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A Pragmatic Study of Political Tweets: The Posts of Netanyahu in Israel – Gaza War as a Case Study

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Abstract

This study conducted to explore the real uses of speech acts on chosen posts in the X platform in English by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during the Israel-Gaza war (2023-2025). The research examines how posts by Netanyahu can be seen as an assertion, declaration, and direction, expression, and commitment but at the same time the establishment of political legitimacy and the shaping of public opinion. Between October 7, 2023, and January 31, 2024, an empirical dataset of English-language posts by Netanyahu was sampled. The posts were divided into the main and secondary type of speech act (assertion, instruction, command, expression, and declaration). This study hypothesizes the use of speech acts in Netanyahu's posts in X systematically changes across different stages of the war in response to involving communicative and political demands. The data of the current study have been collected from Netanyahu's English posts in X platform during the period from October 7, 2023 to January 31, 2024. A qualitative and quantitative pragmatic research design will be used in this study. Culpeper (2011) will assist the researcher to analyze the impoliteness strategies, while the speech

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acts theory by Searle (1969, 1975) will be used to analyze the speech act categories. In the results, one can see that the statements made by Netanyahu throughout the war were dominated by statements and declarations that immediately followed October 7, including the phrase "We are at war", which is a declaration and assertion at the same time. The use of directives (e.g., Leave now) and promises (e.g., We will bring our hostages home) became more common over time and compared to the communicative needs, which changed: the crisis response was replaced by the need to justify and reassure. This paper finds that the application of the X by Netanyahu is indicative of how digital platforms re-orient the force of discourse and into performative acts of governance.

Keywords: Speech acts, X Platform, Digital Communication, Political Legitimacy, Public Opinion Formation

دراسة تداولية للتغريدات السياسية: منشورات نتنياهو في حرب إسرائيل - غزة كدراسة حالة

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قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة تكريت، تكريت، العراق

المستخلص

أجريت هذه الدراسة لاستكشاف الاستخدامات الفعلية لأفعال الكلام في تغريدات مختارة باللغة الإنجليزية على منصة X لرئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي بنيامين نتنياهو خلال حرب إسرائيل وغزة (2023-2025). يهتم هذا البحث بكيفية اعتبار تغريدات نتنياهو بمثابة إعلان وتأكيد وتوجيه وتعبير والتزام، وفي الوقت نفسه وسيلة لترسيخ الشرعية السياسية وتشكيل الرأي العام. خلال الفترة الزمنية ما بين 7 أكتوبر/تشرين الأول 2023 و 31 يناير/كانون الثاني 2024، جُمعت عينات من تغريدات نتنياهو باللغة الإنجليزية. قُسمت هذه التغريدات إلى نوعين رئيسيين من أفعال الكلام (التأكيد، والتعليم، والأمر، والتعبير، والإعلان). تفترض هذه الدراسة أن استخدام نتنياهو لأفعال الكلام في تغريداته على منصة X يتغير بشكل منهجي عبر مراحل الحرب المختلفة استجابةً للمتطلبات السياسية المتغيرة. جُمعت بيانات هذه الدراسة من تغريدات نتنياهو باللغة الإنجليزية على منصة X خلال الفترة من 7 أكتوبر 2023 إلى 31 يناير 2024. وسيستخدم في هذه الدراسة تصميم بحثي براغماتي كمي ونوعي. وسيستعان بكتاب كولبير (2011) لتحليل استراتيجيات عدم اللباقة، بينما ستستخدم نظرية أفعال الكلام لسيرل (1969، 1975) لتحليل فئات أفعال الكلام. تبين النتائج بأن العبارات التي أدلى بها نتنياهو خلال فترة الحرب والتي طغت عليها التصريحات والإعلانات بعد يوم 7 أكتوبر، بما في ذلك عبارة "نحن في حالة حرب"، والتي تعد إعلان وتأكيد للحرب في آن واحد. إزداد استخدام التوجيهات (مثل: ارحلوا الآن) والوعود (مثل: سنعيد رهائننا إلى ديارهم) مع مرور الوقت، مقارنةً بالاحتياجات التواصلية التي تغيرت: فقد حلت الحاجة إلى التبرير والطمأننة محل الاستجابة للأزمة. توضح هذه الدراسة أن استخدام

نتناهو لأسلوب "الخطاب غير الرسمي" يُشير إلى كيفية إعادة توجيه المنصات الرقمية لقوة الخطاب وتحويله إلى ممارسات حكم استعراضية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أفعال الكلام، الخطاب السياسي، التواصل الرقمي، الشرعية السياسية، تشكيل الرأي العام

1. Introduction

In the current political arena, politicians are compelled to use social media, which is vital in direct communication to the local neighbourhoods. The reason is that Twitter (previously referred to as X) holds a niche in the political sphere because it has a rather slow diffusion, is widespread, and has a heterogeneous audience. Twitter is used by politicians to communicate with their citizens as well as share their ideas, visions and policies, which leads to mobilization of their followers and in some instances, to perpetuate political violence. Thus, the practical steps outlined in this paper are of utmost essence, considering the fact that majority of the politicians currently enforce them using their official social media profiles.

One of the most vivid illustrations of the social media application in a crisis situation is the rhetoric of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the war between Israel and Gaza, which intensified on October 7, 2023, as a result of an attack by Hamas-led forces. In hours after the attack, Netanyahu sent such messages as the announcement of a war, not only to the Israeli people but to the world community, but also about the seriousness of the situation. These posts were not just the description of the situation; they were the stimulus of the further political, military and diplomatic activities. In his posts on the days after the attack of October 7, he used different types of speech acts, such as the phrases like We are at war, the orders like Withdraw now, the orders (as well as forces) like We will bring our hostages home, the condescending statements like The Hamas terrorists are responsible for this massacre, and the condolences (such as) We offer our condolences to the victims. His speeches include speech acts, which explain why political leaders usually do things that have both national and international consequences. A review of the publications by Netanyahu shows that there are three trends. First, political communication being driven online requires viable frameworks that can use the speech acts within the potentials and constraints of application such as X. Second, the Gaza-Israel war is an example of a high-

stakes communication during war when speech acts are closely connected to security and international affairs. Third, personalization of political leadership implies that the words of Netanyahu are not just government declarations and orders and pronouncements; they are personal utterances that put into immediate effect the government.

Studies have been on the analysis of natural disasters or pandemics (as it was the case with COVID-19), and little attention was given to the conditions of war on the digital platform. Third, still, although studies recognize the multimedia character and multi platform possibilities of digital discourse, methodological mechanisms in the process of coding and analysis of speech acts in digital political discourse are incomplete. This paper attempts to fill these gaps, with a realistic and exact examination of Netanyahu wartime tweets on the Platform X, which incorporates the classical theory of speech acts and the research on impoliteness and crisis communication. The paper adds to the digital pragmatism study showing how online posts are multi-modes of concurrent operation, considering the particular communication strategies of wartime.

Thus, this research falls on the border of the speech act theory, digital pragmatism, and political communication. Through an examination of the English-language posts made by Netanyahu on the X platform during the Israeli war in Gaza (October 2023-1 January 2024 with references to other postings), the paper attempts to show the ways in which political leaders employ speech acts to create war discourses, mobilize the masses, and bargain over international legitimacy. The major research question in this study is: What are the most common speech acts that are used by Netanyahu during the war on X, and how they impact the opinion of people in the long-run?

By responding to this question, this paper will add to the existing discussions on the topic of pragmatism and the political discourse analysis. It does not only offer an empirical understanding of speech acts during war but also introduces methodological novelties in the analysis of political communication in digital space, not violating ethical norms and platform regulations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speech Act Theory: Foundations and Development:

The notion of language as an action began with a book of J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Austin examined the potentiality of the speech acts to be performative acts that is, they do not merely describe reality but they also lead to social actions. He provided the groundwork of pragmatic analysis by making a distinction between speech acts, performative acts, and direct acts. Based on the work of Austin, Searle (1969, 1975) provided a classification of five fundamental types of speech acts; assertions, directives, assignments, utterances, and statements. This classification has been extensively applied in several works on speech acts but has been criticised as being rigid and not taking into account the context (Vanderviken, 1990; Bach and Harnisch, 1979).

After that, speech act theory has developed with many improvements. Their works by Levinson (1983) and May (2001) have highlighted the significance of considering the social and cultural context in the determination of the power of the speech acts. Wirzbek (1991) was concerned with the fact that the categories of speech acts are culturally relative, whereas Blum-Kolka et al. (1989) proved that the speech acts can vary across cultures. More so recently, digital pragmatism has demonstrated that speech acts on the internet tend to mix categories, forming hybrid functions (Herring, 2013; Zabavinia, 2021). As an example, one and the same post can assert, direct, and announce at the same time.

The declarations (e.g. we are at war), and voluntary statements (e.g. we will win) acquire specific meaning in the context of war. They are not symbolic but constitutive, that is, policies, mobilization, and international affairs. Therefore, the speech act theory offers a methodological framework and theoretical premises to use in the analysis of publications of Netanyahu in X.

2.2 Speech Acts in Digital Communication

The relocation of the speech acts to the digital platform poses some crucial questions regarding their potential, performance, and audience. Herring (2013) also proves new

pragmatic characteristics provided by computational discourse, including persistence, reproducibility, and scalability. Another aspect that he highlights is that, as opposed to face-to-face communication, computational communication permits the post to be disseminated immediately on the digital platform, to reach millions of people within record time and enable them to quote, paraphrase or decontextualize it.

Research devoted to digital pragmatism proves that the speech acts in the social media tend to acquire hybrid forms. Androutsopoulos (2014) emphasizes the fact that performance can be improved with the help of multimedia content (images, hashtags, and links). As an example, a hashtag, such as the one, WeWillWin, serves as a statement, a command, and a rallying cry. In the same way, Tag and Sergeant (2014) show how some speech acts on social media have helped in identity formation and exchange of information. The online platform, especially, has been researched on the merits of political benefits. It is more than a powerful news channel, Papacharisi (2015) explains; it is also a place where not only political leaders share the information but also influence the emotional atmosphere. Graham, Brorsma, Hazelhof, and Van th Haar (2013) note that the posts of politicians tend to confuse the institutional and the personal voice, which is why it is hard to examine the identity of the sender. These forces are essential to deciphering the posts of Netanyahu who combines both institutional declarations and individual entreaties and expressive speech acts.

2.3 Political Leaders and Speech Acts on X Platform:

This paper examines the manner in which political leaders exploit speech acts on platform X. As an example, Ott (2017) examined the Tweets of the US President Donald Trump as performative acts that distort the boundary between elections campaigning and the administration that uses threats and delegitimization as a rule. Ekström and Johansson (2020) discovered that European populist leaders employ platform X not only to impose their opinion but also to give orders and statements that secure their foundation. On the same note, Zabavinia (2021) shows that hashtags in political posts on platform X frequently serve as group commitments, connecting groups to common stances.

The findings of the various studies about crisis communication have affirmed that the posts by political leaders of platform X in the times of crisis fulfill various roles at once, such as informing, directing, reassuring and legitimizing (Fell, Boehner, and Balinshar, 2011). These functions are aggravated in the context of war. Political leaders tend to bypass the standard journalistic practices and resort to social media directly and rhetorically governed practices, which, according to Bennett and Livingston (2021), creates a situation where social media are an avoidable tool of governance. The posts of Netanyahu in the course of the war demonstrates how the rhetorical practices prove to be effective communication tools when it comes to high-stakes situations.

2.4 Impoliteness, Delegitimization, and Crisis Communication

The speech act theory is not enough to comprehend the pragmatic dynamics of communication during the time of war. The use of threatening facial expressions can be used strategically in politics as revealed by Brutalists (Culpepper, 2011; Bussfield, 2008). The use of the labeling of opponents as being terrorists, barbarians or monsters strengthen these ideas and at the same time undermine them. These tricks enhance solidarity of groups but they weaken the legitimacy of their opponents.

Research on social networks in terms of crisis also provides pertinent information. As demonstrated by Combes (2014), the information, justification, and reassurance in the messages of political leaders during crises need to be balanced. During war these functions are confused with speech acts: the role of the commissioner is to be a promise of solution, order to action is given through the command, and the actualities of the politics are created by the utterance. The examples of publications that at the same time threaten Hamas and find reassurance to Israeli citizens are an excellent illustration of this duality in the case of Netanyahu.

2.5 Political Leaders and Speech Acts on Twitter/X

A lot of literature has discussed the utilization of speech acts by political leaders on the X platform. To illustrate, Ott (2017) examined the tweets of the US President Donald Trump as performative practices that cross boundaries between election campaigning and governing with the much-needed resort to threats and delegitimization. In a study

conducted by Ekstrom and Johansson (2020), European political leaders resort to the X platform to not only advance their positions, but also to dictate and express their views, which affect their followers and makes them gain a support base in Europe. On the same note, Zapavina (2021) shows that the application of hashtags in political tweets attracts followers and indirectly links them to common standings.

A portion of the research devoted to crisis and emergency situations has proven that the tweets of political leaders should contain a combination of several actions: informing, directing, reassuring, and legitimizing (Feil, Poyner, and Balinshar, 2011). During the period of war, the political leadership is more active in terms of these functions in their tweets on platform X. Moreover, because of the circumvention of traditional journalistic filters by political leaders through social media, which Bennett and Livingston (2021) demonstrate, direct acts of governance are created. In this way, by his pronouncements about the war, Netanyahu demonstrated the way in which verbal actions create strategic tools of communication in contexts of high risks.

3. Methodology

The given study has chosen a qualitative-pragmatic research design that will rely on the speech act theory, and the descriptive-analytical approach will be employed to analyze the posts made by Netanyahu about X in the war between Israel and the Gaza Strip (October 2023- January 2024). The design enables the researcher to achieve the illocutionary force, strategic functions and contextual meanings of posts in real-time communication during crisis. This corpus is composed of publicly accessible English-language posts by @netanyahu in the direct and indirect stages of the Israel-Gaza war, which is driven by the fact that these messages are intended to reach international audiences, media houses and diplomatic forces. The data has been gathered by the researcher on the official Netanyahu page of X on X platform. The analysis will be conducted in the mixed qualitative-quantitative format: Quantitative: Frequency and percentages of each impoliteness strategies and an individual type of speech acts in the data collected have been analyzed through the use of AntConc software. Qualitative: Interpretation of representative posts. Culpeper (2011) will assist the researcher to analyze the impoliteness strategies employed in the data collected whereas the speech act strategies employed in the current study will

be analyzed with the help of the foundational theory of the speech acts developed by Searle (1969, 1975).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Speech Act Strategies

In the current study, the researcher used Searle's 1969 speech act theory to analyze a collection of 40 empirical articles, revealing the pattern Netanyahu used in his X-platform posts during the war. The statements and assertions focused on the early phase of the Gaza war (October 7-14, 2023), where the speech acts used in Netanyahu's speeches from the outset indicated that it was a "war" and that he sought to hold Hamas responsible. Many directives and inflammatory statements were used in the later phase (October 15-December 31, 2023), which in turn encouraged Netanyahu to issue instructions, warnings, and promises to both domestic and international audiences. Table 5-1 below illustrates the speech acts used in the current study.

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Percentage
Declarations	28	23.3
Assertives	35	29.2
Directives	25	20.8
Commissives	22	18.3
Expressives	10	8.4

Figure (5-1)

From the above table it is clear that the speaker is focusing on Assertive category to emphasize for the public opinion and his people in particular that he is controlling the war and will keep fighting against the terrorists (as he said) but in reality, he kills innocent children and elderly people in order to force them to leave their land. The speaker used the term (terrorists) to make the international community believe that he is fighting terrorism in order to spread peace in the Middle East, but in reality, he is carrying out a genocide against the people of the land its original owners. On the other hand, he avoided using the assertive category which could make him appear weak in front of the international community and his own people in particular. In addition, using assertive will force him to talk about the victims of his army in this war which might move his people against him and demand that he stop the war because of the victims who are falling day after day as a result of his misleading statements and media manipulating of his people. On the other hand, the speaker used the declaration strategy to emphasise that he starts the war, achieved his goals, and killing the leaders of his opponents but he didn't mention all the losses that he suffered in this war. Finally, the less strategy used by the speaker in the current study is the expressive strategy. Using the expressive strategy during the speech shows that someone helps the speaker or makes a favor to him/her, therefore, he rarely used this strategy of speech act because he wanted to make the western governments and his people in particular that he is the leader who achieved the victory in the event of winning the war. Here, the selfishness, arrogant and haughty personality appears by using some speech acts and impoliteness strategies.

4.2 The Impoliteness Strategies

Kolpepper (2011) singled out impoliteness strategies. In other works discussed in this paper, Netanyahu was referring to Hamas as a disgusting term of terrorists, barbarian, or monsters. These words may be explained as the measures of delegitimization and, what is more, he strengthened his appeal to the domestic citizens. Meanwhile, he tried to reinforce his relations with his foreign allies in the war. These measures strengthened orders and judgments in most instances and made him feel more powerful. For example:

- Passive impoliteness strategy: “Leave now! Hamas will not protect you.”

•Overt impoliteness strategy: “We will recover our hostages from the hands of the barbaric terrorists.”

These expressions reveal the hybrid pragmatic role of the publications: they command, bully and delegitimize at the same time. In the first statement he used the passive discourtesy measure where he ordered them to go out of their houses and tried to scare them on that Hamas could not defend them, and that the army of Israel was invincible. Conversely, there was also the approach of blunt discourtesy where he referred to Hamas fighters, likening them to barbaric terrorists, and simultaneously did not going down on the severity of their attacks. These are also the strategies employed by the Prime Minister in his speeches to intimidate his opponents and humiliate them.

As part of his messages in the Gaza war, Netanyahu utilized well-managed rhetoric to pursue rhetorical superficial agendas to make his own citizens and the world community believe that he was waging war against terrorists to bring peace in the Middle East- i.e. the declared purpose. Nevertheless, his real goal in this war was to invade Gaza and forcefully evict its population. Moreover, he applied portions of his rhetoric and aggressive tactics to exude power and influence when in the war and to create terror amongst the Gaza population. This paper shows that communication when in crisis and wars consists of information, warnings, justification, and reassurance messages in a practical and well-coordinated approach. This brings out the performative nature of social media in political leadership where tweets are not utterances but critical moves that create perceptions, mobilize the masses, and justify policies.

In addition, the study is also a contribution to crisis communication research because it demonstrates that wartime posts are a mixture of information, warning messages, justification, and reassuring messages as a pragmatic and well-coordinated approach. This demonstrates the performative nature of social media in political leadership whereby tweets do not qualify as statements, but are decisive political acts that influence perceptions, mobilize the masses, and offer political legitimacy.

5. Conclusion

This research provides an in-depth empirical investigation of the English language posts of Benjamin Netanyahu on the X platform (previously Twitter) in the Israeli-Gaza conflict (October 2023 January 2024). The study of 120 posts through the speech act theory and as complemented by the knowledge of the impoliteness theory shows that digital political discourse acts as a performative act, a tool of war management, and a rhetorical strategy. The more used of speech act categories by Netanyahu in his X post statements and assertions. During the conflict the more successfully he managed to develop a clear story of the war and place the blame of the attacks. He also used more systems of directive and imperative, which indicates the necessity to direct, warn, and reassure the domestic and international audience. The means of rudeness and especially the means of delegitimizing Hamas, supported the power of the orders and requirements that strengthened the unity of the group and the control of the authority of the leader. Moreover, the paper indicates that platform X can be employed to affect local and international residents with the help of different speech acts, which can be supported by the data examined. In this respect, the researcher depicts the speech act strategies used by the speaker and the impact on the masses of opinion as evident in the response of the majority of governments of the world that are assisting Israel in its war against innocent people of Gaza, categorising them as terrorists or barbarians.

Similarly, theoretical implications are major. To begin with, the research proves that the theory of speech acts can still be used as an effective analysis tool in the digital environment, but it should be modified to factor in the hybridity and multi-modality of social media posts. Secondly, the study adds to the literature on political communication during the times of war that show how digital publications might help shape the opinion of the population, mobilize crowds, and justify the political outcomes. Lastly, this paper connects the concept of digital pragmatism, crisis communication, and impoliteness research, which offers a replicable model of examining political stances within high-risk situations.

To sum up, the postings by Netanyahu on Platform X are an example of how digital platforms are reshaping the political rhetoric into action, which is practical, strategic, and

performative. Finally, the researcher concludes that the Prime Minister succeeded in persuading the international community that he is fighting terrorists. Consequently, he was able to employ the speech acts systematically to demand and secure the support of the international community during the war.

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