The Effect of COVID-19 On Presidential Language: A Pragmatic Study of the Indirect Speech Acts in Selected Presidential Speeches

Maha Majeed Anber
Scientific Affairs, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Anbar, Iraq
maha_anber@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT:

Coronavirus COVID-19 has its effect on all the aspects of life. The research is oriented towards exploring to what extent COVID-19 affects the presidential language, and whether this effect leads to the use of indirect speech in the presidents' speeches about COVID-19 instead of talking directly about such unprecedented crisis. Three presidents' speeches are chosen arbitrarily since the effect of COVID-19 overcomes all countries equally: President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020, speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020, president Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020. By adopting Searle's speech acts (1969), the researcher makes a comparison by the qualitative and quantitative analysis leaving the readers to decide to what extent COVID-19 has indelible mark on the presidential language.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Human being is gifted with the ability to use and acquire language which is a complex system of communication. If language is seen as a system, then, its components and their interactions must be looked at (Gromov & Migrina, 2017). The components consist of substance, form and meaning. Meaning is the main concern in the present study. The meaning that is concerned here is not that which relates to the meanings of words and sentences which is investigated by semantics. Rather, it is the meaning which is hidden behind specific forms of words and sentences, the meaning that is not obvious but it is concluded, assumed and inferred, in other words it is the meaning that is studied by pragmatics. According to Huang (2014:1), "pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of language use"., Jacob (2001:6) states that pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society. Some topics have been the concern of pragmatic discussions as it is stated by Levinson (1997:27), who clarifies that Implicates, Speech acts, Diexis, Aspects of Discourse Structure and Presupposition are the focus of the pragmatic studies. Wilson (2015: 4) declares that not only informal interaction that is underpinned by pragmatics, but also it underpins formal and institutional behaviors, as medicine, teaching, law, and, of course, politics. And that is the main focus of this research which is elucidating the effect of COVID-19 on the presidential language. The researcher's main focus will be analyzing the indirect speech act used by three presidents pragmatically: President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020, speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020, president Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020.

Through the present research, the researcher wants to answer the following questions:

- • To what extent indirect speech is used in the presidents' speeches about COVID-19.
- • Indirect speech might hide some sever facts; therefore, it is the only choice in the presidents' speeches in crises.

2. SPEECH ACT THEORY

Austin and his student Searle made a significant contribution to the Speech Acts Theory. Searle (1969:16) says "Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on.".

So, in the process of communication, various acts are performed by speakers such as asking, warning, ordering, arguing, mocking, blaming, advising, praising etc. (Yule 2011:47).

Searle developed the notion of illocutionary force which were first presented by Austin, then classified it into some groups and divided speech acts into five categories:

i.   Assertive which commit the speaker to something being the case. For example: "From the beginning of time, nations and people have faced unforeseen challenges, including large-scale and very dangerous health threats". (President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020),

ii. Directive which gets the hearer to do something which includes: commanding, requesting, begging, asking, inviting and advising. For example: "Nurseries, primary and secondary schools and universities are closed as from today". (President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020)

iii. Commissive which commit the speaker to some future course of action .for example: "I'll tell you the truth about the developing situation". (President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020)

iv. Expressive expresses psychological state of the speaker towards some affairs. For example: "I know what they've been experiencing for days and days; we are with them". (President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020).

v. Declarative which bring about some change in the world. (Chapman,2011:70) For example: "Earlier in the week, I announced an additional allocation of R20 billion to our health response to ensure that we have the beds, medicine, equipment and personnel required when the country experiences the peak of infections". (President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020).

2.1. Locution, Illocution and Perlocution

Austin clarifies that when a speaker produces an utterance, he/ she performs three acts; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts

- A locutionary act represents the literal meaning of an utterance. It is the physical act of uttering the words. When the speaker says meaningful utterances that, in turn, can be understood by the listener, then he is performing locutionary act.
- An illocutionary act is the term of any speech act that accomplishes stating, questioning, commanding, promising, and so on. Contrasted with locutionary act, an illocutionary act is an act performed in saying something. As for the illocutionary force, it is regarded as the speaker's intention behind production of an illocutionary act, including its presuppositions, communicative point, and attitudes involved, (Austin, 1962:109).

A perlocutionary act, according to Austin, is performing an act for "The achieving of certain effects by saying something", (Austin: 1962: 120). It refers to the effect of the utterance upon the hearers' actions, thoughts, or feelings, e.g., persuading, frightening, harming, pardoning, etc. (ibid).

2.2. Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

Direct speech acts involve a direct relationship between structure and function, whereas indirect speech acts have an indirect relationship between structure and function, (Coulmas1986:220,)

Searle, in his essay 'Indirect Speech Acts' elucidates that actions performed through speech acts have two different kinds of illocutionary acts that he termed as "the primary illocutionary act" and "the secondary illocutionary act". Searle states: "the secondary illocutionary act is literal; the primary illocutionary act is not literal", (Cole and Morgan, 1975:61).

Searle's term 'primary illocutionary acts' represents the group of utterances whose meanings are different from the literal meaning expressed by the speech acts. The form of the sentence does not directly relate with the function of the sentence uttered in conveying the non-literal meaning of the utterance, (ibid 1975:61).

2.3. The Use of Figures of Speech

Indirect speech acts include apologies, assertions, congratulations, promises, thanks, and doubts, assurance, blame, complain, deny, insinuation, invitation, praise, question, request, threat, and warning (Kadar and Haugh, 2013:23). Indirect speech acts are noticed in the following figures of speech:

i. Hyperbole

According to Abram (1993:85), hyperbole is exaggerated facts which are used in speech for serious or comic purposes.

For example: No nation is more prepared or more resilient than the United States. (President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020).

ii. Simile

It is a distinction between two different things by the use of (like) or (as) (Abrams, 93:67)

For example: He eats like a horse.

iii. Irony

By ironic statements the speaker implies a meaning that is sharply different from the expressed meaning (Abrams, 1993: 97).

For example: A police officer house has been robbed.

iv. Metaphor

A word or expression which is applied to a thing or action that is different from what it denotes in its literal usage without asserting a comparison (Abrams, 93:67)

For example: 'Baghdad becomes a furnace in summer.

v. Sarcasm

Sarcasm is used as equivalence to irony but the difference is that sarcasm is restricted to the taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise. (Abrams, 1993:99)

For example: I love those mustard stains on your shirt. They really bring out the color in your eyes.

vi. Circumlocution

Circumlocution is defined by The Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary the usage of more words than are necessary if thoughts are ambiguous or to observe politeness if they are unable to state the matter directly.

For example: I am reiterating these basic facts – which by now are probably familiar to many of you – because they explain the actions we have taken to date and they inform the measures I am announcing this evening. (President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic 23 Apr 2020).

vii. Euphemism

Euphemism is using inoffensive expression instead of a frank embarrassing one (Abrams, 1993:60)

For example: For all Americans, it is essential that everyone take extra precautions and practice good hygiene. (President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020).

viii.   Rhetorical Question

A rhetorical question is an interrogative sentence which is not used for getting information, but it is used instead of declarative sentence to achieve a form with more force and effectiveness than the assertive one (Abrams, 1993:183).

For example: Do you want me to go to the wedding with this old dress?

ix. Emphatic Statements

It is a discourse strategy used by speakers in order to impress the listener and attract his attention towards his utterances.

Example: It is with great solemnity, this evening, that I say we must listen to our healthcare workers who are telling us: if you want to help us, you must stay at home and limit your contact with others. (President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020).

2.4 A Review of Previous studies

The researcher Varma (2010), in his study, 'A study of indirect speech acts in the selected plays of George Bernard Shaw' makes an analysis of Indirect Speech Acts in some of George Bernard Shaw's plays which are Arms and the Man (1894), Candida (1895), The Doctor's Dilemma (1906), and Pygmalion (1913). Various methods and techniques have been applied to bring out the real significance of the research; Conversational Maxims of Grice has also been taken into account in the analysis. The method is a qualitative one whereas in the present study the method which is Searle's model (1969) is used for making both qualitative and quantitative analysis, besides the data understudy is presidential speeches about unprecedented crisis in the twenty first century.

The second study is 'A Pragmatic Study of Indirect Speech Acts in President Joko Widodo's State Address' by Nurul Fitriania, Tri Pujiatib In this research, the data understudy is the speech of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Goku Widodo, the mode is speech act theory in a descriptive method to gain a deep understanding of some of the president's statements in his speeches and he did not use a quantitative method as in the present study with the two illocutionary forces of speech acts.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

For the first time in our modern history, all countries of the world are involved in one crisis, which is the Corona pandemic crisis. The choice of the three speeches is arbitrary and unintended, as the current crisis makes all political speeches similar with the same goal. The difference between them was made on the basis of the difference of the continents. The first speech belongs to the President of America, the second to a European country, and the third to an African country.

The present section concentrates on analyzing indirect speech acts marked in some selected utterances of three presidents' speeches; President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020, speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020, president Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020.

By adopting Searle's modal of speech acts (1969), this section introduces the quantitative and qualitative results of the analysis. According to Harkness et al (2010:455) converting data into a more intensive and confidential model that addresses research questions, the hypothesis of the test, the

meaning of observation, and so on are included in the qualitative data analysis. on the other hand, the quantitative data analysis, comprises similar transformation, but with numbers as input (ibid), therefore, it gives the researcher the ability to obtain concrete numbers of the frequencies of occurrence and percentages of the politeness strategies and their linguistic realizations.

Table (1) the analysis of the speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020

Locutionary Acts	Frequency	percentage	Illocutionary force	Frequency	percentage
Directive	8	15,7%	Directive	35	68,6%
Assertive	17	33,3%	Assertive	-	
Expressive	5	9,8%	Expressive	14	27,5%
Commissive	6	11,7%	Commissive	-	-
Declarative	15	29,5%	Declarative	2	3,9%
	51	100%		51	100%

Table (2) the analysis of President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020

Locutionary Acts	Frequency	percentage	Illocutionary force	Frequency	percentage
Directive	3	9%	Directive	13	39,4%
Assertive	23	69,7%	Assertive	-	-
Expressive	-	-	Expressive	16	48,6%
Commissive	6	18,3%	Commissive	1	3%
Declarative	1	3%	Declarative	3	9%
	33	100%		33	

Table (3) the analysis of President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020

Locutionary Acts	Frequency	percentage	Illocutionary force	Frequency	percentage
Directive	2	3,4%	Directive	29	49,2%
Assertive	51	86,4%	Assertive	-	
Expressive	-		Expressive	22	37,3%
Commissive	2	3,4%	Commissive	3	5%
Declarative	4	6,8%	Declarative	5	8,5%
	59	100		59	100%

- The percentage of indirect speech in the speech of the American President was (72%), the French President came second in indirect speech by percentage (69%), while the lowest percentage of indirect speech was in the speech of the President of South Africa which is (47%).
- The assertion speech acts have the largest percentage of use as locutionary acts with (86, 4%) percentage by the South African president, (69, 7%) percentage by the American president, and (33, 3%) by the French president.
- As illocutionary force, the Assertive speech acts is never used by both the American and the South African presidents, while the French president uses it with (27, 5%) percentage.
- As locutionary speech acts, Directive speech acts is used with small percentages; (15, 7%) percentage in the French president's speech, (9%) in the American president's speech, and (3, 4%) percentage in the South African president's speech.
- The Directive speech acts have the largest percentage of use as illocutionary force in the French president's speech with (68, 6%) percentage, (49,2%) percentage in the South African president's speech, and (39,4%)percentage in the American president's speech.
- The Expressive speech acts is never being used as locutioneary speech acts by both the American and the South African presidents, while the French president uses it as locutionary speech acts with (9,8%) percentage.
- However, as illocutionary force, Expressive speech acts is used with (48, 6%) percentage by the American president, (37,3%) percentage by the South African president, and (27,5%) percentage by the French president.
- Declarative speech acts are used as locutionary speech acts with (29,5%) percentages in the French president's speech, while in the South African speech the percentage is (6,8%), and (3%) in the American president's speech.
- As illocutionary force, Declarative speech acts is used with approximate percentages in the three speeches; (9%) in the American president's speech, (8,5%) in the South African president's speech, and (3,9%) in the French president's speech.
- As locutionary speech acts, the commissive speech acts is used by the American president with (18, 3%) percentage, (11, 7%) percentage in the French president's speech, and the South African president uses it with (3, 4%) percentage.
- As illocutionary force, commissive force is not used by the French president, while in the South African president and the American president's speeches the percentages are (5%) and (3%) respectively.

4. RESULT DISCUSSION

- For keeping popularity under such sever circumstances, many various speech acts implied directive as primary illocutionary force. Furthermore, many instructions such as 'wash your hands' might be humorous to be uttered by presidents in other circumstances.
- Showing emotions might backfire, therefore Expressive as primary illocutionary force result in more appropriate results.
- Declarative as primary illocutionary force shows that circumstances under COVID-19 do not allow the announcement of what is optimistic.
- Commissive as speech acts directly and indirectly have the smallest percentage of use due to the fact that under COVID-19 circumstances, future obligations are beyond individuals or governmental capabilities. Future obligations are the responsibilities of the people and the government equally.

- Assertive speech acts appear to be the only speech acts that is neutral and that can be used with the largest percentage directly hiding and implying many orders and indirect feelings.

5. CONCLUSION

- Indirect speech might be the only option when attempting to find appropriate situation through the unavailability of the definite solutions, while direct speech might be either the means of the complete power or the complete surrender.
- All feelings, desires and dreams are similar in crises.
- Attempts to persuade people to wage a war may seem to be easier than persuading them to wash their hands and stay at home. What appears trivial and shallow may be essential and decisive, but under certain conditions.

6. REFERENCES

Abrams, M.H. (1993). A Glossary of Literary Terms (6th ed.). Bangalore: Prism Books Pvt. Ltd.

Austin, J. L. (1962). How to Do Things with Words. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fitriani , N.(2018). A Pragmatics Study of Indirect Speech Acts in President Joko Widodo's State Address. Article in Journal of English Language Studies 3(2):155 · September 2018 with 30 Reads. DOI: 10.30870/jels.v3i2.3256

Chapman, S.(2011). Pragmatics. Siobhan Chapmann.

Grice, H.P. (1975). 'Logic and Conversation,' P. Cole and J.L.Morgan (eds.), Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts. New York: Academic Press. Pp. 41-58.

_____. (1989). Studies in the Way of Words. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press.

Gromov, V. A., & Migrina, A. M. (2017). A Language as a Self-Organized Critical System. Wiley Hindawi, (2), 1–7.

Huang, Y. (2014) . Pragmatics Oxford textbooks in linguistic. Oxford University Press.

Jacob. M. (2001) .   Pragmatics: An Introduction. Wiley

Johnston, B. (2008). Discourse Analysis. Barbara Johnston.

Mr. President Cyril Ramaphosa: South Africa's response to Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic on 23 Apr 2020. Retrieved from

https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-south-africas-response-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic-23-apr-2020

Mr. President M. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, on the COVID-19 coronavirus on 16 March 2020. Retrieved from

https://uk.ambafrance.org/We-are-at-war-with-COVID-19-says-President-in-national-broadcast

Paltridge, B. (2012). Discourse Analysis. Brian Paltridge.

Mr. President Trump's Speech on Coronavirus Pandemic on March 11, 2020. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-speech.html

Searle, J. R. (1969). Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Varma, M.(2010). A Study of Indirect Speech Acts in the Selected Plays of George Bernard Shaw. A Case Study. (Unpublished thesis), INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN ENGLISH GANESHKHIND ROAD, AUNDH, PUNE-411007

Yule, G. (1996). Pragmatics. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____. (1985). The Study of Language. U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

تأثير وباء كورونا على لغة الرؤساء: دراسة تداولية للكلام غير المباشر لخطابات رئاسية مختارة

مها مجيد عنبر

الشؤون العلمية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الأنبار، الأنبار، العراق

maha_anber@yahoo.com

الملخص :

لقد اثر فايروس كورونا على كل جوانب الحياة، لذا يهدف البحث الحالي الى لكشف الى أي مدى وصل تأثير وباء كورونا على اللغة الخاصة بالرؤساء، وفيما اذا كان هذا التأثير ادى لاستخدام الخطاب غير المباشر في الخطب الرئاسية التي تتحدث عن وباء كورونا بدلا من التحدث عن هذه الأزمة الغير مسبوقة بصورة مباشرة. لقد تم اختيار ثلاثة خطابات رئاسية اعتباطا لان تأثير وباء كورونا قد عم جميع البلدان بلا استثناء وهي خطاب الرئيس الامريكي ترامب في الحادي عشر من اذار عام 2020، خطاب الرئيس الفرنسي ايماونويل ماركون في السادس عشر من اذار للعام 2020 وخطاب الرئيس جنوب افريقيا سيريل رامافوسا في الثالث والعشرين من نيسان لعام 2020. قام الباحث باستخدام موديل سيريل (1969) لأفعال الكلام وعمل مقارنة للتحليل الكمي والنوعي لأفعال الكلام الغير مباشر في الخطابات الثلاثة تاركا النتيجة ليقررها القارئ لمعرفة الى أي مدى تم استخدام الكلام غير المباشر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جائحة كورونا، خطاب غير مباشـر، الرئيس ترامب، أفعال الكلام لسيريل، الخطاب الرئاسي .