SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF TELEGRAM MESSAGES ON CORONAVIRUS: SOCIAL MEDIA AND FAKE NEWS IN UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT:

The digital communication across the world has been accumulated by the development of social media, including Uzbekistan. Since the confirmation of the first case of the COVID-19 in Uzbekistan, a large number of the unconfirmed news on the subject had gone viral on social media which are largely considered by the WHO (World Health Organization) to be false. The aim of this study is to analyze some of those messages on Telegram messenger were circulated across the Uzbekistan. Several messages collected between March-November, 2020 were analyzed using the framework of Austin's Speech Acts with insights from the Conversational Maxims of Grice's Cooperative Principles.

Keywords: Social Media, Speech act, Coronavirus, Digital Communication, Fake news, perlocution, locution, directness, warning, provocation.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Today the pace of technological innovation has enhanced so intense as it enabled people to access social communication and interaction easily. With the advent of social media as a communication channel, the dissemination of messages and information to a larger number of people has become even more widespread. Social media has been defined as websites and applications that have been developed and designed to facilitate the effective transmission and dissemination of online content (Hudson, 2019). The emergence of social media as a communication channel It is a collection of new digital media channels through which people can connect and share information about personal, general, and global issues. A plethora of social media platforms have emerged as a result of the advancement of digital communication and the resulting increase in social interaction. Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, Pinterest, Snapchat, and YouTube are just a few examples.

The importance of Telegram messages in shaping or shattering Uzbekistan's peaceful atmosphere, unity, and trust cannot be overstated. It is a well-known fact that messages and news about the Coronavirus pandemic circulated on Telegram have a great deal to do with the implicit and explicit intentions of the writers or initiators of such messages. The current study is an attempt to decipher the illocutionary act, perlocutionary move, and level of observance of Grice's Conversational Maxims of such messages on the Telegram platform. The value of this study lies in the fact that it will enlighten telegram users on the true motivation of those who initiate forwarded messages on the App.

2. MATERIALS:

The internet sources related to the messages in terms of corona virus infection were taken as a main source for this research. Comments, audio and written messages that circulated on social media, namely telegram messenger served as a basis.

Every day, people are bombarded with a massive amount of information. Fake news

becomes part of an information stream, and in the general population, it has a negative impact on the construction of social reality. Fake news is a type of news content that contains deliberate misinformation and fabrication that circulates on social media platforms and, on occasion, in traditional mainstream media. Unfortunately, in some occasions, this type of news is presented as a fact even in some popular news websites. In Uzbekistan, Telegram messenger has become a popular social media platform that has served as a conduit for the spread of fake news. The Telegram app is the world's most popular text and voice messaging app, allowing users to freely message one another via mobile and desktop devices. The importance of Telegram in enlightening people in Uzbekistan cannot be overstated. People receive critical information in a very short period of time thanks to this app. It is also used as a tool to spread fake news. The analysis of Coronavirus messages considered to be fake news spread on messenger in Uzbekistan is the crux of this research. The principle of speech act is used to properly carry out this task. Many messages have been circulated on Telegram by many users since the confirmation of the index case of Covid-19 in Uzbekistan. The majority of these messages are about health and other issues that are alleged to be fake news. The purpose of this study is to examine the acts contained in such messages as well as the sociocultural effects such messages have on Uzbekistan.

3. METHODS:

This study is entirely based on data derived from Covid-19-related news, which was widely circulated on Telegram messenger by many Uzbeks during the research period (March – November, 2020).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

This research is primarily a pragmatic exercise based on Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Theory and the Conversational Maxims of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principles. Austin's Speech Acts Theory can be traced back to a lecture he gave in Oxford in 1952–1954 titled "Words and deeds" (Collavin, 2011). Austin's Speech Acts Theory, as modified by Searle (1969), defines five types of illocutionary acts based on their perlocutionary effects on the audience in Studies in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis. Grice's Conversational Maxims insights, woven around the concept of Cooperative Principles, provide a solid foundation for this study. Grice's Conversational Maxims are a type of implicature that explains the relationships between utterances and what can be inferred from them.

Grice (1975) proposes that participants in a conversation follow a general "cooperative principle" that should emerge naturally when a communicative conversation is taking place. "Make your conversational contribution such as is required by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged," he says. It is undeniably true that, in some cases, speakers in a discussion may purposefully or unintentionally fail to fulfill a maxim in various ways (Grice, 1975). Such speakers may violate, flout, infringe, suspend, or simply refuse to follow a maxim. In this study, there will be a discussion about the quality of maxim observance by the authors of Telegram messages on Covid-19 who do so with the intention of achieving specific goals.

5. RESULTS:

A relevant investigation regarding fake news on social media in the republic of Uzbekistan illustrates that each of the news emerged in distinctive forms serving to portray the authors purpose of such news. Three different messages purposefully selected from

Telegram messenger which are obviously seen to be described as fake new.

Rumor:

Rumor is defined as "unverified information statements that circulate about topics that people perceive to be important; occur in situations of ambiguity, threat, or potential threat; and are used by people attempting to make sense or manage risk." Di Fonzo's (1994). Rumours thrive when people do not have access to the truth about information that is of general concern. Though they differ in some ways, rumors and fake news are two phenomena that are inextricably linked. This is due to the fact that people frequently describe pieces of news that are either confirmed as fake or remain unverified as rumors (Kwon, et al., 2013). Similarly, some pieces of information that are obviously true are frequently described as Rumours when the truth remains hidden. The majority of fake news in Uzbekistan circulates as Rumours on social media. Since the confirmation of the Covid-19 index case in Uzbekistan in March 2020, social media, particularly Telegram, has been inundated with rumors. These rumors include some myths about Covid-19 prevention and treatment.

Warning:

It is worth noting that not all fabricated news is dangerous for human consumption, as some segments of society believe. A significant amount of fake news in Uzbekistan is intended to enlighten or warn people away from engaging in activities that are deemed unhealthy. It sometimes comes with some advice or direction and commits people to doing something good and helpful. Below is audio message that went viral on Telegram in Uzbekistan which, though adjudged by the Ministry of Health as fake news, is considered enlightening and helpful: "Breaking news"

All we need to do in order to "compete with corona virus" is burning incense regularly, rinse the throat with alcohol and vinegar. People who eat ginger do not get the coronavirus'.

Incisiveness:

When the deadly new coronavirus found in China, most of the telegram channels spread false news as China . It is roared in the massages that it was Chine's biological weapon and it is devised several years before and they are capable of inciting the Uzbek people against China .

These types of the comments frequently evoke tension and panic in any volatile society. Below some of these comments which were widely circulated in Uzbekistan during the period of coronavirus pandemic.

'Chine boasted the viruses could be "artificially manipulated into an emerging human disease virus, then weaponized and unleashed in a way never seen before '.

Another is "China is planning to invade the world and intended to kill human beings in order to decrease the number of the increasing population'.

'Coronavirus infection is being deliberately spread by soft drink manufacturers'.

6. DISCUSSION:

This research is primarily a practical exercise. As a result, the data analysis, as well as the discussion and findings, are based on Austin's concept of Speech Acts and Grice's Conversational Maxims. Telegram messages (news) for analysis will be referred to as extracts in the analysis from now on.

Each extract will be evaluated based on the type of illocutionary act performed, the perlocutionary effects on the audience, and the degree of adherence to Grice's Conversational Maxims.

Extract 1:

'COVID-19 vaccines are dangerous because they are produces so quickly. All we need to do in order to "compete with corona virus" is burning incense regularly, rinse the throat with alcohol and vinegar. People who eat ginger do not get the coronavirus'. Please, send this messages to your relatives and friends as much as possible'.

Act Type (Illocution)	Perlocution	Maxim (Observance)
Directives (warning)	Instigating, inciting	Quality (flouting)

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

This extract is taken from one of the messages from telegram channel that once spread widely on social media. At that time, there was no exact treatment for Covid-19 and local people were eager to try any medicine or advice which is useful to beat with virus as none of the vaccines were available then. However, this messages is not true as well as it has not been justified by any health organizations in Uzbekistan.

The illocutionary act in this extract is directive. The message directs the reader that it is sent 'to relatives and friends' and warns his or her audience not to touch the alleged vaccine, which is described as "deadly." The message has some perlocutionary effects on the reader as well. The reader is instigated and incited to oppose China and anything related to China. The writer intentionally violates Grice's quality maxim in order for this message to have a strong impact on the reader's mind. According to Grice, a speaker violates the quality maxim when he or she says something that is clearly false. In the case of the above extract, the message is obviously false because, at the time of conducting this research, no vaccine for Covid-19 prevention had been brought to Uzbekistan from China.

Extract 2:

Chine boasted the viruses could be "artificially manipulated into an emerging human disease virus, then weaponized and unleashed in a way never seen before '.

Another is "China is planning to invade the world and intended to kill human beings in order to decrease the number of the increasing population'.

'Coronavirus infection is being deliberately spread by soft drink manufacturer'.

Act Type (Illocution	Perlocution	Maxim (Observance)
Assertives (claimimg); Directives (warning)	Inciting, thought provoking	Quality (flouting)

The time when this messages were went viral on social media, many used to claim that corona virus was deliberately spread by China to invade the world without war. This message is one of that claim. It is, however, considered fake news because there is no verifiable proof that it is true. In fact, the text itself confirms this, considering the statement, "who knows the fact.

Fake news serves a variety of purposes. One of these goals is to persuade text recipients to believe and act in ways that are either beneficial or detrimental to them (Taiwo et al, 2017). The text writer can achieve this goal by modifying the text's language.

The writer's perlocutionary motive, without a doubt, is to incite the people against China. This is not surprising given that it occurred at a time when many people around the world, including prominent world leaders, believed China had questions to answer about Covid-19. A careful examination of this message would prompt one to question its veracity. This is a violation of Grice's Conversational Maxim. The writer clearly violates the quality maxim by providing information that is believed to be false and lacking adequate evidence.

Extract 3:

"Attention!!! The government of Uzbekistan proclaimed to make internet free for all citizens during the pandemic period so as to stay at home and to control the spread of the disease. Moreover, the government is planning to distribute 500 000 soum to every family as a compensation ".

Act Type (Illocution	Perlocution	Maxim (Observance)
Assertives (claiming); Directives (ordering)	Reassuring, enlightening	Quantity (flouting)

The above message conveys information that was later discovered to be false news. This message went viral on WhatsApp across the country, capturing the attention of many Uzbeks. The falsified news spread during a period when the majority of people were asked to stay at home in order to control the expansion of Covid-19.

The message's actions are both assertive and directive. The writer directs his or her audience to take action at the end of the message. The writer violates the quantity maxim in two ways. First, more information is provided than is required. There is an instance of excessive repetition of the same ideas. In this case, only the necessary information is provided. The message, on the other hand, is reassuring and enlightening.

7. CONCLUSION:

The evolution of social media has undoubtedly improved digital communication in today's technologically advanced world. Telegram, a social media platform, was discovered to be a powerful medium through which some fake news about Coronavirus spread throughout Uzbekistan. Austin's Speech Acts were used to analyze the data. Theory based on Grice's Conversational Maxims. It has been discovered that the writers of those messages carefully manipulate some linguistic features in order to cause those messages to perform some illocutionary acts as well as trigger some perlocutionary moves in the minds of the readers. To achieve the desired result, they deliberately violate Grice's quality and quantity maxims.

It is true that besides the communication, language is a tool to achieves certain goals by particular users. As a result, the analysis conducted in this study will encourage other language researchers and non-linguists to pay close attention to the role of language in every communicative encounter.

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