future. When he says "We will rebuild what the Nazi occupation has destroyed," it shows that he is committed to fixing

what the Nazis ruined. This way of talking shows that he is determined to make things better after the occupation and give hope to the people that things will be improved.

6. "We reject Zionist propaganda that we are mistreating the captives"

”نرفض الدعاية الصهيونية القائلة باننا نسيء معاملة الاسرى“

This statement is classified as a commissive speech act because it includes a speech act verb which is “نرفض” , “We reject” . He has to give such refusal to the enemy. In this sentence, "we reject" acts as a commissive speech act, specifically as a refusal to accept something. By stating "We reject Zionist propaganda that we are mistreating the captives," it signifies a firm refusal from him to acknowledge or agree with the Zionist propaganda about mistreating the captives. This linguistic choice from him demonstrates a clear stance against the accusation, conveying a sense of defiance and determination to refute the claim, thereby defending his reputation and actions.

Conclusion

In studying Abu-Obaida's speeches, particularly through the lens of speech act theory focusing on commissive acts such as promises, threats, refusals, and guarantees, several key insights emerge. Firstly, Abu-Obaida's speeches serve as powerful tools for conveying commitments and intentions, shaping perceptions and rallying support.

Secondly, the careful analysis of linguistic cues unveils the strategic use of language to assert authority and instill confidence among supporters. Moreover, promises made within these speeches not only outline future actions but also serve to solidify alliances and maintain morale within the group. Similarly, threats are employed to deter adversaries and assert dominance in the conflict narrative. Refusals, on the other hand, signal strategic boundaries and demonstrate resistance to external pressure or demands. Lastly, guarantees offered in Abu-Obaida's speeches serve to reassure supporters and project stability amidst uncertainty.

Overall, this study underscores the intricate relationship between language, power dynamics, and strategic communication in the realm of political discourse, offering valuable insights into the rhetoric employed by actors such as Abu-Obaida within conflict contexts.

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