

## **A Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts Used in Selected Arabic Websites amidst COVID–19 Pandemic**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Coronavirus (COVID–19) has popped up as one of the terrifying events in the 21st century. Lockdown was one of the precautionary measures taken by many nations including Arab. Such an unusual situation has led people to follow–up news all over the available resources, especially over the Internet. That is, the news of COVID–19 has become their primary concern. In this study, the authors' aim was to analyze COVID–19 news, specifically the ones directed to the Arabic nation through visiting the most popular news sites. Pragmatic analysis was applied to find out which types of speech acts were mostly used. Several results emerged after reviewing some of the COVID–19 news on Arab websites. The directive speech act was determined to be the most commonly used approach in the

study. The findings of this study are useful for future researchers and students as well. Those who are involved in analyzing speech act methods can have this study as a reference, especially with what relates to Arabic context.

### KEY WORDS:

Coronavirus, Covid-19 news, Speech act Methods, Pragmatic Analysis.

### ملخص البحث

ظهر فيروس كورونا (كوفيد - 19) كواحد من الأحداث المرعبة في القرن الحادي والعشرين. كان الإغلاق أحد الإجراءات الاحترازية التي اتخذتها العديد من الدول بما في ذلك الدول العربية. فمثل هذا الوضع غير الاعتيادي، دفع الناس إلى متابعة الأخبار في جميع قنوات التواصل المتاحة ، وخاصة عبر الإنترنت. أخبار كوفيد 19 - تحديداً- قد أصبحت أن ذلك مصدر قلق أساسي للعديد من الناس. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الإخبار المتعلقة بالجائحة والموجهة للعالم العربي من خلال زيارة المواقع العربية الإخبارية الأكثر متابعة والمشهورة في الوسط العربي.

تم تطبيق منهج التحليل البراغماتي لمعرفة أنواع أفعال الكلام التي تم استخدامها في الغالب. ظهرت عدة نتائج على مواقع الويب العربية بعد مراجعة وتحليل عدد من الإخبار. بينت النتائج أن "الكلام التوجيهي" كان النهج الأكثر استخداماً في مخاطبة رواد تلك المواقع وذلك محاكاة لطبيعة الأفراد وخطورة الوضع البيئي والصحي. نتائج هذه الدراسة مفيدة للباحثين والطلاب المستقبليين أيضاً. يمكن لأولئك الذين يشاركون في تحليل أساليب فعل الكلام أن تكون هذه الدراسة كمرجع مهم ومفيد ، خاصة فيما يتعلق بالسياق العربي.

الكلمات الرئيسية: كورونا - كوفيد 19 - الاخبار - صيغة الفعل اللغوي - التحليل

البراغماتي

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

It has been exactly three years since the world has been struck by the pandemic which is known as COVID-19. Since the end of December 2019, the world has sounded the alarm, and the incident was very astonishing to the entire world. The COVID-19 new virus has shot almost all the nations over the world (Jackson, 2021). This micro mugger is caused by a virus belonging to one of the coronavirus species. The level of danger pushed almost all countries worldwide to impose many social restrictions to eliminate people's contact that has been making the disease spread out more (Harris, Ellis, Gorman, Foo & Haustead, 2021). Lockdown has been the blasting concept associated with COVID-19 as it has become the negative action for the situation. Instead, the world has started to initiate their activities virtually because there was no choice to refuse or ignore the risk of the disease.

During the pandemic; especially when the situation severely progressed, a few concepts have been introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) to articulate the issue as well as to show the danger of the situation ( Pilgun, Raskhodchikov & Koreneva Antonova, 2022). The risk of the

disease imposed to have particular concepts to effectively control the society and update people with what is beneficial to them at the right time (WHO, 2022). The language used at that critical time is imperative, where the actions taken mostly depend on the media for such novel emergent situation.

Language is the means of communication, where it is used by humans for the purpose of contact and interaction as well (Sirbu, 2015). A speech act is an act of communication that conveys the speaker's purpose. This is an important part of pragmatics as it is common in everyday life to connect and communicate with the information the speaker conveys as its primary content (Arsani, Juniarta & Ariyaningsih, 2021). Due to the precautionary measures during the spread of the pandemic of COVID 19, the Internet has become one of the most available resources for people to keep connecting with the urgent outside world, not only for socialization purposes, but also to keep up or be on track with the latest news (Chaer & Agustina, 2004) .

News is one of the means by which reports are disseminated, and this has attracted the attention of many researchers interested in the pragmatic aspects (Ma'yuuf & Ghitheeth 2021). Multiple studies were conducted to

investigate the different methods of speech from different angles and with diverse objectives.

Some studies were conducted to find out the most overused method. Recently, Ma'yuuf and Ghitheeth, (2021) specifically identify the representative speech acts (Arsani, Juniarta & Ariyaningsih, 2021). Some were leveling the speech of the highest authorities such as of Queen Elizabeth II's (Arsani, Juniarta & Ariyaningsih, 2021), and of African presidents of Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa' (Anyanwu & Abana, 2020). Some more were directed to the COVID-19 news of journalist (Supriyono, Zulaeha & Yuniawan, 2020), and others were either directed to the World Health Organization (WHO) through Instagram (Utami & Yanti, 2021) or to the official website of WHO (Raheem & Nehal, 2021).

Rini and Wagiran (2018) studied the humanist expressive speech acts and found out that the form of speech used in the learning interaction was direct and indirect. The humanist expressive speech function is to express apologies, criticize or suggest, function to apologize and insinuate. The study focused on speech acts, for both formal and informal language usage of speech acts are commonplace to not only

convey such knowledge through speech, but also there is a purpose behind it that needs to be correctly interpreted.

Ma'yuuf and Ghitheeth (2021) conducted their study by using the types of speech acts to find out which one is used more than the other. They focused on Assertive and Directive speech acts in the study. The results of the study showed that the Assertive speech act was used more than Directive ones. This refers to the point of informing about the cases of covid19. furthermore, (Raheem and Nahel 2021); focused on the idea of the pragmatics of communication of health advice in covid 19. Fifteen public health advice to Covid-19 were collected from the official website of the World Health Organization. They also shed light on the consciousness of EFL learners with the health advice of covid-19 and what degree of consciousness comes and literal comprehension. The results of the study revealed that the frequent type of advice is directive, the frequent strategy is imperative, and the frequent advisors are advising. At the same time the results showed full consciousness, partial consciousness, and unconsciousness of the health advice of covid-19.

However, speech act methods in COVID-19 news directed to the Arab audiences has not been investigated yet.

This study tends to fill in the gap as Arabs are part of the entire world and the pandemic of COVID-19 is of concern to the whole world. In this research, selected news from multiple known Arabic websites was analyzed to find out what types of speech act methods were mostly used. The study intends to find out the functions adapted to the context of the posted news and analyze them. Understanding the purpose of using a specific type of speech over the others is essential in assessing the target actions (Utami & Yanti, 2021).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY:

Taha, T. M. (2018) and Austin (1975) argue that the uttering of sentences is part of the doing of an action, which is different from only saying something. Austin, thus, believes that one's attitude, thoughts, feelings, or intentions are important. He added that performative utterances are either felicitous or infelicitous, sincere or insincere, authentic or inauthentic, well invoked or misinvoked. At the same time, Austin divided linguistic acts into three components. The first component is the locutionary act, which refers to the act of 'saying' something. The second component is illocutionary act, which refers to the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something. The third

component is the perlocutionary act, which refers to the consequential effects resulting from saying something. These effects impact the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, the speaker, or any other person.

Searle, a student of Austin, also contributed to the theory of speech acts. He wrote about speech acts in (1969, 1979). He rejected Austin's classification of speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, focusing on illocutionary force. Similar to Austin, he believed that meaning cannot be explained out of its context. Thus, sentences or tokens in context are what constitute a proposition. In addition, Searle (1976) introduced another classification of the speech acts as consisting of five types through which the data of this study will be explained to:

a) Representatives / Assertives: they include speech acts that commit the speaker to do something. They include suggesting, putting forward, swearing, boasting, concluding, statements, assertions, remarks, explanations. For example, I came first in the English exam.

b) Directives: they include speech acts that ask an addressee to perform an action. The directives could include



requests, orders, commands, asking, etc. an example of directives is “open the door” and “would you pass me the salt?”

c) Commissives: they commit the speaker to performing or doing something in the future. They include promising, planning, vowing, betting, and opposing. For example, I am traveling to Baghdad next week.

d) Expressives: they express how the speaker feels about the situation. They include thanking, apologizing, welcoming, and deploring. For example, “I am sorry for being late for the class”.

e) Declarations: They change the state of the world in an immediate way. For example, “you are fired”.

Here, the theory shows the speech acts categories clearly and how the speakers or writers use their words to explain what they are intending. Since the reading is an essential skill for knowing what people want to say and intend, sometimes the writers explain what they are mean in direct or indirect way. Using this theory by the researcher here due to explain for the readers what they have to do ‘follow and avoid’. The researcher used this theory because it could be useful for the

readers to avoid the whole things which could be harmful to their health.

### 3. METHOD

As the Covid-19 is still under surveillance, the researchers deliberately used the qualitative research method as the methodological approach. As Morse and Field cited “qualitative research is usually conducted to explore problems about which relatively little is known (1996)”. Unlike the qualitative approach that can offer more intricate details about phenomena, the quantitative method is unconstructive and insignificant at the beginning of the epidemic. Besides, the researchers apply a pragmatic approach as the theoretical method. Here, the researcher will explain the hidden meaning at the current data and show the intended meaning for the readers.

Purposive sampling was the sampling method used for collecting data as it is the most common and useful technique in such investigations. As Tongco stated when explaining the goal of this type of sampling as “to find someone frequently mentioned the most number of times (2007)”. And in the case of this study, the researchers were looking for the websites frequently visited and famous in the Arabic media. The data was collected from five Arabic websites. France 24, Al Arabiya,

BBC News عربي, Sky News عربية, and Arabic-RT were among the websites shown first responding to the key research “أخبار كوفيد في العالم العربي: The latest COVID-19 news in the Arabic world”. The selected news represents the highest read news among the targeted websites as they were the most visited news websites. Qualitative content analysis will be used in this study to show the linguistic expressions that were used by the news writers of the current data. The analysis is based on utilizing Searle’s Speech Acts Theory on the news of COVID-19 to find which speech act taxonomy were applied the most and showing the reason behind that with reference to the target users of those websites.

The researchers, when using such sampling procedures, seeks to find cases which represent the spectrum related to the phenomenon under study (Hancock et al., 2009). The current samples show the importance of the topic in these days where it is the universal problem and the theory that is used here by the researcher will examine the best way that could be used to warn the people from the pandemic.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this research was to analyze and describe speech act categories used in the world press during COVID19

period. This study used Searle's (1976) speech act categories and the linguistic expressions which were used within the speech acts through applying speech act theory. Searle classified speech acts into five categories: Assertives, Expressives, Commissive, Directives, and Declarations. In any communication, listening or reading is an essential skill for knowing what people want to say. In this section, the researchers are going to focus on the speech acts that have been said by the press speakers or writers and how it has been understood by the readers and listeners during COVID19 news.

1. France 24 (13 January 2022):

The French government warns of a "sudden" development of the fifth wave of the corona virus.

French government spokesman Gabriel Attal announced on Sunday a "surprising" development in the fifth pandemic wave of the Coronavirus, warning of worrisome and other factors that "make us confident". The injuries doubled within a week, reaching 17,153 on Saturday, after it was 9,458 a week ago. The authorities fear that the rise in the number of injuries will exacerbate the pressure on hospitals.

In the above news item in part, the reporter tried to get the readers' attention about the pandemic and the fifth wave which

is worse than the previous one by announcing the situation of the virus and how it has gone from bad to worse by showing the number of cases in the announcing week which is almost double of the number of cases in the last week. In addition, he shows the fears of the authorities on the rise in numbers which could cause crowds in the hospitals. Here, the speaker/ writer used the directive category of speech acts by using the above warnings which are indirect commands or orders while talking to people to be careful or aware and follow the healthy instructions which could help them avoid the virus and decrease the number of injuries among the citizens. Using a warning by the speaker/ writer while he/ she is talking to the people is a way to be more polite with the readers or listeners and avoid threatening the hearers' face.

2. Al Arabiya (13 January 2022):

Corona cases in the Eastern Mediterranean increased by 89%, and deaths decreased by 13%

An official in the "Eastern Mediterranean" region of the World Health Organization said that cases of coronavirus infection in the region increased by 89% in the first week of January, compared to the previous week, but the number of deaths due to infection decreased by 13%.

In the news above, the reporter could be trying to send a warning message to the people emphasizing that the virus is still dangerous, and the infection is increasing. Here, in the first section of the news, the writer uses the directive category of speech acts. He warns the people from the increasing ratio of injuries that's to force them indirectly, there are to abide by the healthy instructions and make them feel the seriousness of the virus danger, which will urge people to be careful of the infected people. On the other hand, the writer uses the Assertive speech acts category by sending a reassurance message to the people by announcing about the ratio of deaths which has decreased lately.

3. BBC News عربي (13 January 2022)

Corona Virus Vaccine: Why do those who received it get infected with the virus? And how effective is it?

Vaccines are still largely effective in preventing the most severe cases of disease caused by infection with the Coronavirus. Countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil and many other countries have recorded record numbers of cases due to the mutants Delta and Omicron. However, scientists, doctors, and healthcare

institutions continue to rely on the various vaccines that have already been tested and approved, all over the world to protect against infection. Here we analyze how these vaccines can help contain the epidemic.

The above piece of news is expressive in its content. The article tried to introduce his opinion about the efficacy of vaccines because this news is about telling how vaccines are still effective. Then the writer switched to cite some of the greatest countries reporting the number of cases increasing due to new mutations. This could imply that the increase was because of the new mutations and not reflecting any bad impression about the efficacy of vaccines. Assertive speech was used to explain how the vaccine can still work. Such news still lacks implementing the directive speech acts.

4. Sky News عربية: (13 January 2022)

Global Health to “Sky News Arabia”: This is the reality of “DELTACRON”

The World Health Organization has resolved the controversy surrounding the emergence of a new mutant of the Corona virus in the name of “DELTAKRON”, which is claimed to be a mixture of the “Delta” and “Omicron” mutant. The director of the World Health Organization's Infection Risk Prevention Program, Abdel

Nasser Abu Bakr, told Sky News Arabia, "On the ground, there is no mutant called (DELTACRONE) approved by us, according to an expert in Cyprus."

In this news, the reporter used the Declarative speech act by using a Nominating sentence (searle: 1976). Therefore, the writer is trying to nominate the new kind of the virus which is known as "DELTACRON". The writer used the verb (claimed) within his news to show for the readers that this news is just allegations. Here, the writer tries to explain that there is no new virus called DELTACRONE approved by the World Health Organization at once trying to confirm that the above organization is working hard to solve the problem and reduce the effect of the virus.

##### 5. Arabic-RT (13 January 2022)

Europe is witnessing a significant increase in Omicron injuries  
European Union countries are witnessing a significant increase in the number of daily infections with the Omicron mutant, amid warnings of a crisis of hospital overcrowding in the coming weeks.

European Union countries using the directive speech acts to warn its citizens from a pig problem could happen during the



next weeks by addressing them in indirect command to increase the number of daily infections, otherwise, there will be overcrowding in the hospitals. Here, the writer orders the citizens to get the infections which will help to reduce the number of injuries.

In the current study, the researcher found that Arabic news writers tend to use a directive speech acts category to express their ideas and thoughts then send it to the readers to let them follow the instructions since it talks about something very important and dangerous on the society. Using directive speech acts category makes people consider the importance of the topic that is mentioned by the writers and apply the important instructions to keep themselves and their families healthy and safely by avoiding the crowded places, wearing masks and all the healthy instructions.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIOqqa q qq21[2N

Examining some of the news of COVID-19, in particular Arabic websites, several outcomes showed up. The current study found out that the writer used a directive speech act that was mostly used over the other methods. He used this category of speech act to warn the readers and encourage them to get the

vaccine and follow the healthy instructions, otherwise, the number of injuries could be increased, then, the citizens may face a big problem that could affect the situation of the country economically, healthily, socially and educationally. Even though the vaccine is already out, the news is still pending in the directive method in an indirect warning way. Some people are losing their patience about restrictions, and others are refusing to take the vaccine. However, the virus still spreads around the world with new mutations.

For the next researcher on the subject, they can try to look into another direction such as analyzing the speech of Arab politicians about COVID-19 to see if they share the speech act methods or not. This research can be a reference for researchers who are aiming to increase knowledge and get to know about expressive speech acts that are widely used in emergencies.

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