

A Pragmatic Analytical Comparison of Speech Acts in Two War Poems

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Abstract:

The present study carries out a pragmatic scrutiny of speech acts performed in two English poems from two different literary periods. The first poem is “War Photographer” By Carole Satyamurti, from the contemporary literary period and the second poem is “Does it Matter” by Siegfried Sassoon from the modernist literary period. They both tackled the issue of war. The study established on Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1969) speech acts theory. It particularly adopted Searle’s (1969) flexible design of categorizing speech acts. Thus, the study focused on discovering direct and indirect speech acts’ types and functions in the two poems. Frequent studies delved into theoretical and practical perspectives considering speech act theory to conduct pragmatic analyses of various literary genres such as speeches and short stories. Thanks to the reasonable grounds it provides for explaining the author’s intended messages, speech act theory was implemented in analyzing the two poems. Findings showed that the two poems contained different direct speech acts types. The first poem held *representative* speech acts 100% on its surface level. The second poem’s highest number of **direct speech acts** was the *directive* type 46%. However, both poems

(similarly) shared the highest percentage of the **indirect speech acts** as the *expressive* type 54% in 'War Photographer' and 62% in 'Does it Matter'. The poems' surface language was almost neutral, but the underlying meanings indicated emotional images about the suffering of the war victims.

المستخلص :

تجري الدراسة الحالية فحصاً عملياً لأفعال الكلام التي يتم إجراؤها في قصيدتين إنجليزيتين من فترتين أدبيتين مختلفتين. القصيدة الأولى هي "مصور الحرب" لكارول ساتيامورتي ، من الفترة الأدبية المعاصرة ، أما القصيدة الثانية فهي "هل يهم" بقلم سيغفريد ساسون من الفترة الأدبية الحديثة. كلاهما تناول قضية الحرب. تأسست الدراسة على نظرية أفعال الكلام لأوستن لسنة (١٩٦٢) وسيرل لسنة (١٩٦٩). اعتمدت بشكل خاص تصميم سيرل المرن لسنة (١٩٦٩) لتصنيف أفعال الكلام. وهكذا ركزت الدراسة على اكتشاف أنواع ووظائف أفعال الكلام المباشر وغير المباشر في القصيدتين. بحثت الدراسات المتكررة في وجهات النظر النظرية والعملية مع الأخذ في الاعتبار نظرية الفعل الكلامي لإجراء تحليلات عملية لمختلف الأنواع الأدبية مثل الخطب والقصص القصيرة. بفضل الأسس المعقولة التي توفرها لشرح الرسائل المقصودة للمؤلف ، تم تطبيق نظرية الفعل الكلامي في تحليل القصيدتين. أظهرت النتائج أن القصيدتين احتوتا على أنواع مختلفة من أفعال الكلام المباشر. القصيدة الأولى اقيمت أفعال الكلام التمثيلي ١٠٠٪ على مستواها السطحي. كان أعلى عدد من أعمال الكلام المباشر في القصيدة الثانية هو النوع التوجيهي ٤٦٪. ومع ذلك ، تشترك كلتا القصيدتين (بالمثل) في النسبة المئوية الأعلى لأعمال الكلام غير المباشر مثل النوع التعبيري ٥٤٪ في "مصور الحرب" و ٦٢٪ في "هل يهم". كانت اللغة السطحية للقصائد شبه محايدة ، لكن المعاني الضمنية أشارت إلى صور عاطفية حول معاناة ضحايا الحرب.

Terms: Speech act Theory, Poetic Language, "Does It Matter?", "War Photographer".

Hypotheses:

1. The illocutionary direct speech acts types are distinctive between the two poems.
2. The illocutionary indirect speech acts types are similar between the two poems.

Research Questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between the direct and indirect speech acts types in the two poems?
2. Can pragmatic speech acts analysis perform a satisfactory role in discovering the core messages intended by the poets?

Objective of the study:

The Study is mainly conducted to specify and scrutinize the various speech acts, their types and effects, in two war poems from two different literary periods. It also attempts to indicate the distant to which speech acts serve the themes of the targeted poems in evoking the sense of compassion and responsibility towards those who suffer in warzones. Thus, the inquiry aims

to show how the pragmatic analysis of poetic language can become an instrument for poets communicate their heartfelt sentiments to readers regarding issues like war, sickness and death.

Introduction:

Linguistics can conduct any action of evaluation to any type of discourse and it can't be but a valid kind of examination. Jacobson (1960) pertains that "linguistics is likely to explore all possible problems of relation between discourse and the 'universe of discourse'". One of the prominent tools to conduct such linguistic analysis to discourse particularly poetic discourse is speech act theory. Speech act theory is being currently used on a wide level to a determine and analyze the nature of language of many subjects from different contexts such as legal conversations in court, literary texts in theater, drama, poetry, or political topics such as presidential speeches, media as in celebrity interviews and even songs. This analytical strategy as well, successfully facilitates the mission of reading and understanding literature, particularly poetry.

Readers make analogies about which speech acts the poet is implying and seeking to manifest through his/her chosen expressions.

Review of Literature:

Pragmatics:

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that studies language in use. It takes into consideration the perspective of language choices that speaker takes in certain contexts. Many scholars have produced other definitions as Levinson (1983) who views pragmatics as “the study of language in use”, and Yule (1996) who finds that it is the capacity in the human mind to recognize what is meant even when it is not actually said. Hence, it is the study of “invisible” meaning. Van Dijk (1976), asserts that one cannot interpret the literary sensation depending on the semantics and syntactic levels only, it’s thus rudimentary to conduct the interpretation originating from pragmatics of the real world. Literary aspect requires the speech act event with the same felicity conditions as those holding in the real world. He clarifies that actions in some imagined world are represented where “the reader knows the writer’s intention that he, the receiver, should act in the same way in reality” (1976: 52). Cook (1992) delineates that speech act theory strives to reveal how speakers utilize language to perform deliberate actions and how listeners comprehend the predetermined meanings from what was said.

Undoubtedly, one of the most crucial endeavors in the analysis of poetry as a particular literary genre is seeking to infer what is being communicated by the poet and interpret the implied content of his/her ideas such as promises, apologies, orders, complements, warnings, or requests. An essential point is taking into consideration the form and context of the utterances to ensure the correct reception of the poet’s thoughts and interpretation of the literary masterpiece as a whole coherent unit. Possessing this

capacity needs identification of the cultural, social and physical circumstances that surrounded the poet's life (the situation and time instances when this particular poem was created). Conducting investigation to reach such information is the core of the concept of speech Act Theory.

Speech Act Theory:

When people use language for interacting, they unconsciously deploy their ability of reciprocal understanding and shared communication in sending and receiving messages such as promising, giving orders, thanking, apologizing, complaining, complementing, congratulating, warning, threatening etc. Speakers have these ideas in mind and via utterances they perform the speech act that listeners need to interpret their meaning. They usually rely on the underlying knowledge of the social and physical world to make assumptions and figure out the correct meaning. For example, when someone says "I'll talk to you soon." He by saying this utterance performs an action which is a promise. He also expects the listener to react to his words in a certain way. The most famous theory about speech acts is the one mentioned by Austin (1962). In his book *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin explains that when a speaker produces an utterance, three acts are carried out:

1. The locutionary act: It is performed when a speaker produces a grammatically correct meaningful expression. Such as: I ate my burger.
2. The illocutionary force: It is the second dimension of the performed act where a function is linked to it such as a communicative statement that seeks to inform, offer or warn.
3. The perlocutionary effect: The effect that the functional utterance causes when the hearer recognizes the intended message such as a feeling or an action.

In the same token, Bach and Harnish (1998) agree with Austin by the idea that speakers bring up a reciprocal belief that both the addresser and the addressee refer to a common ground of meaning and understanding that the speaker intends in his illocutionary purpose. Yule (1996), expounds that “when people try to show their thoughts, they not only follow the conventional way of using utterances shaped by grammatical structure and words, they also try to perform actions through their expressions”. These actions are the core of what we refer to as the Speech Act Theory. An example is, when someone is working under the command of a powerful boss, then it is possible in a case of an uncalculated mistake to hear the utterance: “You are fired.” Which is not an ordinary statement. It is an action more than a mere expression., since it is performing act of ending someone’s job. In other situations, nonetheless, some utterances can be quite uprising rather than sorrowful. You may hear in a wedding ceremony the utterance “I now pronounce you husband and wife”. The action performed in this utterance is marriage. Having said that, we come to the presumption that actions performed by utterances are usually identified as Speech Acts.

The listener is able to figure out the speaker’s intention and recognize the particular kind of the speech act, for instance, when the hearer receives the utterance “it’s cold in here” beside an open window in winter, his reaction is different from hearing the same utterance in summer season beside an air-cooler. The first one is a complaint whether the second is a praise. Thus, the circumstances or the “Speech Events” aid in determining the nature and type of the speech act. The same utterance can become two or three different speech acts in different contexts.

Davidson (1998) indicates that each utterance includes a descriptive content of the sentence that may comprise three moods; indicative, imperative, and interrogative. He further speculates that sentences can be used to assert, give orders or ask questions. Other theorists emphasized the same idea. They summoned that when someone utters

a sentence not the meaning only is conveyed, but the illocutionary force of the utterance is intended for the hearer to comprehend.

Direct and Indirect Speech acts:

Searle (1998), denotes that the same utterance can perform distinct act in non-identical contexts. He adds that it's very difficult to recognize the right act of the spoken sentence. For example, when a wife says: 'it's a sunny day', This could be a mere fact or a request. Janeddi, Poletto, & Jannedy, Poletto & Welden (1994) explicated that declarative sentences in the direct speech acts establish assertion speech acts, interrogative sentences establish questions, and imperative sentences establish orders. Therefore, there is a direct relationship between form and function in the direct speech acts. For more illustration, the declarative sentence form: "There is a bird in the cage" contains the function of assertion. The interrogative sentence form: 'Is there a bird in the cage?' contains the function of question, and the imperative sentence: "Leave it alone!" is an order.

Moreover, some speech acts include performative verbs in their utterances. Like: "I *promise* to call you tonight." Or "I *order* you to call me tonight." The speech act in these sentences is performed directly due to the existence of the performative verbs *promise* and *order* within them. Searle (1993) expounds that readers should look through sentences in an analogous way. On the first level, meaning is delivered by sentences precisely and by the exact verbatim of words. Conversely, the other level is what the speaker thinks of or the metaphorical aspect of words. Many sentences; however, carry intended meanings that are in the mind of the speaker only. When the speaker implements indirect speech acts, the listener can usually understand the underlying purpose since both interlocutors share common ground of information and rely on

mutual knowledge to infer meaning of the ongoing conversation. Searle adds that language has a property that allows the speaker to say one thing and mean something else. He clarifies that indirect speech acts are the trait where the speakers intended utterance meaning is different from the literal meaning.

Speech Act Classification:

Yule (1996) introduces a systematic list of five types of speech acts that perform general functions: Declarations, Representative, Expressives, Directives and Commissive.

Table 1: Classification of Speech Acts

Category	Classification	Example
Declaratives	Change the world via the utterance	Sentencing, baptizing, resigning, naming
Representative	What the speaker believes the case	Stating, describing, announcing, reporting
Expressives	States what the speaker feels	Liking, regretting, enjoying, sympathizing
Directives	Gets someone to do some thing	Commanding, asking, requesting, warning
Commissives	Commits the speaker to future actions	Promising, requesting, threatening, offering

This system of speech acts classification that was first designated by Searle is a flexible system that allows researchers to subset and add acts, which is why many researchers rely on it for their analytical studies of speech acts. On these grounds, the

current study adopts the aforementioned system as the main tool to conduct a scholarly linguistic analysis of speech acts in the two targeted poems.

Poetic Language:

Language in general, whether written or spoken, is simply used by human beings as a medium of socialization and to communicate about various realistic or imaginary topics such as education, religion, politics, and economy etc.

Poets, unlike other human beings, conceive vehement ideas and distinct views. They strive to express their talents in symbolic terms. They influence their audience by creating an aura of excitement and admiration. Al-Zubaidy (2014), mentions that “poetic language used by the poet does not simply describe or depict whatever meaning he intends to convey, but rather he makes the language he uses perform or enact that meaning.”

Research methodology:

The poems selected for this study look into the themes of violence of the war and its consequences. The loss of innocence is a main point where the two poets discern that somehow we find amusement in watching others suffering. In the chosen poems of this study where war is a dominant theme, the poet Siegfried Sassoon (modernist poet) implores to express his agony and horrific experience in war. The other poet Carole Satyamurti (contemporary poet) pleads to convince her readers to comprehend the real situation in the war, and not be hoaxed by the media since news and images that come from the battlefield are deceiving. They show part of the truth and not the whole one.

Instruments of The study:

Poem 1:

The poem “War Photographer” by Carole Satyamurty, talks about how a photo of war affects its viewer. The picture of a girl was taken in a deceiving moment where the child seems almost smiling. It was exhibited in a newspaper’s frame with a caption under it saying “even in hell, human spirit triumphs over all”. But the reality of the situation is different. Right after the picture was taken, a bomb shattered the tranquility of the moment and left everyone in shock. The girl ran away for her life screaming after she instinctively dropped a baby she was carrying in her hands. In the poem, the poet highlights that the photographer knows the whole truth, and the trouble that he has to untangle is to capture the agony not to assist it. She points out that media though, fails to reveal the true story of injustice which dominates the world. The poet also provides vivid comparison between people who drink champagne and sunbathe luxuriously, and those innocent children who suffer until they become the casualties of the brutal war embarking in their countries. The poem is finalized by reckoning that pain is chaotic and arbitrary “as a blood stain on a wall”.

Poem 2:

The poem “Does it Matter?” by Siegfried Sassoon is a sequence of rhetorical questions in a semi-sarcastic way to a soldier (or a group of soldiers), who unfortunately lost their legs, eyes and consequently their dreams. The poet indicated that the soldier’s life has miserably changed since he can no longer do the things he loved to do (like hunting), What worsens the scene and adds to the distress of the soldier is that everybody around him do not seem to care. (They come in after hunting eat their muffins ...) They ignore the truth that he was a soldier fighting for his country. The poem starts with a strange question; if it matters to lose one’s legs. Siegfried Sassoon is a WW1 poet who was accused of being unpatriotic because he wrote poems describing the soldier’s life in the muddy trenches, gas attacks and the futility of war.

The Speech Act Analysis:

Poem 1 (War Photographer)

Data 1:

Locution: *The reassurance of the frame is flexible –*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (Descriptive)

Indirect: Representative (announcing, claiming)

Data 2:

Locution: *You can think that just outside it*

People eat, sleep, love normally

Illocution: Direct: Representative: (reasoning)

Indirect: Directive (warning, noting)

Data 3

Locution: *While I seek out the tragic, the absurd,*

To make a subject

Illocution: Direct: Representative: (telling)

Indirect: Commissive: (vowing to do)

Data 4

Locution: *Or if the picture's such as lifts the heart*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (hypothesizing, stating)

Indirect: Expressive (deploring)

Data 5

Locution: *the firmness of the edges can convince you*

this is how things are.

Illocution: Direct: Representative (reasoning)

Indirect: Directive (warning)

Data 6

Locution: *As when at ascot once,*

I took a pair of peach, sun-gilded girls

rolling, silk crumpled, on the grass,

in champagne giggles

Illocution: Direct: Representative (telling, describing)

Indirect: Expressive (deploring)

Data 7

Locution: *as last week, when I followed a small girl*

staggering down some devastated street,

hip thrust out under a baby's weight.

Illocution: Direct: Representative (telling, describing)

Indirect: Expressive (commiserating)

Data 8

Locution: *She saw me seeing her; my finger pressed.*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (comparing)

Indirect: Representative (telling)

Data 9

Locution: *At the corner, the first bomb of the morning*

shattered the stones,

Illocution: Direct: Representative (announcing)

Indirect: Expressive (surprising)

Data 10

Locution: *Instinct prevailing, she dropped her burden*

and, mouth too small for her dark scream,

began to run...

Illocution: Direct: Representative (reporting, stating)

Indirect: Expressive (lamenting)

Data 11

Locution: *The picture showed the little mother*

the almost-smile.

Illocution: Direct: Representative (stating)

Indirect: Expressive (condoling)

Data 12

Locution: *Their caption read*

*‘even in hell the human spirit triumphs
over all.’*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (reporting)

Indirect: Expressive (blaming)

Data 13

Locution: *But hell’ like heaven, is*

untidy, its boundaries arbitrary as a blood stain on the wall.

Illocution: Direct: Representative (concluding)

Indirect: Directive (questioning)

Poem 2: (Does it matter?)

Data 1

Locution: *Does it Matter? Losing your legs?*

Illocution: Direct: Directive (questioning)

Indirect: Representative (stating)

Data 2

Locution: *For people will always be kind*

Illocution: Direct: Commissive (promising)

Indirect: Expressive (condoling)

Data 3

Locution: *And you need not show that you mind*

When others come in after hunting

Illocution: Direct: Directive (directing)

Indirect: Directive (defying)

Data 4

Locution: *To gobble their muffins and eggs.*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (telling)

Indirect: Expressive (deploring)

Data 5

Locution: *Does it matter? –losing your sight?*

Illocution: Direct: Directive (questioning)

Indirect: Representative (stating)

Data 6

Locution: *There's such splendid work for the blind*

Illocution: Direct: Expressive (promising)

Indirect: Expressive (condoling)

Data 7

Locution: *And people will always be kind*

Illocution: Direct: Commissive (promising)

Indirect: Expressive (condoling)

Data 8

Locution: *As you sit on the terrace remembering*

And turning your face to the light.

Illocution: Direct: Directive (suggesting)

Indirect: Expressive (regretting)

Data 9

Locution: *Do they matter – those dreams in the pit?*

Illocution: Direct: Directive (questioning)

Indirect: Expressive (commiserating)

Data 10

Locution: *You can drink and forget and be glad,*

Illocution: Direct: Directive (instructing)

Indirect: Commissive (offering)

Data 11

Locution: *And people won't say that your mad;*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (asserting)

Indirect: Directive (neglect)

Data 12

Locution: *For they know that you've fought for your country*

Illocution: Direct: Expressive (praising)

Indirect: expressive (thanking)

Data 13

Locution: *And no one will worry a bit.*

Illocution: Direct: Representative (asserting)

Indirect: Expressive (deploring)

The anticipated **Perlocutionary Effect** of the indirect Speech acts of the two poems is reflection and compassion.

Analysis of the Data:

Table 2: Table of Data of Poem 1 “War Photographer”:

Speech Acts (Direct and Indirect)	Frequencies		Percentage	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Representatives	13	2	100%	15%
Directives	—	3	—	23%
Expressives	—	7	—	54%
Commissives	—	1	—	7%
Declaratives	—	—	—	—
Total number of speech acts	13	13	100%	100%

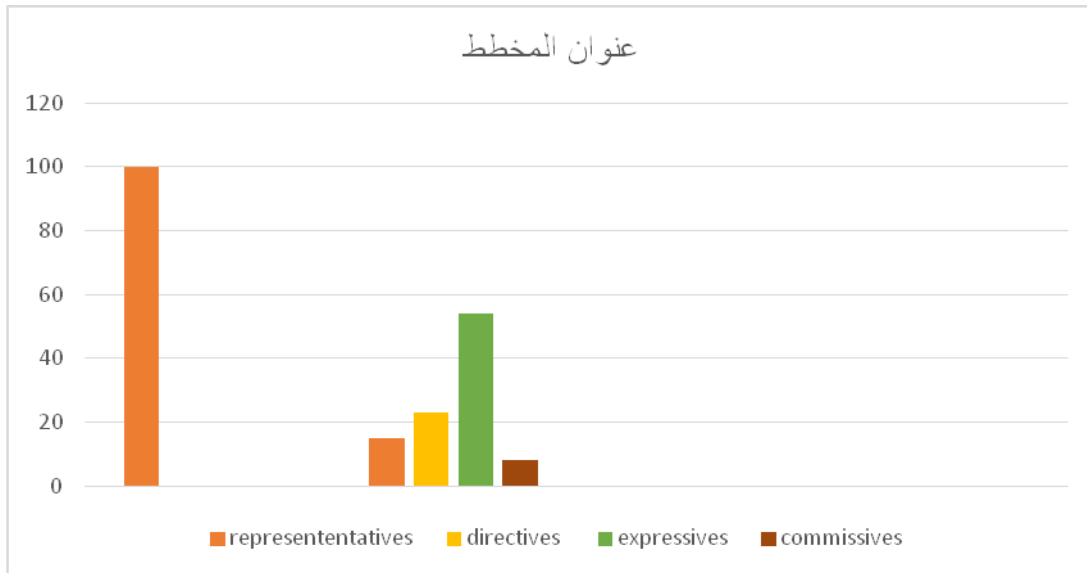


Chart 1: Direct and indirect speech acts in the poem ‘War Photographer’

The chart above shows the calculated information mentioned in the previous table. It visually represents the data of each direct and indirect illocutionary act type.

Table 3: Table of Data of Poem 2 “Does it Matter”:

Speech Acts (Direct and Indirect)	Frequencies		Percentage	
	Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Representatives	3	2	23%	15%
Directives	6	2	46%	15%
Expressives	2	8	15%	62%
Commissives	2	1	15%	8%
Declaratives	—	—	—	—
Total number of speech acts	13	13	100%	100%

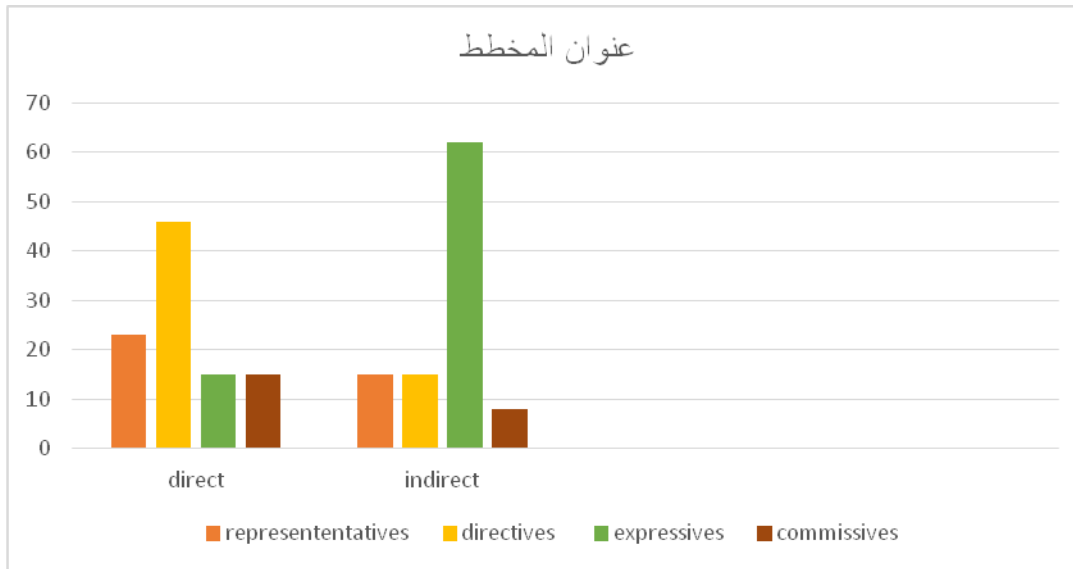


Chart 2: Direct and indirect speech acts in the poem ‘Does it Matter?’

The chart above shows the calculated information mentioned in the previous table. It visually represents the data of each direct and indirect illocutionary act type.

Interpretation of the Data:

Poetic language is a tool to express the feelings and thoughts in a creative but condensed way. Poets usually wrap up their messages with a general ambience and give indicative hints for the readers. The speech acts uncovered in this scrutiny intend to interpret the underlying messages sent by the two poets. Four out of five categories of Searle’s (1969) speech acts paradigm were shown. One category (Declarative) was not manifested in the two poems since the action performed in this utterance change the world. Poets’ utterances do not usually change the world. Judges or priests do under certain felicity conditions. In the first poem “War Photographer” By Carole Satyamurti the mostly used sentences in the direct speech acts analysis are representatives 100%, since the poem is made up of descriptive and narrative statements (narrating and describing the incident of photographing the girl in the war

zone). while the indirect speech acts analysis showed that the implied categories were expressives 54% ‘the highest category’ (sympathizing with the war casualty and deploring the media for mitigating the victims suffering). Other indirect speech acts were directives 23%, representative 15% and commissives 7%. In the second poem ‘Does it Matter?’ the analysis showed that there is a variety in the use of both direct and indirect speech acts. In the direct speech acts, the categories ranged between directives 46%, (Asking strange questions about the soldiers losing their legs and eyesight) representatives 23%, commissives 15% and expressives 15%. While in the indirect speech acts analysis, the highest category was expressives 62% (deploring people who fail to appreciate the soldier’s suffering and sorrowful condoling for his affliction), then the other categories shown were directives 15%, representatives 15%, and commissives 8%.

Based on the upcoming results and the aforementioned statistics, we conclude that our hypotheses were confirmed.

Hypotesis1: The types of Direct Speech Acts varied in the two poems due to the different sentence forms and structures.

Hypothesis 2: The types of indirect speech acts were similar in the two poems since they convey the same function. Because they tackled a similar theme of war, they conducted identical underlying meanings. Thinking of war brings to mind images of fear, pain and agony.

In conclusion, this current study investigated two poems in terms of direct and indirect speech acts. The categories of direct speech acts varied between the two poems. In the poem ‘War Photographer’, representatives dominated as the major direct speech act. The poem was a group of fact and description statements. On the other hand, the second poem ‘Does it Matter?’ included directive speech acts as the most recurring

type, followed by commissives and expressives. The poem comprised direct questions about losing the soldier's legs or eyesight in the battle and suggestions to deal with that dilemma. On the other hand, the highest category of indirect speech acts in both poems was the expressive category. It manifested the dense psychological state of the two poem's backgrounds. States of sorrow, pain and suffering were common. Instances of fear and agony from two warzone specimens were recorded by two poets who did not shy away from wading into painful topics such as war, disease and the fragility of human life. What was revealed by the two poems tackling the theme of war in two different places and times (modernist period particularly in 1917 where WW1 was taking place in Europe and contemporary literary period particularly in 1987 at the time of several great conflicts including the war in South Africa, The Troubles in Northern Ireland, The Iran/Iraq war, and the Srilankan Civil war) is that no matter what the setting is, war puts its victims in the same hell.

Conclusion

By and large, poetic language is one of the most compact types of language in meanings and symbols. Pragmatically speaking, words spoken or written contain underlying meanings that need to be interpreted, not only on the semantic surface level of the utterance, but also pragmatically based on the writer (or speaker) and the reader (or listener) mutual background knowledge. What is more, the function of pragmatic analysis based on Speech Acts theory is to conduct a thorough explanation of any discourse including poetry. Any other type of poetry interpretation that relies only on semantic surface meanings would not be sufficient since it is not able to read between the lines and assure the revelation of the real intent and purposes of the verse-maker.

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