



## Perlocutionary Acts of Imran Khan's X Post on Constitutional Protest Movements: Speech Act Theory Perspective

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### Abstract

The study aims to examine the perlocutionary impact of Imran Khan's tweet about the constitutional protest movement, highlighting how his choice of words shapes readers reactions and drives specific outcomes. The tweet was crafted to prompt particular responses from followers, aiming to influence their beliefs, attitudes, or actions for particular cause. Using qualitative descriptive research methods, including content analysis, the study provides a deeper understanding of the data collected. The findings indicate that Khan's language was intentionally designed to achieve certain perlocutionary effects, such as rallying public support, challenging the government's authority, or escalating political tensions. This study utilizes the Perlocutionary Acts Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, developed by Michael Halliday, to analyze the perlocutionary effects of Imran Khan's tweets concerning constitutional amendments. By investigating the relationship between locutionary and perlocutionary acts in his tweet, this research analyzes the rhetorical strategies employed to inform, persuade, or incite action. Overall, it contributes to the broader understanding of political communication on social media and underscores the significant role of perlocutionary acts in influencing public behavior and outcomes.

**Keywords:** Perlocutionary Acts, X Posts, Imran Khan, Speech Act Theory Perspectives

### Introduction

Perlocutionary Acts comes under the umbrella of Pragmatics which primarily focuses on utterances, referring to specific instances of communication that involve the deliberate actions of speakers at particular times and places, usually using language. According to Yule (1996), Pragmatics is a study of how meaning is given by the speaker/writer and how listeners/readers receive it. Moreover, Yule also defines pragmatics as understanding of speaker meaning, contextual meaning, how in fact more than what is being said is being communicated and relative distance. Additionally, pragmatics examines the connection between linguistic forms and the people who use them. Studying language through the lens of pragmatics helps us understand what people really mean, their beliefs, their intentions, and the types of actions they take when they communicate, such as making requests. Pragmatics focuses on exploring the meaning of language in relation to its context (Ndraha et al., 2022). In line with this, Panther (2022) mentioned in his book "Introduction to Cognitive Pragmatics" that pragmatics is interested in the meaning of use of a linguistic unit, that is, the impact that the situation of communication and the discourse context has on its meaning. Furthermore, communication involves more than simply grasping the meanings of words; it also requires understanding what speakers intend with their statements. This

understanding falls under the study of pragmatics (Saadullah et al., 2024). One function of pragmatics is to demonstrate how the same content can have different meanings in various contexts. For effective communication, both the speaker and listener must understand the contextual background of utterances, as their meanings can change depending on the setting. Analyzing the speaker's intentions and goals helps us understand their speech acts, leading to a clearer comprehension of what the speaker means. Speech act theory is a branch of pragmatics that examines how language is used not just to convey information, but also to carry out actions. According to (Yule, 1996), "Speech act is a study of how the speakers and hearers use language. Speech act is actions that performed via utterances." Speech act theory was first forwarded by British philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) in his lecture "How to Do Things with Words". He divides speech acts into three types, namely locution, illocution and perlocution. A locutionary act refers to the act of producing a meaningful linguistic expression or utterance. An illocutionary act involves making an utterance that carries specific intentions, such as commanding, warning, or performing an action. Simply, illocutionary meaning can either be direct or indirect and the act is supposed to be done. In contrast, a perlocutionary act is the effect or response generated by an utterance. In today's political landscape, X has become a fundamental tool for politicians to communicate with the public and each other. They use language in everyday situations and create statements that fit the context. Everyone communicates with others using language, but the skill and the ability of how they communicate to others can vary (Yule, 1996). Politicians utilize social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter) to engage in debates that can sometimes lead to controversies or discussions. They use X to express their views right away to their followers, to highlight their accomplishments, to attack their opponents, and sometimes to spread such information or counteract rival propaganda, which can escalate into public disputes. In Pakistan, X is counted as an effective channel for public perlocutionary outcomes e.g., call for rallying supporters. Politicians frequently call on their supporters to take part in protest marches or rallies, using persuasive language to encourage action. Politicians, in specific Imran Khan (the former Prime Minister of Pakistan) has been utilizing X (twitter) more frequently to get in touch and communicate with his followers and the public. He often calls up various reactions from his public, making them model subjects for analyzing perlocutionary acts they express. The current study examines the perlocutionary acts, the effects of utterances on the audience, in Imran Khan's X post (attached at Appendix A), analyzing how his linguistic choices influence public opinion and trigger responses from his followers.

### **Research Objectives**

- To analyze the perlocutionary act of Imran Khan's X post on his followers' political actions.
- To investigate how language is employed in his post to influence public opinion and to achieve perlocutionary outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

- What are the predominant perlocutionary outcomes observed in response to IK X post?
- How does the language used in X post influence public opinion to achieve perlocutionary outcomes?

### **Statement of Problem**

In Pakistan, political discourse is often marked by hostility and polarization, with political leaders leveraging speeches and social media to influence public sentiment and mobilize their supporters. Imran Khan, a prominent political leader, has garnered significant attention for his impactful use of rhetoric, particularly on platforms like X (formerly Twitter). His choice of words has been linked to the mobilization of protests and strong public reactions. However, with a ban on his speeches, Imran Khan's social media activity, particularly his posts calling

for protests against opponents and government policies, has become a focal point of public and academic interest. This study tends to investigate the perlocutionary effects of the X posts of Imran Khan on public reaction. This study seems to analyze the perlocutionary acts of X post and how language use for posts incites or influences reader and evokes reactions among masses. This research aims to highlight the role of social media platforms in shaping political and societal discourses and attitudes in Pakistan.

### **Significance of the study**

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to the field of linguistics by applying speech act theory to the realm of digital communication. It sheds light on how politicians use language on social media to connect with their audiences, helping us better understand the ways in which political leaders shape public perceptions and influence actions. Moreover, current research would also contribute to the existing body of knowledge on political communication in our increasingly digital world. By analyzing Imran Khan's X post, this study also provides insights into how social media can be a powerful tool for political influence and public engagement.

### **Limitations**

There are multiple limitations within this study. First of all, the present study focuses exclusively on English and Urdu comments on the tweets which probably misses huge diversity of opinions expressed in various other languages or dialects. Lack of the entire range of audience reactions—As this research focuses on publicly available posts and engagement metrics, it may not fully capture the spectrum of audience responses. Finally, the issue of verifying the authenticity of follower accounts adds another layer of challenge that may affect engagement reliability. As a whole, these limitations suggest that the findings may not be generalizable to other political figures or contexts.

### **Delimitations**

Researchers delimited their approach by focusing solely on X as a social media platform. Analysis is restricted to Imran Khan's single X post/ tweet to call for protest against the proposed constitutional amendments. Moreover, to keep things manageable, the focus is on the available responses of post to analyze the impact it has on the audience. By looking at direct responses and engagement metrics, we get a good sense of how Khan's messages resonated with people during this important moment.

### **Literature Review**

The study of perlocutionary acts, a concept introduced by Austin (1962) in *How to Do Things with Words*, focuses the effects that impact the audience, extending beyond their literal or intended meanings. In the context of political communication, the study of perlocutionary acts provides an insight into the way political leaders' speech acts influence their audience's emotions, beliefs, and actions, either by persuading or by manipulating them.

### **Perlocutionary Acts in Political Discourse**

Political discourse often relies on rhetoric style specifically designed to shape public narrative, instigate emotions, or call for some form of actions. Researchers have pointed out that perlocutionary acts in political communication can seem to occur in diverse forms such as persuasive and pressuring. For example, Chilton (2004) said that political language often operates discursive tools to employ rhetoric for constructing ideologies and articulating power dynamics. In line with this, Wodak (2009) highlighted those strategic goals of political discourse serves the purpose of reaching particular effects on the audience, through linguistic choices.

### **Social media as a Source to Perlocutionary Acts**

Political leaders directly interact, to have real-time communication with their audience, by using social media platforms like X (formerly called Twitter). Researchers have investigated how these platforms assist the performative nature of political interactions. Van Dijk (2011) points out that due to the reach of posts, social media provides a unique space for perlocutionary effects. These perlocutionary effects can be both intentional and unintentional. Furthermore, Ahmed (2020) points out that strategic linguistic choices are significant to maximize its impact on audience through social media posts. This is specifically related to political leaders as their posts frequently have dual functions: shaping public narratives and directing their audience.

### **Linguistic Strategies in Political Leaders' X Posts**

In the context of political communication, research on X uncovers some specific linguistic choices that are strategically designed to instigate/ provoke perlocutionary effects. These includes:

***Emotive Language:*** Research by Tumasjan et al. (2010), point out that political leaders often used words that are fully charged with emotions to draw out effectively strong reactions and unified support.

***Rhetorical Devices:*** techniques like rhetorical questions, repetition, and metaphor are employed to stress upon key points, important messages, and connect/ engage the audience. (Charteris-Black, 2011).

***Interactivity and Engagement:*** According to Kreiss (2016), political leaders frequently use direct address (for-instance, “You” and “We”) and hashtags to promote a sense of belongingness and foster discussions.

Adding to the above literature, Fitriyani and Prayitno (2023) stated “perlocutionary speech act is the kind of speech acts that influences the audience actions”. In the same vein, Rahardi (2020) highlights that the perlocutionary act has a ability to create a significant impact on public behavior, opinion, and attitudes. The research showed that these actions may cause various outcomes such as influencing the public, shaping their perceptions, indicating particular meaning to the audience, and stirring certain responses from the public. Rahardi (2020) research effectively shows that external context plays a vital role in how the messages posted on social media are received by the audience and how they respond to the message. This research framework is significant for analyzing political communication on platforms like X, where linguistic choices are strategically employed to achieve specific perlocutionary outcomes. A perlocutionary speech act is a kind of speech that can perform an act of psychological influencing another person. The aims of perlocutionary speech acts are to influence the other person (Fitriyani & Prayitno, 2023). The findings of the research indicate that perlocutionary speech acts in educational parenting discourse on TikTok include: perlocutionary speech acts of commands, requests, appeals, and giving advice. Depending on the utterances of the speaker, the influence or effect can vary accordingly. The effectiveness of perlocutionary acts can depend on numerous factors, including the speaker's intentions and the contextual interpretation by the audience (Kissine, 2008). For instance, even if a speaker does not plan to provoke a particular response, their statement may still lead to unintended consequences. This highlights the complexity of communication in digital platforms where messages can be rapidly disseminated and interpreted in diverse ways.

### **Gaps in Existing Research**

Despite considerable work on political discourse and social media, the specific studies on the perlocutionary dimension, on political leaders' X posts remain limited. Most research addresses illocutionary intent or audience reception without fully exploring the intermediary effects of language as an action itself.

## Methodology

A qualitative descriptive approach has been employed in the current study, more specifically it is a content analysis, as the research revolves around the language used on social media, especially X, by politicians to reach out their audience and followers. Hence, the *qualitative* approach examines and develops an understanding of the meaning that people or groups want to share with their supporters and how politicians used language in tweets to convince them to carry out certain actions. Qualitative research using *descriptive* method is the research that identifies, categorizes, and analyzes the data collected and aims to present results in the form of descriptive data, namely sentences or expressions that carry perlocutionary speech act meanings in political discourse on the social media platform X. *Content analysis* method has been utilized to describe/ define specific linguistic elements, themes, ideas or concepts present in textual/ qualitative data.

## Theoretical Underpinning

This study utilizes the Speech Act and perlocutionary acts along with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework, developed by Michael Halliday, to analyze the perlocutionary effects of Imran Khan's tweets concerning constitutional amendments. Central to this framework are three meta functions of language: ideational, interpersonal as well as textual. These meta functions are realized by *Field*; the subject matter of the interaction, *Tenor*; the relationship between speaker and audience and *Mode*; the form of the interaction. This approach is useful in analyzing the linguistic and pragmatic strategies that Khan used in his tweets to achieve specific responses from his followers. Through using SFL, the study identifies how Imran Khan achieves his objectives of persuasive speaking, mobilizing people's support and responding to opposing ideas. The field analyses the key themes of Khan's tweet, such as political reform and justice, while the Tenor explores IK's authoritative position as a former prime minister, and its impact on the audience engagement. The Mode aspect analyses how Twitter's specific characteristics, such as short message length and integration of multimedia tools, contribute to the process of effective communication. All together, these elements offer a theoretical lens to examine how Khan's language influences the response of the audience and how they help in attaining desired perlocutionary effects.

## Data collection

The data has been collected from X tweet of Imran Khan and comments on that tweet. For the data collection documentation technique has been used by capturing screenshots of posts and comments and writing down the relevant data for analysis. X post (tweet) and comments are the primary data of the research. The data has been selected from the official twitter account of Imran Khan and organized with regards to the research questions and cross-checked by the researchers. The data has been analyzed by using roadmap outlined by Cresswell and Cresswell (2017) for data analysis, which comprises following steps:

Firstly, collect data by taking screenshots of tweets and comments and organize the data by writing it down. Secondly, read each extract. Moreover, a content analysis approach is used to describe the particular linguistics elements, themes, and ideas from the collected data. Highlighting and emphasizing main elements and themes to analyze how Imran Khan uses his language in a tweet to influence public opinion and achieve perlocutionary results. Lastly, turn the analyzed data into description passage to report the result and findings of the analysis by describing the themes included in the post and comments and the perlocutionary act being performed.

## Population of study

The prominent leader Imran Khan, former Prime Minister of Pakistan and chairman of political party Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf, has been selected to analyze the tweets and the

targeted data has been selected from the social media platform i.e., X. The tweet posted on 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 2024 has been analyzed while conducting the research.

### **Sampling technique**

In the present research purposive sampling technique has been utilized. It is a non-probability sampling method for data collection. Main keywords and articles' title has been used to narrow down the source for research. The purposive sampling method (also known as selective and judgmental sampling) has been employed to deliberately select specific content/ comments to be analyzed that is relevant to the purpose of the study and research objectives.

### **Data analysis**

This tweet by Imran Khan serves as a profound example of perlocutionary acts, where the language used aims to evoke specific emotional responses and catalyze tangible actions among his audience. The speech act theory was used as a lens to analyze the perlocutionary acts of Imran Khan's post on masses. This analysis explored the ways in which the X post mobilized the people by inspiring them but triggering their sentiments to come out for protest against the constitutional amendment.

### **Religious and Cultural Resonance**

The tweet opens with the phrase "La ilaha illallah (There is no God, but One), means freedom." This statement is central part of Islamic beliefs, and every Muslim people has strong effects of this statement because it is related to their Islamic values. This phrase has developed a link between audience and the religion with of concept of freedom as identity of Muslims against oppression. His use of terms such as "martyrs" and the reverence that those who give up their lives for a worthy cause are honored in Islamic culture are phrases that are meant to elicit such feelings. The religious allusion that Khan made has a perlocutionary impact through implicature suggesting that supporting of his cause is religious and moral obligation. This kind of use of religious language is meant to call the audience to show the loyalty for religion and state and this language in evoking them to offer one's life in the name of Islam and Pakistan. When calling for a particular ideology, Khan restates religious principles because it sanctions his leadership images a man of faith; it fortifies his followers' directions and presents his political aims as compatible with their faith. This post has perlocutionary effects on the readers as we can see in one of the comments on this post, as shown in following figure. This selection of language discourse by Imran Khan has serious effects on readers mind because in Pakistan religious sensationalism is on the peak and people can be easily triggered in the name of religion. He has also used the sentence, "The positions of Syed Hassan Nasrallah and Ismail Haniya are very high (in the eyes of God)" (picture attached at Appendix B). Semantically this statement is sympathizing with the people of Palestine but pragmatically he is evoking the masses by asking them to sacrifice their lives like Palestinians who are fighting without any fear. People in Pakistan has strong sentiments about Palestinian martyrs and we can see it in one of the comments (picture attached at Appendix C) shows the perlocution of this post.

### **Historical and Nationalistic Imagery**

Imran Khan has given the references of historical figures such as Tipu Sultan and Bahadur Shah Zafar, as he said, "*I would rather be martyred fighting for my country like Tipu Sultan, than die like Bahadur Shah Zafar.*" These symbols show resistance against the colonial forces. Tipu Sultan was a courageous Muslim leader who had fought against the British till his death. He is preparing the masses to die like Tipu Sultan rather like Bahadur Shah Zafar who surrendered to British and accepted his defeat. This historical analogy was used to create sensationalism and provocation to show nationalism and patriotism against oppression. Historical personalities are used here to have perlocutionary effects so that the followers

should consider the fight of Khan not as a personal vendetta but as an objective to stand for nation. This synthesis of historical and cultural allusions serves to solidify the national identity and allegiance to the opposition among supporters, who will thus view their conduct as part of some epic struggle for liberation.

### **Polarization and Vilification of Political Opponents**

The use of phrase “Gang of Three” referred to the PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement). The function of these terms is to denounce his political rivals by portraying them as evil agents who are conspiring to ruin Pakistan’s governance framework. He draws a clear line between himself and his opponents by declaring their policies against law because they are using state institutions and ignoring rule of law. This strategy of polarization creates a perlocutionary effect on the followers to develop a disposition of mistrust and anger in him towards his opponents.

In this part of the tweet, Khan’s language is to promote his political fight as one that is between the people and the corrupt politicians. This form of rhetoric is meant to further enrage his followers, turning them against any forms of compromise and he paints his political rivals as enemies of his followers, especially in regard to their liberties. The continued vilification has perlocutionary force in which his followers repeat what he has said, share similar sentiments, and feel that they are fighting a common enemy.

### **Mobilization through Call to Action**

In the final part of his tweet, Khan directly calls on his supporters, as he says “*All my efforts have been to liberate you, so now it is time that you break the shackles of fear and come out (for your rights). It's time to Do or Die!*” His words move his followers to face fear and go forward, he sanctions the participation in protests as a necessity and even as patriotic act that will help shape Pakistan’s future. This language is used to evoke the sentiments of the public to show instant response. The perlocutionary effect here is potent: he is motivating the audience that as nation we are failed if we are not taking any action against the tyrants, and he mobilizes followers to demolish any doubts and engage in protests. The fact that protests continued to be observed despite the ban of X shows the efficiency of this perlocutionary strategy that how his words influence the public for reaction and mobilization.

### **Public Reactions and Mobilization**

As a reaction to his message the followers from all over the Pakistan came on roads of Rawalpindi and Islamabad for protest against the constitutional amendments. The twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad were jammed by the government, schools and offices were closed, roads were blocked, and due to the worst condition armed forces took control of Islamabad for keeping peace.

### **Discussions and Findings**

The profound impact of Imran Khan’s post is reflected through public reaction and response, despite legal ban on X in Pakistan. This post was seen by over a million people and the diction of post was successful in inspiring the masses for reaction. There was a huge protest recorded in Islamabad and millions of people were present there. This protest demonstrates the efficient nature of Imran Khan’s perlocutionary approach, where the use of language was successfully utilized to evoke the action from people. He has strategically used the historic and nationalistic allusion for increasing the perlocutionary impact and was successful in managing to mobilize his followers into a movement. The comments of people under the post shows the strong emotional attachment of people towards the messages as they are showing consensus with his support for Palestine and Iran and they are admiring his valor against the corrupt elite of Pakistan. The reaction of people in the form of comments and protest shows the perlocutionary effects of the terms like freedom, justice, and sacrifice. People were under the influence of these terminologies as they are echoing back his words with sentiments and

showing collective reactions. This analysis explains the power of perlocutionary acts in political communication, revealing the aspects of language in evoking emotional and physical responses on a larger scale.

## Conclusion

This research has explored the perlocutionary effects of Imran Khan's recent X post related to call for the protest against the 26<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment proposed by the parliament of Pakistan. This study utilized the lens of speech act theory as a theoretical framework to analyze the impact of diction used in the post to mobilize the public. Imran Khan has used historical figures and Islamic perspective to create sensationalism in public. He has carefully selected the diction of his post. The research analysis has explored the role of perlocutionary acts in shaping public attitudes and behaviors by explaining how selection of language serves as a catalyst to provoke people for reactions. This research analysis also explains the importance of social media platforms and reflects the reason of ban on X in Pakistan because in masses are using X for posting their personalized political and social thoughts and expressions without any hesitation. Therefore, the research reflects the purpose and importance of X posts in mobilizing the public and inciting them for the reactions.

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