
Perception of Speech Acts Categories in Donald Trump's Tweets by Native and Nonnative Speakers of English

Davood Souri^{1*}, Ali Merç²

¹British Time, Şişli, Istanbul, Turkey

²Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey

*Email: dsouri53@gmail.com

DOI <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v15i1.26029>

Submitted 3 September 2020. Revised 30 September 2020. Accepted 22 October 2020

Abstract

Twitter plays an important role in today's world. Its role among politicians and those who are interested in politics is more obvious. Due to its importance and special characteristics such as character limits, it has drawn the attention of many researchers including linguists and ELT researchers. This study aimed to compare the perceptions of native and nonnative speakers in identifying speech acts in Donald Trump's tweets. The subjects of this study were nine English native speakers and twenty nonnative English teachers who were Turkish citizens. Thirty-seven tweets of Donald Trump over the course of a week were selected and the participants were asked to identify the speech acts of the tweets based on the speech acts taxonomy by Searle (1976). The analysis of the data revealed that both native and nonnative speakers of English identified the speech acts of the large majority of the tweets very differently. These differences were partly due to lack of enough political as well as background knowledge and partly due to lack of contextual variables.

Keywords: speech acts; twitter; pragmatic competence; native speakers; EFL teachers

INTRODUCTION

Computer-mediated communication is becoming increasingly popular these days. It is common practice not only with ordinary people but also with politicians. Grossman (1995) proposed that the Internet could allow citizens to engage directly in political decision-making processes. According to Bertot, Jaeger, and Grimes (2010): "Social media technologies allow users to immediately publish information in near real time" (p. 266). It seems that politicians have also joined people in this regard. It is hard to find a politician who does not have a Twitter account nowadays. In the last few years, Twitter has become an important channel through which politicians discuss and argue issues with each other. Millions of people all around the world follow and retweet their tweets. There is no doubt that politicians struggle for power. Once they have got the power, they can put their plans into practice much easier. In this regard, language plays a crucial role. It seems that language and politics are intertwined in a way that one cannot draw a line between them. Opeibi (as cited in Abuya, 2012) noted "

"No matter how good a candidate's mani-

festos is; no matter how superior political thoughts and ideologies of a political party may be, these can only be expressed and further translated into social actions for social change and social continuity through the facilities provided by language" (p. 9).

Twitter, an ocean of information, has provided opportunities for researchers, in particular ELT researchers, to investigate different aspects of the English language manifested in tweets. Numerous research studies have been conducted on the production of speech acts in different situations and contexts; however, not much work has been done on how native and non-native speakers of a particular language perceive and identify different kinds of speech acts in political tweets. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the possible differences between the perceptions of native and nonnative English teachers in terms of identifying speech acts of political tweets. This paper focuses on the speech acts of Donald Trump's tweets, the president of the United States, over the course of a week.

Austin (1962) was the first person who highlighted that communication was more than just a series of utterances providing information. According to him, speakers are often attempting to accomplish something with their speech,

such as trying to get someone to do something or describing a state of affairs to someone. He called them speech acts. According to Austin, speech acts consist of three parts: locutions, illocutions, and prelocutions. Locutions are related to the construction of speech such as using certain words in conformity with grammatical rules. In other words, locutions are physical utterances or the literal meaning of the words used by speakers. In contrast, illocutions are about the intended meaning or the purpose of utterances produced by speakers. While locutions are about what is said by speakers, illocutions are about what is meant by speakers. Prelocutions are said to be the by-product of speaking, that is to say they are the actions which result from locutions. In other words, Prelocutions are about the effects of utterances produced on subjects and their reactions to the speakers' utterances. With regard to illocutionary acts, Searle (1976) distinguished five categories namely, representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Table 1).

As Table 1 shows, assertive utterances are about propositions which are believed to be true by speakers. In other words, assertive utterances are about facts, as a result, verbs such as claim, assert, to be, believe, report, and conclude are often used in assertive utterances. The aim of producing assertive utterances is to give information about something or somebody. This tweet "Health Insurance Stocks, which have gone through the roof during the ObamaCare years, plunged yesterday after I ended their Dems windfall! (14/10/2017)" by Donald Trump, is considered to be an example of an assertive speech act. Directive utterances are produced by speakers to get their subjects to do or not do something. There are three kinds

of directive utterances namely commands, requests, and suggestions. Commands are utterances produced by speakers who have some degree of control over their addressees. For example, a judge in a court of law may say: "Don't discuss the case". Requests are utterances produced by speakers when they wish their subjects to perform or not perform an act. For example, Could you possibly send it before Friday? Suggestions are utterances produced by speakers when they wish to give their opinions to get subjects to do or not do something. For example, I suggest you see a doctor. Commissive utterances are produced when speakers commit themselves to perform or refrain from some future actions. Verbs such as promise, offer, refuse, agree, and vow are often used in Commissive utterances. For example, I promise to do my homework. Expressive utterances are about speakers' present feelings or their feelings about something they did and experienced in the past. Words such as apologize, admit, congratulations, and sorry are often used in Expressive utterances. This tweet: "Our hearts are with all affected by the wildfire in California (17/10/2017)." by Donald Trump is an example of an Expressive utterance. Declarations are the utterances, which once produced, they bring about a change in the world and reality. When a priest says to the bride and groom: "I now pronounce you husband and wife", the world or reality changes for them upon hearing this sentence i.e. a second before hearing this sentence they were not married but after hearing the sentence they were married. Communication is not as easy as it seems, and sometimes fails due to several factors such as lack of adequate context. To communicate effectively, speakers and subjects should be able to understand

Table 1. Speech Acts Taxonomy (Searle, 1976)

Speech Act	Definition	Example
Assertives	The speaker commits to the truth of what is asserted, i.e. what is said is believed to be true by the speaker. E.g. <i>statements & claims</i>	We watched a movie yesterday.
Directives	The speaker makes an attempt to get the subject to do something by expressing his/her wish. E.g. <i>requests & order</i>	Bring me some hot water.
Commissive	The speaker commits to take an action in future. E.g. <i>promises & offers</i>	I promise, I will complete the work by tomorrow.
Expressives	The speaker expresses a variety of psychological states. E.g. <i>apologies</i>	I am sorry for my disrespectful behavior.
Declarations	The speaker brings about a change in the world via words. E.g. <i>baptizing, declaring war, abdicating</i>	I now pronounce you husband and wife.

and discern contextual meanings as well as the purposes of the utterances produced by speakers. They should also be able to perform the language functions well in given contexts. This ability is referred to as pragmatic competence.

Murray (2010) defines pragmatic competence as “an understanding of the relationship between form and context that enables us, accurately and appropriately, to express and interpret intended meaning” (p. 239). It should be noted that having pragmatic competence is a key to discern and perceive speech acts. As mentioned above, we are sometimes unable to understand this relationship which in turn may result in pragmatic failure. Some speech acts may be perceived differently by non-native or even native speakers of English given the fact that speech acts do not depend solely on semantics. For instance, cultural differences between native and non-native speakers or even among native speakers of English who live in different countries or regions may lead to perceiving some speech acts differently.

Egner (2006) studied the conditions of use for the act of promising between Africans and Westerners. He found out that in African culture, the act of promising is for showing politeness and the speakers do not intend to carry out the promised act which is completely different from how Westerners make a promise indicating that cultural differences affect the speech act of promising. Insufficient knowledge of pragmatics for a particular speech act among non-native learners of English may result in failure to perform that specific speech act in the target language appropriately. Therefore, studying speech acts is necessary to better understand how underlying messages of international communication, particularly political communication, are conveyed. Donald Trump, the 45th President of the United States, with millions of followers uses Twitter actively and tweets almost every day to convey his messages to the whole world. His tweets might be perceived differently by different people all around the world due to several factors such as contextual variables. The role that speech acts play in conveying political tweets is really important because the semantic features of tweets can only help us understand the purposes of tweets to some extent. Hemphill and Roback (2014) believe lobbying strategies can be categorized by the use of speech acts because speech acts can differentiate different approaches the speakers adopt to get their hearers to take some future actions.

Based on the above-mentioned points with regard to speech acts, identifying speech acts in tweets requires a high level of pragmatic com-

petence. Even English learners with a high proficiency in English grammar show differences when it comes to pragmatic norms in English. Bearing this fact in mind that pragmatic competence facilitates the way we use speech acts brings us to our research question. This paper aims to address the following research question:

Do native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English identify the speech acts in Donald Trump's tweets differently?

Twitter as a micro blogging platform has gained popularity over the last decade especially among politicians. Since it is a micro blogging platform, it does not permit its users to send more than 280-character messages called tweets (even as few as 140 characters before November 2017); therefore, its users do not have the freedom of tweeting detailed complex structures and that is why simplicity is one of its distinctive features. Short phrases, brief comments, images, or links to relevant websites and resources are the most important features of tweets (Stieglitz & Dangi 2013).

The main reason why Twitter users often post links to websites, videos, and resources according to Ott (2017) is that the content of these websites and videos are too complex to be tweeted. Moreover, tweeting can be considered an impulsive activity since one does not necessarily have to think hard or take several important things into account to tweet something. It is also very easy to tweet due to widespread wireless technology and availability of mobile phones nowadays. That explains why everyday millions of messages are tweeted. Retweeting or resending the original tweet to other users is another sign of this impulsivity which is a reaction to an original tweet by many users who are interested in its message. Retweeting is a quick way through which people share information and that is why it has gained popularity among people and in particular among politicians. By retweeting, not only do people share information, but they can also express their own opinions about the original tweet. Twitter users can also follow other Twitter users. However, this is not reciprocal. One may have thousands or even millions of followers while following less than a hundred users at the same time.

For instance, Donald Trump had more than 19 million Twitter followers the day before the election (Bickart, Fournier, & Nisenholtz, 2017). As mentioned above, Twitter users can make small changes and modifications to the original tweet such as expressing their opinions. People often put # sign, called hashtag, before

some certain keywords or phrases in their tweets as a means of categorizing the keywords in order to make them easier for other twitter users to either find or follow. Upon clicking or touching a keyword with a hashtag, the word is immediately linked to the tweets including it. Hashtag is considered an important feature of Twitter which facilitates sharing information among Twitter users. The sign, @, is another feature which Twitter users often use to call out usernames in their Tweets. People can use your @ username if they want to mention you in their tweets so that other users can view your profile by clicking on your @ username. People complain that the language used in Twitter is often uncivil and impolite.

Ott (2017) believes that Twitter “fosters incivility”. What he means by incivility is the use of offensive and insulting language in tweets. One of the main reasons why people use impolite phrases or words in their tweets is that this platform is informal in nature from a linguistic point of view. Since there is a limit of characters per tweet, Twitter users tend not to include grammatical words in their messages which in turn makes the language informal and broken at times. According to Ott (2017): “Its lack of concern with proper grammar and style undermines norms that tend to enforce civility” (p. 62). Twitter as a social media platform owes its success as well as popularity to the simplicity of its use and the conciseness of tweets.

Although many research studies have been conducted on speech acts in different contexts in the last few decades, not much work has been done on speech acts on Twitter, for it is obviously a new forum. Hemphill and Roback (2014) conducted a study on how citizens communicate with members of congress (MOCs) in terms of common strategies of lobbying on Twitter using different speech acts. The results of their study revealed that Twitter is different in a significant way from other platforms since there is a character limit to tweets, which does not permit its users to provide many examples or great deal of context. The results also revealed that identifying speech acts in tweets requires sociocultural as well as language knowledge. This limitation also makes Twitter users write their tweets more precisely compared to other forms of writing. Twitter is often used by governments as a platform for interactions with their citizens.

Feroz Khan, Yoon, Kim, and Park (2014) conducted a study to explore the use of Twitter by Korea’s central government. The twitter-based networking strategies used by the central government were divided into two categories:

government-to-citizen and government-to-government strategies. 32 Twitter accounts of the government organizations were used as the data which included the information about the numbers of followers, followings, tweets, listed, and favorites. The findings revealed that the networking strategies used by the Korean government did not necessarily get its citizens to participate in the government’s social activities indicating that the government had difficulty interacting with its people through Twitter, however, the networking strategies proved to be effective it came to connection between the government institutions. There is no doubt that technological advances have had a great impact on how people communicate especially in the world of politics.

Postman (1985), in his book, *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*, claims that American public discourse has been undermined to a great extent in terms of quality by TV. In his book, he notes: “The best things on television are its junk, and no one and nothing is seriously threatened by it” (p. 16)”. What concerns him most is that television is used as a channel through which political, religious, and educational discourse are filtered. We have been witnessing in the last few years a smooth and gradual transition from the era of Television to a new era known as social media.

Based on a study done by Naaman, Bose, and Lai (2010), about 80% of the activity on Twitter is harmless and insignificant and its consequence is so little. However, issues arise when cultural, social and political discourse are filtered through Twitter. In recent years, Twitter’s role in politics has been significant in the election campaigns and the percentage of people using Twitter is increasing day by day. Online data has provided researchers an opportunity to investigate whether these data can help them predict the results of some political events such as elections or not. After reviewing some studies and focusing on the most commonly used analysis methods on social media, Gayo-Avello, Metaxas, and Mustafaraj (2011) applied those methods on the tweets collected from the US 2008 Presidential elections on every individual user based on his/her geographical location rather than predicting the overall vote in the country. The results showed that predictions made by the means of the data collected from tweets are not completely reliable. The methods would have overestimated Obama’s victory. They had also predicted a victory for Obama even in Texas.

Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner, and Welpe (2010) carried out a research on Twitter messa-

ges about the 2009 German federal election and found out that the number of messages reflected the election result. The results also indicated that Twitter could be considered a reliable sign of political opinion. On the contrary, Gayo-Avello et al. (2011) in a study, investigated whether predictions about elections which took place in the US during 2010 were correct. The data was collected from two different data sets: Twitter chatter volume and sentiment analysis of tweets. The results showed that predictions for six senatorial races were only half correct i.e. three out of six, and the mean average error for the predictions obtained from Twitter volume was 17.1%, however, the mean average error for the predictions obtained from Twitter volume was only 7.6%. With regard to celebrities' speech act patterns on Twitter, Nemer (2016) conducted a study on four celebrities namely; Oprah Winfrey, Britney Spears, Shaquille O'Neal, and Chris Colfer concerning their speech patterns on Twitter. After accessing the celebrities' timelines, 1200 tweets were collected and then were broken into 2283 utterances for analysis. The results revealed that the four celebrities used different speech acts to communicate with different audiences. When it came to communicating with their fans, they mainly used Twitter to inform them, while they mostly made claims when it came to communicating with their friends.

In another study, Pain and Masullo Chen (2019) analyzed 303,086 of Donald Trump's tweets, retweets, and responses to his tweets from 2009 to 2017 to explore the themes in his discourse. Three major themes were found in the data. These themes included the "the outsider who will make America great, racism, misogyny, and hate Speech, and fake news" (pp. 6-8). Twitter has been a powerful means through which politicians try to convey their messages to their followers in particular and Twitter users in general.

Twitter users may perceive the purposes of tweets differently due to several factors one of which is the language. What nonnative speakers of English perceive as one type of speech act in a sentence may differ from what native speakers of English do which could be due to their levels of competency. However, the results of a study conducted by Carrell and Konneker (1981) on comparing judgments of native speakers of American English and nonnative ESL learners on politeness revealed that there was a high correlation between the 72 ESL learners who participated in the study and 42 undergraduates who were native speakers of American English in terms of their politeness judgments. In another study on the

speech act of apology, Linnell (1992) compared native speaker's and nonnative speakers' apologies in identical situations. 20 non-native speakers of English and 20 native speakers of English took eight verbal discourse completion tests. The two groups demonstrated no significant differences in six out of eight situations. It should be mentioned that taking only the linguistic features of tweets into account and disregarding their purposes and the meanings underlying them which can be related to sociocultural, political, and other contextual factors seems to be insufficient.

METHODS

The subjects of this study were 29 EFL teachers in two groups. The first group included 9 native speakers of English (NSEs) including 2 two males and 7 seven females aged 27-38 (4 British, 3 American, 1 Irish, and 1 Australian) one of whom was teaching for an English language school and the rest were working for a university in Istanbul teaching English preparatory courses. The second group included non-native speakers of English (NNSEs). The participants were 20 EFL teachers including 7 males and 13 females all of whom were Turkish citizens with their ages ranging from 24 to 33. They were all teaching general English for an English language school in Istanbul, Turkey during the data collection period which took two weeks.

A list of 37 tweets by Donald Trump, the president of the United States, from 13/10/2017 to 18/10/2017 was collected and written in chronological order (see Appendix). The participants were then given the list with the speech act taxonomy (Table 1) attached to it. The participants were asked to read the tweets and put a number (From 1 to 5) or just the first letter of speech act category in front of each tweet i.e., 1 or A for Assertives, 2 or D for Directives, 3 or C for Commissives, 4 or E for Expressives, and 5 or D for Declarations.

Prior to handing out the papers, a clear instruction on the five mentioned speech acts categories was given to the participants. The aim of the instruction was first to raise the participants' awareness of speech acts and then to introduce the five different categories mentioned in Table 1. To raise the participants' awareness, a situation was given and then a question was posed: "Imagine you were students and sitting in a classroom and your teacher came into the classroom and said: "It's hot in here". Would you interpret this utterance as Assertive due to its semantic features, or would you interpret it as a Directive ut-

terance requesting a student to open a window?” After raising the participants’ awareness about speech acts, a handout defining and exemplifying the speech acts (Table 1) was given to each participant. Each speech act with its example was read out and then the participants were asked if they could give others examples for that specific speech act category for concept checking. Finally, they were asked to read the tweets individually and put a number (From 1 to 5) in a box in front of each tweet which took them between 20 to 35 minutes to do it.

Four categories emerged from the data set. First, the percentage and the number of the tweets which were labeled with only one category by NSE and NNSE participants were calculated and then compared within and between the two groups. This was named “all agreed”. In the second part of the analysis, the percentage and the number of the tweets which were labeled with the same category by all but one participant were calculated and analyzed. This was named “all but one”. In the third part, the tweets which were labeled either by one category or another by more than one participant were quantified within and between the groups. This was named “only two categories. The rest of the tweets which received wider range of identification, more than two categories, by the participants were named “more

than two categories”. The following section presents the findings in a detailed fashion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

English Native Speaker Participants

The data gathered from 9 NSE participants are presented and discussed in terms of their identification and perceptions of speech acts in 37 tweets of Donald Trump. The results based on the data obtained from the NSE participants revealed big differences within this group. The participants only agreed on 5 out of 37 tweets in terms of their speech acts unanimously which accounted for 13.51 percent of total identifications (Figure 1). *Assertive* was chosen for tweets 10, 12, and 19 and *Expressive* was chosen for tweets 27 and 28 by all of the NSE participants, (Table 2).

All but one participant chose *Assertive* for tweets 5, 13, 25, and 31, and *Declaration* for tweet 6 which accounted for 13.51 percent of the total identification of speech acts, (Table 3). For tweet number 5: “In America, we don’t worship government-we worship God. #ValuesVotersSummit” all of the participants chose *Assertive* but only one participant, the American one, chose *Directive*. *Declaration* was chosen for tweet number 6: “I have no greater privilege than to serve as your Commander-in-chief. HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Table 2. Speech Acts Agreed Unanimously by the NSE Participants.

Tweet	Speech Act
10. Many people talking, with much agreement, on my Iran speech today. Participants in the deal are making lots of money on trade with Iran!	Assertive
12. Health Insurance Stocks, which have gone through the roof during the Obama Care years, plunged yesterday after I ended their Dems windfall!	Assertive
19. Since Election Day on November 8, the Stock Market is up more than 25%, unemployment is at a 17 year low & companies are coming back to U.S.	Assertive
27. Always great to see the wonderful people of South Carolina. Thank you for the beautiful welcome at Greenville-Spartanburg Int’l airport!	Expressive
28. Our hearts are with all affected by the wildfire in California. God bless our brave First Responders and @FEMA team, We support you!	Expressive

Table 3. Speech Acts Agreed by all of the NSE Participants but One.

Tweet	Speech Act
5. In America, we don’t worship government- we worship God. #ValuesVotersSummit	Assertive
6. I have no greater privilege than to serve as your Commander-in-chief. HAPPY BIRTHDAY to the incredible men and women.@USNavy	Declaration
13. “Consumer confidence soars to highest level since 2004”	Assertive
25. “Dow Passes 23,000 for the First Time, Fueled by Strong Earnings”	Assertive
31. Democrat congressman totally fabricated what I said to the wife of a soldier who died in action (and I have proof) Sad!	Assertive

to the incredible men and women.@USNavy” by eight participants as, and only the Irish participant chose *Assertive* for that. Eight NSE participants chose *Assertive* for tweet number 13: “Consumer confidence soars to highest level since 2004”. However, one participant, British citizen, labeled it a *Declaration*. For tweet number 25: “Dow Passes 23,000 for the First Time, Fueled by Strong Earnings” all participants chose *Assertive* while the Australian participant chose *Expressive*. Finally, for tweet number 31: “Democrat congressman totally fabricated what I said to the wife of a soldier who died in action (and I have proof) Sad!” all of the participants chose *Assertive* while one participant, the Australian one, chose *Declaration*.

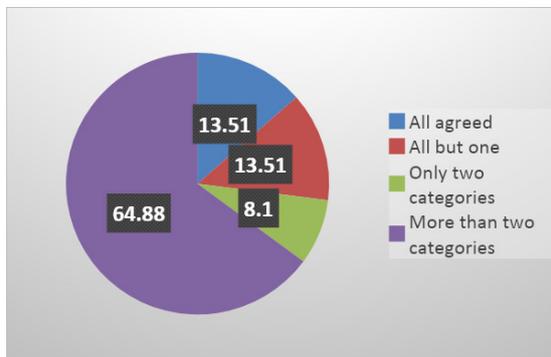


Figure 1. NSE Participants' Perceptions

Non-Native Speaker Participants

The results based on the data obtained from the NNSE participants of this study revealed noticeable differences within the group regarding their perceptions of speech acts in Donald Trump's tweets. The NNSE Participants only agreed unanimously on 2 categories for 2 different tweets (19 and 23) which only accounted for 5.4 percent of the total identifications of the speech acts (Figure 2). *Assertive* and *Declaration* were chosen for Tweets 19 and 23 respectively by the NNSE participants, (Table 4).

For tweets 3, 4, 13, 14, 25, 27 and 28, the NNSE participants chose only two categories which accounted for 18.91 percent of the total identifications of speech acts. For tweet number 3: “Today, I announced our strategy to confront the Iranian regime's hostile actions and to ensu-

re that they never acquire a nuclear weapon.” six participants chose *Directive* and the rest chose *Declaration*. For the rest of the tweets, 75.67 percent, the NNSE participants' identifications of speech acts varied widely and for each item more than two categories were chosen.

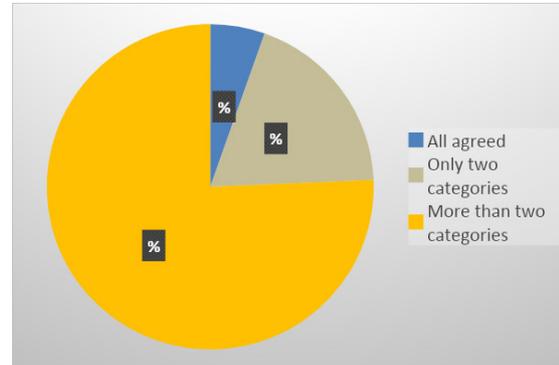


Figure 2. NNSE Participants' Perceptions

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data given in tables 3 and 4, named “all agreed “ are congruent with the findings of Carrell and Konneker's (1981) study which revealed the correlation between that native and nonnative speakers of English in terms of their politeness judgments was high. The data are also consistent with the findings of Linnell's (1992) study which indicated that no significant differences were found in performance of apology speech act between the native speakers and nonnative speakers of English. However, by comparing the percentages of the speech acts that the NSE and the NNSE participants agreed on unanimously with the percentages of the speech acts that they chose differently, it became apparent that both groups had a wide range of judgments and perceptions of the speech acts lied in the tweets. Less than one fifth for NSE participants and only a small minority of the NNSE participants agreed unanimously on speech acts of a few tweets, and for the rest of the tweets, the differences were wide and noticeable. For example, within NSE participants, some chose one category for tweets 1, 15, and 32 and the others chose another category. Three participants (The Australian, one American, one British) chose *Directive* for tweet num-

Table 4. Speech Acts Categories Agreed Unanimously by the NNSE Participants.

Tweet	Speech Act
19. Since Election Day on November 8, the Stock Market is up more than 25%, unemployment is at a 17 year low & companies are coming back to U.S.	Assertive
23. It was my great honor to welcome Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece to the WH today!	Declaration

ber 1: “You sit in Bill O’Reilly’s chair in Roger Ailes’s house and advocate each night for Donald Trump” and the rest labeled it as *Assertive*. For almost 65 percent of the total tweets (Figure 1), the NSE participants’ identifications of speech acts were completely different. For example, *Commissive* was chosen for tweet number 2: “People are just now starting to find out how dishonest and disgusting (FakeNews) @NBCNews is. Viewers beware. May be worse than even @CNN” by the Irish and the British participants while one American and one British chose *Directive* for the same tweet. Moreover, two American and British participants chose *Assertive*, and the Australian participant’s judgment was *Expressive* for the same tweet. The differences within NSE participants’ identification of speech acts might be due to the fact that the NSE participants were away from their countries at the time of the data collection process, and this being away from the political contexts as well as lack of sufficient context in the tweets might have affected their judgments in identifying speech acts of the tweets. Speech acts are dependent on contexts, so one cannot easily identify speech acts of tweets without considering the time and situation in which tweets are written.

According to Kaplan (1989, p. 591) context should include “what is needed” for doing what we want to use it for. When one is away from his/her country and not following the current political events, some common information defining those events, which would be taken for granted if the person lived in his/her country, might not be well understood by him/her which in turn might affect his /her judgment about perception of the speech act of a tweet. To illustrate better, the Australian participant chose *Declaration* for tweet number 14: “The Democrats in the southwest part of Virginia have been abandoned by their party. Republican Ed Gillespie will never let you down.” while one British participant chose *Directive*. Also, *Commissive* was chosen by one American, three British, and the Irish participants, and two other Americans chose *Assertive*.

With regard to the NNSE participants, the differences were even bigger. The NNSE participants agreed unanimously on only 5.4 percent of the total speech acts of the tweets and more than three thirds of the speech acts which were chosen by the NNSE participants were different from one another. This may partly be due to the fact that the people who live in a country are more interested in the local political events taking place in their own country and may be unaware of the international political events to a great extent.

The NNSE participants on this study might have relied more on semantics of the tweets to understand their intended meanings due to the lack of the context in the tweets which explains partly why their differences compared to the NSE participants were bigger at 75.67 percent (Figure 2).

This large variation indicates that there is more to be involved rather than just semantics. This is congruent with the findings of the study conducted by Hemphill and Roback (2014). The results of their study revealed that sociocultural as well as language knowledge play an important role in identifying speech acts in tweets.

Shams and Afghari (2011) conducted a study on 60 Iranian participants (30 males & 30 females) about the effects of gender and culture on the comprehension of indirect request speech act. A questionnaire with twenty different situations was used for collecting the data. The results revealed that culture had a significant effect on the interpretation of the participants regarding indirect request of speech act, however, no significant effect was found for gender. Not only within groups but the differences between groups were big too. For example, all of the NNSE participants chose *Declaration* for tweet number 23: “It was my great honor to welcome Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece to the WH today!”, however, the NSE participants chose *Assertive*, *Declaration*, and *Expressive* for the same tweets.

Contrary to the findings of the studies conducted by Carrell and Konneker (1981) and Linnell (1992), the results of this study revealed that there were noticeable differences between the judgements and perceptions of speech acts by NSE and NNSE participants. To illustrate better, six NNSE participants chose *Directive* for tweet number 3: “Today, I announced our strategy to confront the Iranian regime’s hostile actions and to ensure that they never acquire a nuclear weapon.” and the rest labeled it as *Declaration* while for the same tweet, four out of 9 NSE participants chose *Assertive*, three labeled it as *Commissive*, and two chose *Directive*. Moreover, all of the NSE participants chose *Assertive* for tweet number 10: “Many people talking, with much agreement, on my Iran speech today. Participants in the deal are making lots of money on trade with Iran!”. However, *Assertive* was chosen by only half of the NNSE participants, and the other half labeled it with different speech acts such as *Declaration* and *Expressive*.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to compare the

perceptions of speech acts in Donald Trump's tweets based on speech acts taxonomy by Searle (1976). The findings of the study revealed that the perceptions of the participants in terms of speech acts varied widely. One of the possible explanations for the wide variations within and between the participants of this study could be due to the lack of enough context in tweets. Since Twitter users are limited to a certain number of characters in each tweet, tweets do not provide much context. Therefore, taking only linguistic features of a language into account in order to understand the purpose of a tweet does not seem to be enough and other variables such as socio-cultural and political knowledge of Twitter users who follow politicians may play important roles in understanding the purpose and underlying meanings of their tweets. That explains partly why the NSE participants of this study categorized the speech acts in more than half of the tweets differently, and a slightly more than three quarters (75.67%) of the NNSE participants had different perceptions as well. Thus, lack of context and political knowledge may play a role in affecting ones' judgment about identifying speech acts of tweets. The findings of this study have relevant implications for EFL teachers and should therefore lead to recommendations for further training or studies. EFL teachers should bear in mind that only semantics do not necessarily assist English learners in understanding the purpose of the messages embedded in English phrases and sentences but other variables such as context play roles as well. Therefore, EFL teachers need to provide enough context for their learners so that they can understand the purposes of English utterances. To illustrate, teaching words individually and out of the context is one of the examples of teaching English language out of context. Teaching reading without activating a learners schemata about the topic through different techniques such as a brief discussion on the topic or getting students to watch a short video of the topic is another example of teaching English out of context. EFL teachers need to think about the ways through which they can contextualize their lessons so that their lessons are more focused on meaning rather than just the form.

REFERENCES

- Abuya, E. J. (2012). A Pragma-Stylistic Analysis of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Inaugural Speech. *English Language Teaching*, 5(11), 8-15.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford.
- Bertot, J., Jaeger, P., & Grimes, J. (2010). Using ICTs to create a culture of transparency: E-government and social media as openness and anti-corruption tools for societies. *Government Information Quarterly*, 27(3), 264-271.
- Bickart, B., Fournier, S., & Nisenholtz, M. (2017). What Trump understands about using social media to drive attention. *Harvard Business Review*, 1-7.
- Carrell, P., & Konneker, B. (1981). Politeness: comparing native and nonnative judgements. *Language Learning*, 31(1), 17-30.
- Egner, I. (2006). Intercultural aspects of the speech act of promising: Western and African practices. *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 3(4), 443-464.
- Gayo-Avello, D., Metaxas, P., & Mustafaraj, E. (2011). Limits of electoral predictions using social media data. In *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Barcelona, Spain*.
- Grossman, L. K. (1995). The electronic republic. *Media Studies Journal*, 9(3), 163-168.
- Hemphill, L., & Roback, A. J. (2014). Tweet acts: How constituents lobby congress via Twitter. In *Proceedings of the 17th ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work & social computing*, 1200-1210.
- Feroz Khan, G., Young Yoon, H., Kim, J., & Woo Park, H. (2014). From e-government to social government: Twitter use by Korea's central government. *Online Information Review*, 38(1), 95-113.
- Linnell, J. (1992). Can you apologize me? An investigation of speech act performance among non-native speakers of English. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 8(2), 33-53.
- Murray, N. (2010). Pragmatics, awareness raising, and the cooperative principle. *ELT journal*, 64(3), 293-301.
- Naaman, M., Boase, J., & Lai, C. H. (2010, February). Is it really about me? Message content in social awareness streams. In *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 189-192).
- Nemer, D. (2016). Celebrities acting up: A speech act analysis in tweets of famous people. *Social Networking*, 5(1), 1.
- Ott, B. L. (2017). The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement. *Critical studies in media communication*, 34(1), 59-68.
- Pain, P., & Masullo Chen, G. (2019). The President Is in: Public Opinion and the Presidential Use of Twitter. *Social Media+ Society*, 5(2), 2056305119855143.
- Postman, N. (2006). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*. Penguin.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A classification of illocutionary acts. *Language in Society*, 5(1), 1-23.
- Shams, R., & Afghari, A. (2011). Effects of culture and gender in comprehension of speech acts of indirect request. *English Language Teaching*, 4(4), 279-287.

- Stieglitz, S., & Dang-Xuan, L. (2013). Emotions and information diffusion in social media—sentiment of microblogs and sharing behavior. *Journal of management information systems*, 29(4), 217-248.
- Tumasjan, A., Sprenger, T. O., Sandner, P. G., & Welpe, I. M. (2010). Predicting elections with twitter: What 140 characters reveal about political sentiment. In *Fourth international AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*.