

Pragmatic Competence of Non-Native English Speakers: A Speech Act Analysis of Shashi Tharoor's Oxford Union Address

Mariam Arooj

MS Scholar, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Pakistan
noorainfatima89@gmail.com

Ali Furqan Syed

Lecturer, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Pakistan
alifurqan.syed95@gmail.com

Nimra Nawaz

BS English, Government College Women University Sialkot, Pakistan
nimranawazcheema@gmail.com

Abstract

Cross-cultural communication is crucial in today's globalized world. This study examines the pragmatic competency of non-native English speaker by taking Shashi Tharoor's impactful lecture at the Oxford Union as an example. Tharoor, an Indian diplomat and politician, who is regarded as the Noam Chomsky of India by the media outlets like The Hindu, News 18 and The Wire due to his work in linguistics and social criticism, delivered a thought-provoking address that pinpoints the legacy of British colonialism in India and highlighting the historical context in educational setting. The analysis focuses on Tharoor's strategic use of various speech acts, such as representatives, expressive, and directives, to enhance his pragmatic competence and persuasive strategies implied behind words. Qualitative Descriptive research methodology has been used to quantify the results. The theoretical framework of the research is Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) classification of the speech acts to identify the category of the Speech Acts to find the Pragmatic Competence. The study reveals that, despite being a non-native English speaker, Tharoor demonstrates an impressive level of pragmatic ability. He adeptly notices the contextual factors such as the audience who are listening to his speech, occasion, and dominant historical narratives by adapting his vocabulary accordingly. Tharoor's thorough awareness of linguistic and cultural nuances, as well as his ability to apply suitable pragmatic methods has allowed him to effectively engage the audience and present a persuasive argument. The findings of this study highlight more horizons to work on the pragmatic competence of non-native English speakers, challenging the widely held aspect that language skill alone defines effective cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: *Cross-cultural communication, Non-native English speaker, Oxford Union address, Pragmatic competence, Speech acts analysis*

Introduction

Language is vital for communication and societal interaction, influencing how we connect with others. Proficiency in spoken languages enhances pragmatic competence, which affects social interactions and the understanding of nuances and cultural references. This competence can differ based on language skills, as well as individual communication styles, social abilities, and personality traits. Some individuals may find social situations easier, while others may need more time to develop these skills (Bhatt, 2012).

Communication is meaningful when it incorporates context and language, utilizing both verbal and non-verbal methods such as words, gestures, and expressions. Pragmatic competence is essential for understanding others' intentions and interpreting non-literal language, which enhances communication and reduces misunderstandings. Strong pragmatic skills foster rapport and social connections, as individuals who can read social cues and use language effectively are more likely to build trust. This competence is vital for navigating social interactions, developing empathy, and maintaining relationships, as it aids in conflict resolution and minimizes miscommunication (Herman, 2015).

Verbal and non-verbal communications reflect the thoughts of both speakers and listeners, with the speaker as the source and the listener as the target. The main aim is to convey messages accurately, but interpretations can vary based on individual experiences and cultural

backgrounds. Pragmatics examines these differences, which can lead to varying levels of understanding across cultures. Social contexts also play a significant role in shaping communication styles, as individuals adjust their language according to the formality of the situation (Laughlin, 2015).

Strong pragmatic ability is essential for understanding others' intentions and viewpoints, facilitating effective communication. This competence fosters peaceful interactions and helps resolve conflicts smoothly. It also plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication, where differing standards and expressions can lead to misunderstandings. By recognizing and respecting cultural variations, individuals can navigate these differences successfully and enhance their communication (Daniel, 2017).

Pragmatic competence is the ability to use language effectively in social contexts, encompassing an understanding of social and cultural norms. It involves more than grammar and vocabulary, including skills like using idiomatic expressions and performing appropriate speech acts such as requests and apologies. Recognizing the tasks accomplished through language, such as evaluating a speaker's intent and understanding the illocutionary force behind speech acts, is crucial. This competence enables individuals to interpret meanings and respond suitably in various communicative situations (Andrade, 2014).

Tharoor's (2015) Oxford Union speech advocated for British reparations to former colonies, showcasing the effective communication skills of non-native English speakers. Tharoor reminded the British of their colonial history and its enduring effects on the subcontinent. His approach illustrates how non-native speakers use techniques like civility, requests, and indirect language to express their views while being mindful of cultural nuances. They also interpret non-verbal cues, adapting their language to align with various customs, which highlights their awareness of cultural differences in communication.

Statement of the Problem

A lot of challenges can be faced by the non-native English speakers while dealing with the pragmatic competence in the formal settings. As a matter of fact, it aims to highlight, how non-native English speakers use speech acts to negotiate during social relationships, to convey meanings in a formal English-speaking environment taking the pragmatic competence demonstrated by a non-native English speaker under consideration.

Research Objectives

- 1) To identify the categories of illocutionary speech act used by Shashi Tharoor in his Oxford Union Address
- 2) To analyze Pragmatic Competence of Shashi Tharoor in his Oxford Union Address

Research Questions

- 1) What are the categories of the Illocutionary speech acts employed by Shashi Tharoor in his Oxford Union Address?
- 2) How does Shashi Tharoor employ pragmatic competence in his Oxford Union Address?

Significance of the Study

The analysis of Shashi Tharoor's Oxford Union speech highlights the limitations of focusing solely on one speaker's pragmatic competence and communication style, suggesting that a broader examination including other non-native speakers would yield a more comprehensive understanding. The study specifically investigates Tharoor's illocutionary acts and the influence of the audience on his language use, employing qualitative research methods rooted in speech act theory. It emphasizes the unique context of Tharoor's speech, making it difficult to generalize findings to other non-native speakers. The research underscores the challenges faced by non-native speakers in formal settings and offers insights into their pragmatic skills, which could inform language teaching and enhance communication strategies for public

speakers and diplomats engaging with diverse audiences.

Literature Review

Pragmatics involves understanding acceptable language use, informed by how speakers respond to compliments. Compliments express positive attributes that benefit both the speaker and the recipient. However, misunderstandings can occur in cross-cultural interactions, particularly regarding the giving and receiving of praise, due to differing traditions (Deda, 2013).

Saleem (2021), first proposed the idea of field language communicative competence. He emphasized the value of focusing on the linguistic domains we wish to become proficient in and highlighted out. The scant literature is about this area of communication and its proficiency. He concluded that communicative competence in field languages is dependent on more than the knowledge of and ability to use a given field language in ways that are grammatical and socio-culturally appropriate based on the results of his research, which was done in West Africa. This argument raises potential questions about the purpose of formal education, which does not entail field language experience but rather focuses on improving language learners' communicative ability in terms of native speakers.

Chomsky (1965) first proposed the concept of pragmatic competence to acknowledge that language users are aware of the relationship between spoken language and the particular context in which it is used. The foundational distinction between proficiency and the concentration on performance at first caused many to place pragmatic phenomena in the performance domain, omitting pragmatics from linguistic investigations that instead concentrated on the competency level, which is mostly related to syntax. Secondly, the notion that pragmatic processing was linked to a particular, separately analyzed module as a traditional Chomsky an-intended competency was first refuted by the modular theory of mind. Pragmatics was not taken into consideration because language use involves several aspects (such as the understanding of speech acts, the computation of implicatures, the turn-taking system, etc.).

Speech is a tool for achieving specific goals. When effective language is used, it clarifies the speaker's viewpoint, making it easier for the audience to understand. A speech conveys more than just words; it aims to deliver useful and logical information. The significance of pragmatic competence for communicative competence is demonstrated in this research. Additionally, it shows how much second language learners' communicative proficiency in the classroom is impacted by their acquisition of pragmatic competence. He gave remarkable hype to competence as a practical approach, taking into consideration certain communicative contexts, like variations in sociocultural contexts. The central idea in the pragmatics of second languages has been covered in several ways (Yazan, 2012).

Searle explains that speech conveys information and performs an action known as a speech act. Verbal communication, or speech acts, combines the concepts of speech (the utterance) and act (the action performed). There are three main types of speech acts: 1. Locutionary acts 2. Illocutionary acts 3. Perlocutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts influence the emotions, thoughts, or behaviors of listeners, affecting their beliefs, attitudes, or actions. Searle (1969) categorizes illocutionary acts into five groups: (a) Assertives: Statements that commit the speaker to the truth of what they express, such as asserting, claiming, or reporting. (b) Directives: Requests or commands aimed at influencing the listener's behavior to achieve a specific outcome. (c) Commissive: Commitments by the speaker to perform certain actions in the future, like promises or offers. (d) Expressives: Statements that convey the speaker's psychological state, such as expressing regret or congratulations. (e) Declaratives: Utterances that create or change a state of affairs, such as naming, declaring guilt, or starting a war.

Some Chinese language learners think that pragmatic competence is the capability to communicate to accomplish goals by using suitable speech in particular settings and communication skills are broken down into four categories: discourse organization skills, pragmatic language skills, social pragmatic skills, and pragmatic knowledge skills. His categorization of dimensions does have certain limits, though, such as not addressing the psychological aspects of learners. People have distinct ways of doing things when they are in different environments. Conversations with friends tend to be informal and center on the question of whether the message can be communicated in the end. They don't give a damn about some practical knowledge gaps. Thus, pragmatic competence plays an important role in communicative expression. According to Kentmen (2023), the process of speech act often happens when we communicate. A speech act is more seen from the meaning of the action. Speech act analysis now emphasizes utterance. It's evident in everyday speech and certain grammatical constructions. As a byproduct, many people are unaware of what constitutes an illocutionary act and how to arrange them. Additionally, it can be difficult for listeners to determine whether or not the speaker's context was understood by the audience. Of course, the context and the situation of the speaker and listener influence every statement or conversation. Apart from that, sentences have a relationship to speech acts that have any literal sentence expression. Speakers who say a sentence and mean it exactly are the simplest cases of meaning, Searle (1969). As a result, in spoken acts, the meaning of the hearer and speaker are always present.

Yan (2022) stated Communicative competence and pragmatic competence are related, with pragmatic competence emphasizing the learner's capacity to communicate his or her genuine goals, while communicative competency emphasizes language and strategic competence our attention is focused on finding ways to help non-nativespeakers to better incorporate their pragmatic competence into communication. This paper aims to examine the communicative capacity of second language speakers through an analysis of various circumstances and a discussion of local and international ideas and examples.

Despite persistent increases in self-references in cultural artifacts, it is far less evident how other-oriented references have evolved. Furthermore, due to the uncertainty in researchers' definitions of "others," other-oriented references sometimes confuse self-interest and other-interest, making it unclear if increases over time are due to an increase in self-interest or other-interest. For example, some studies treat the word "we" as solely other-oriented, even though "we" expresses the interests of both "me" and "you" combined. There is a distinction between saying "We won the game," which suggests some personal responsibility and credit, and "They lost the game," which implies no personal accountability (Mey, 1994).

Research Methodology

The study utilizes a qualitative descriptive research design to examine Shashi Tharoor's pragmatic competence in his Oxford Union lecture. It involves a detailed analysis of the speech transcript, focusing on speech acts and cultural sensitivity, guided by Searle's Speech Act Theory. Data is collected from publicly available transcripts, with the analysis being iterative and rigorous. Ethical considerations are emphasized, ensuring the protection of sensitive information and participant anonymity. The researcher employs purposive sampling to select speeches from various Asian non-native English speakers, aiming to explore linguistic elements and pragmatic competence, with Tharoor's speech being particularly significant due to his expertise in English and the educational nature of his address. The study applies John Searle's Speech Act theory, which focuses on the psychological aspects of communication, particularly beliefs and intentions. It examines Tharoor's pragmatic competence by analyzing his speech acts through Searle's framework, which categorizes

utterances based on their illocutionary force. This includes identifying various types of speech acts such as requests and statements, and understanding how Tharoor employs them to achieve specific communicative objectives. Searle's classification includes representatives, directives, and commissives, each serving different functions in communication.

Data Analysis

The analysis focuses on the speech acts utilized by Shashi Tharoor in his Oxford Union address, applying Searle's Speech Act Theory to assess his pragmatic competence as a non-native English speaker. The speech acts are categorized and exemplified, revealing Tharoor's use of assertives, expressives, directives, and commissives to convey humor, critique colonialism, present historical data, and argue for reparations. His remarks highlight the impact of British colonial policies on India, the contributions of Indian soldiers in World Wars, and the moral implications of reparations. The analysis illustrates how Tharoor's rhetorical strategies effectively engage the audience while addressing complex historical and ethical issues.

The speech acts present in the speech of Shashi Tharoor which was delivered at the Oxford Union are categorized according to the classification of the Speech Acts provided by John Searle. Here is the detailed analysis of the Speech Acts with examples from the text:

“I, standing here with eight minutes in my hands in this venerable and rather...that as Henry VIII said to his wives. I shall not keep you long” (Assertive).

This illocutionary speech act contributes to the speaker's objective of connecting their public speaking style with Henry VIII's, while also implying brevity in their impending speech through humor.

“But now finding myself the seventh speaker out of eight in what...Henry VIII's last wife must already” (Expressive).

This illocutionary speaking act communicates the speaker's perception of the situation and may elicit empathy or humor from the audience.

“I more or less know what's expected of me but I am not sure how to do it any differently” (Assertive).

“Perhaps what I should do is try and pay attention to the arguments that have been advanced by the Opposition today” (Directive).

By using these Speech Acts, The speaker communicates their intention to pay heed to the points offered by the opposition, indirectly pressing themselves to pursue a specific course of action.

“We had, for example, Sir Richard Ottawa's suggestion...of the colonies was worsened by the experience of British colonialism” (Directive).

Directive illocutionary discourse aims to influence the audience's beliefs, opinions, or actions.

“Well, I stand to offer you the Indian example, Sir Richard. India's share of the world economy when Britain arrived on its shores was 23%” (Assertive).

In this scenario, the speaker is giving data about India's share of the global economy when Britain came.

“By the time the British left it was down to below 4%. Why? Simply because India had been governed for the benefit of Britain” (Assertive).

In this situation, the speaker asserts a claim or states a fact concerning India's declining proportion of the global economy. The speaker explains this collapse to India being controlled for Britain's benefit. This remark is intended to communicate a certain point of view or argument on the impact of British governance on the Indian economy.

“Britain's rise for 200 years was financed...premiered upon the de-industrialization

of India” (Assertive).

In these lines, the speaker asserts or states facts about the relationship between Britain's rise, financial resources, and actions in India. The speaker claims that Britain's rise was fueled by its actions in India, which implies exploitation or pillage. Furthermore, the speaker claims that Britain's industrial revolution was predicated on India's deindustrialization, implying that British policies harmed India's industries.

“The handloom weavers, for example, famed across the world whose products were exported around the world, Britain came right in” (Assertive).

In this statement, the speaker makes a claim or states a fact concerning handloom weavers and their products. The speaker emphasizes the popularity of handloom weavers and their global exports. The expression "Britain came right in" implies that Britain intervened or had a considerable influence on the handloom weaving industry.

“These weavers were making fine muslin as light as woven wear...The products of the dark and satanic mills of the Victoria in England” (Assertive + Description).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech acts to illustrate the harmful impact of Britain's actions on handloom weavers as well as the broader ramifications for India's textile sector. The employment of claims, descriptions, and criticism serves to express the speaker's point of view and emphasizes the exploitative aspect of British colonial policy.

“That meant that the weavers in India became beggars and India went from being a world famous exporter of finished cloth into an importer when from having 27% of the world trade to less than 2%” (Assertive + Explanation).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech actions to illustrate the detrimental impact of the reported events on Indian weavers, as well as the overall fall in India's trade position. The allegations and explanation support the speaker's argument concerning the negative consequences of British colonial policies on India's economy and textile industry.

“Meanwhile, colonialists like Robert...India while taking the Hindi word *loot* into their dictionary as well as their habits” (Assertive + Criticism).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech actions to highlight the alleged corrupt behaviors of colonialists such as Robert Clive, their gain of fortune through stealing and their adoption of Indian phrases and customs. The assertions and critiques serve to express the speaker's point of view while also emphasizing the exploitative character of colonialism.

“And the British had the gall to call him...he did was to ensure that much of the country belonged to him” (Expressive).

The speaker's goal in using this illocutionary speech act is to attack the British for appropriating the title and to emphasize the gap between the British conception of Clive and his actual function in India. The act of criticism contributes to the speaker's understanding of the British colonial mindset and their presumptuous attitude towards India.

“Britain's biggest cash cow...we paid for our oppression” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to show annoyance or indignation about the scenario in which their society or country is financing its tyranny. The claim and criticism combine to underline the speaker's perspective on the paradoxical and unjust nature of the described events.

“And as has been pointed out, the wealthy...Owed their money to transporting 3 million Africans across the waters” (Assertive + Explanation).

By using these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to highlight the role of affluent Victorian British families in benefiting from the slave industry and the major impact it had on

their wealth acquisition. The allegation and explanation support the speaker's point regarding historical injustices and the linkages between money, slavery, and society during that period.

“And in fact, in 1833 ...but to those who had lost their property” (Assertive + Criticism).

By using these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to convey a sense of injustice and disparity in the recompense that followed the abolition of slavery. The assertion and criticism work together to underline the speaker's point of view on the flaws in the compensation system and the lack of reparations for individuals who suffered as slaves.

“I was struck by the fact that your Wi-Fi password...One of those who benefited from this compensation”(Representative).

The speaker's goal in adopting these illocutionary speaking acts is to underline the situation's irony or conflict. The remark and criticism combine to communicate the speaker's perspective on the paradoxical features of celebrating Mr. Gladstone while noting the profit his family earned from the reparations linked with slavery.

“Staying with India between 15 million and 29 million Indians died of starvation in British...Europeans as reserve stockpiles” (Assertive + Criticism).

By deploying these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to call attention to the tragic consequences of British-induced famines in India, as well as Churchill's alleged participation in exacerbating the Bengal famine. The assertions and criticism help to express the speaker's perspective on historical events while emphasizing the detrimental effects of British colonial practices on the Indian populace.

“He said that the starvation of anyway underfed Bengalis mattered much less than that of sturdy Greeks’ – Churchill’s actual quote” (Representative).

In this example, the stated phrase serves as evidence of Churchill's alleged position on the relative importance of Bengali suffering and starvation against the Greeks. The statement implies that the wellbeing of Bengalis is ignored or devalued in favor of Greeks' concerns. This quote adds to the speaker's argument or viewpoint on Churchill's Beliefs and policies.

“And when conscious stricken British officials wrote to him pointing out that people ...and bring the benefits of colonialism and civilization to the benighted”(Directive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech actions is to present examples and evidence to support their perspective on the true nature of British colonialism and to dispute the dominant narrative of noble intentions behind colonization. The allegations and criticism are intended to portray the speaker's perspective on British authorities' actions and attitudes, as well as their influence on colonized communities.

“Even I am sorry — Churchill’s conduct in 1943 is simply one example of many that gave light to this myth” (Expressive).

The speaker's use of these illocutionary speech acts tries to address the negative ramifications of Churchill's actions in 1943, as well as its role in sustaining a myth. The assertion and apology work together to highlight the speaker's perspective on the larger pattern of action and its impact on the public image of Churchill and the accompanying myth.

“As others have said on the proposition, violence and racism were the reality of the colonial experience” (Directive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech acts to buttress the argument that violence and racism were inherent in the colonial experience. The assertion and appeal to authority work together to provide evidence and support the speaker's point of view on the subject.

“And no wonder that the sun never set on the British Empire because even God couldn’t trust the English in the dark” (Expressive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech actions to communicate a critical perspective on the British Empire and the trustworthiness of the English. The statement and sarcasm combine to convey a poor impression of the empire and its rulers.

“Let me take World War I as a very concrete example since the first speaker Mr. Lee suggested these things couldn’t be quantified”(Directive).

By adopting these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker intends to respond to the preceding speaker's proposal and provide a concrete example by quantifying World War I. The assertion and apology work together to clarify the speaker's intentions and express their point of view, which is particularly Indian.

“Well let me quantify World War I for you. Again” (Assertive).

By employing this illocutionary speech act, the speaker aims to offer quantifiable data or information about World War I. The assertion conveys the speaker's intention to provide measurable facts or statistics to support their argument or present a more concrete understanding of the war.

“I am sorry from an Indian perspective as others have spoken about the countries” (Expressive).

By adopting an illocutionary speech act, the speaker hopes to spark a discussion by offering a particular example and questioning Mr. Lee's argument. The request reveals the speaker's aims and seeks a chance to use World War I as an example to promote their point of view.

“One-sixth of all the British forces that fought in the war was Indian...missing or in prison” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to present specific data and figures that illustrate the crucial role played by Indian soldiers in the conflict and the human cost they bear. The assertions provide verifiable information to support the speaker's arguments or viewpoint on the subject.

“Indian taxpayers had to cough up 100 million pounds in that time’s...And sent out of India and 1.3 million Indian personnel served in this war” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to present actual data and statistics that demonstrate India's financial burden, material support, and large manpower contribution throughout the war. The claims provide reliable material to back up the speaker's position or perspective on the subject, highlighting India's significant involvement and accomplishments.

“I know all this because, of course, the commemoration of the centenary has just...and poverty and hunger, was in today’s money 8 billion pounds. You want quantification, it’s available” (Directive).

By using these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to demonstrate their expertise in the issue and provide specific measurable data to back up their case. They illustrate India's major contributions and losses during the war, as well as the economic and humanitarian issues the country faced at the time. The assertions and challenge work together to give factual facts and encourage additional investigation into the quantifiable aspects of India's engagement in World War I.

“World War II, it was even worse — 2.5 million Indians in uniform. I won’t believe it to the point but Britain’s total war debt of 3 billion pounds in 1945 money, 1.25 billion was owed to India and never actually paid” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to highlight the significant number of Indians who served in World War II as well as to call attention to Britain's substantial war debt to India. The claims communicate precise information and stress the speaker's point of view on the subject, notably about India's contributions and unsolved financial obligations resulting from the war.

“Somebody mentioned Scotland; well the fact is that colonialism cemented your union with Scotland” (Assertive).

By using this illocutionary speech act, the speaker hopes to communicate their point of view on the subject and demonstrate colonialism's effect in forming the union with Scotland. The assertion expresses the speaker's viewpoint on the historical relationship between colonialism and the union and encourages further discussion or investigation of this connection.

“The Scots had tried to send colonies...There you had a disproportionate employment of Scots” (Expressive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to communicate their point of view on Scotland's historical link, colonial activity in India, and the economic impact on Scotland. The assertions present particular material to support their thesis about Scots' engagement in the colonial enterprise and the economic rewards that resulted. The apology acknowledges the presence of another speaker and implies that the speaker intends to continue their discussion despite this.

“I am sorry but Mr. McKinney had to speak after me, engaged in this...What brought prosperity to Scotland, even pulled Scotland out of poverty” (Assertive).

The speaker expresses remorse or apologizes by saying, "I am sorry, but Mr. McKinney had to speak after me." This act of apologizing expresses regret or awareness that they are continuing their discourse in the presence of another speaker.

“Now we have heard other arguments on this side and there has been a mention of railways” (Representative).

Using this typical illocutionary speech act, the speaker explains what has happened during the discussion. They claim that other arguments have been advanced by their side and acknowledge the particular inclusion of railways in those arguments. The objective of this statement is to provide an overview of the prior issues and set the stage for additional discussion or refutation.

“Well let me tell you first of all as my colleague the Jamaican High...of the local people” (Directive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary projects to express their thoughts and the purpose of making roads and trains. The assertion focuses on an argument relevant to the underline motivation for the construction, putting pressure on the importance of British interest above the interest of the local people. The attribution given to the Jamaican high Commissioner carries weight implying that it is founded on a high level of information and expertise.

“But I might add that many countries have built railways and roads without having had to be colonialized to do so” (Assertive).

The speaker's main aim in using these illocutionary speech actions is to tell the public about the point of view of the high authorities on the construction of railways and roads during pre-colonialism. The argument calls into question the premise that colonialism was required for infrastructural development, pointing out that many countries have accomplished such development on their own. The addition indicates the speaker's aim to provide a new perspective or counterpoint to the conversation.

“They were designed to carry raw materials from the hinterland into...Colonial

public — their needs were incidental” (Assertive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech actions to offer their perspective on the purpose and prioritizing of railways and roads in the colonial environment. The allegations emphasize the economic goals of these transportation infrastructures, including the extraction and transit of raw commodities for the advantage of Britain. Furthermore, the second argument implies a conflict or inequality in terms of prioritizing the demands of the colonial public over the economic interests of colonial powers.

“Transportation — there was no attempt made to match supply from demand from as transports, none whatsoever” (Assertive).

The speaker uses an illocutionary speech act to convey their opinion on the absence of coordination or synchronization between supply and demand in transportation during the colonial period. The argument implies a disregard or negligence in managing transportation systems in order to successfully meet the needs of colonial society.

“Instead in fact the Indian railways were built with massive incentives. Because there was so much money being paid in extravagant returns” (Assertive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech acts to express their perspective on the financial elements and ramifications of establishing Indian railways during the colonial period. The statements shed light on Britain's motivations and the financial burden imposed on Indians through tax payments. The explanation goes on to describe the effects of these financial arrangements, including the extravagant returns achieved by British investors and the subsequent greater expenses of railway building in India compared to other countries.

“Britain made all the profits, controlled the technology, and supplied all the...Risk. That was the railways as an accomplishment” (Expressive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech actions to present their point of view on the British engagement in railways and its influence on India. The accusations emphasize the unequal distribution of profits, control, and equipment, with Britain reaping the most benefits. The study emphasizes the perceived exploitation or risk that the Indian public faces in connection to the advantages created by the British private sector.

“We are hearing about aid, I think it was again Sir Richard Ottaway mentioned British aid to India” (Assertive).

By adopting these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to express their awareness of the debate over British aid to India, as well as Sir Richard Ottaway's explicit remark. The assertion makes a factual claim about the mention of aid, whereas the attribution credits Sir Richard Ottaway as the source of the mention, implying that it is based on his statement or position.

“Well let me just say which might be an appropriate metaphor for that argument” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech acts is to enlighten the audience about the Indian government's spending objectives and to make a metaphorical link between fertilizer subsidies and the topic at hand. The assertion makes a factual claim regarding the spending on subsidies, but the metaphorical analogy adds a support or illustrates the point.

“If I may point out as well, that as my fellow speakers from the...and in India's case even one of our last Mughal emperors” (Expressive).

By using these illocutionary speech actions, the speaker hopes to contribute to the discussion by acknowledging opposing opinions and providing further information about historical events. The concessive speech act establishes a respectful tone, but the statements make factual claims regarding the incidents that occurred.

“Yes, maybe today’s Britain’s not responsible for some of these reparations but the same speakers have pointed with pride to their foreign aid — you are not responsible for the people starving in Somalia but you give them aid surely the principle of reparation for what is the wrongs that have done cannot be denied” (Directive).

By adopting these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker hopes to communicate their point of view on the subject and answer the argument provided by speakers who are proud of foreign aid. The concessive speech act indicates a readiness to examine other ideas, whilst the statements express the speaker's perspective on the relationship between foreign aid and the principle of reparation.

“It’s been pointed out that for the example dehumanization of Africans in the...Religious tensions were the direct result of colonial experience” (Assertive).

The speaker's goal in adopting these illocutionary speech actions is to offer their perspective on the impacts of British colonization in the Caribbean. The assertions make factual claims and give a perspective on the historical and ongoing repercussions of colonial experiences in the region.

“So there is a moral debt that needs to be paid. Someone challenged reparations elsewhere” (Assertive).

By using this forceful illocutionary speech act, the speaker conveys their belief in the existence of a moral debt and the significance of repaying it through restitution. The declaration seeks to highlight the ethical responsibility to acknowledge and remedy historical injustices, while also acknowledging that the concept of compensation has been challenged in other contexts.

“Well I am sorry Germany doesn’t just give reparations to Israel, it also...Picture of Charles William Brunt on his knees in the Walter Gaiter in 1970” (Directive).

The speaker's intention with this directed illocutionary speech act is to guide the audience's understanding and viewpoint on the topic of reparations. The remark urges that the audience consider the historical background and specific examples, such as Germany's reparations to Israel and Poland, as well as the occurrence involving Charles William Brunt.

“And there are other examples, there are Italy’s reparations to Libya, there is Japan’s to Korea, even Britain has paid reparations to the New Zealand Maoris”(Assertive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech actions is to present examples and reasons to support the premise that the concept of restitution is neither exceptional nor unexpected. The allegations focus on individual incidents of governments paying reparations, whereas the comparative speech act contextualizes and defends reparations as a valid and recognized practice.

“So it is not as if this is unprecedented or unheard of that somehow opens some sort of nasty Pandora box” (Assertive).

The speaker uses this aggressive illocutionary speaking act to convey their perspective on the topic at hand and address any concerns or objections that may arise. The statement seeks to underline that the idea is neither unique nor worrisome, and should not be interpreted as anything that could have bad implications.

“No wonder professor Louis reminded us that he is from Texas. There is ...They were speaking; there was a reference to democracy and rule of law” (Expressive).

The speaker's goal in using this illocutionary speaking act is to convey their point of view while also criticizing the opposing arguments. The expressive speech act enables the speaker to express their opinion figuratively and succinctly, relying on a cultural expression from Texas to underline their argument.

“Let me say with the greatest possible respect, you cannot be rich to oppress, enslave, kill, torture, maim people for 200 years and then celebrate the fact that they are democratic at the end of it” (Expressive).

The speaker's goal in using these illocutionary speech actions is to convey their point of view on the problem and make a compelling case against celebrating democracy in light of a history of oppressiveness and violence. The assertion expresses their point of view, and the display of respect helps to keep the conversation cordial.

“We were denied democracy so we had to snatch it, seize it from you with... limited franchise”
(Assertive).

By using this forceful illocutionary speech act, the speaker expresses their opinion on the denial of democracy and following efforts to obtain it. The statement seeks to assert historical facts while also expressing the speaker's point of view on the subject.

“Yes, indeed madam...if I may just point out, I think the arguments made by a couple of speakers” (Directive).

By adopting these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker recognizes agreement with Madam President's position, admits that there is no need for contradiction, and signals their intention to contribute by highlighting specific arguments made by other speakers.

“The first speaker Mr. Lee...they would be use of propaganda tools, and they will embolden people like Mr. Mugabe”(Commissive).

By adopting these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker summarizes Mr. Lee's reparations perspective. They affirm his recognition of colonial misdeeds, admit his doubts about the efficacy of reparations, and make a forecast concerning the potential use of reparations as propaganda tools and their impact on leaders such as Mr. Mugabe.

“So, it's nice ...Drake would come up after them that was the legacy, now Mugabe will be there – the new sort of Francis Drake of our time”
(Directive).

The speaker uses these illocutionary speech acts to comment on a former cultural practice and compare historical personalities (Francis Drake) to modern characters (Mugabe). The statements reveal information on the cultural legacy, whilst the comparison provides insight into the perceived similarities between the two figures.

“The fact is very...Quite prepared to accept the proposition that you can't evaluate, put a monetary sum on the kinds of horrors people have suffered” (Expressive).

The speaker presents their perspective on reparations through the use of these illocutionary speech acts. They argue that reparations are intended for atonement rather than empowerment, and they acknowledge the difficulty of quantifying the suffering experienced by individuals. These speech acts help to strengthen the speaker's argument and shed light on their stance on reparations.

“Certainly...You are not going to figure out an exact amount but the principle is what matters” (Assertive).

Using this illocutionary speech act, the speaker highlights the severe impact of personal loss and claims that monetary compensation cannot provide a rapid or effective solution for the emotional implications of such a loss.

“The fact is that to speak blithely of sacrifices on both sides as an

analogy.... on both sides that I am sorry to say is not an acceptable argument” (Assertive).

By using these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker expresses their opinion on the flawed nature of equating sacrifices made by oppressors and victims. They argue that utilizing such an analogy or reasoning is improper, and they question the concept of equivalence between the two parties' experiences.

‘The truth is that we are not arguing specifically that vast some of money ...Not the fine points of how much is owed, to whom it should be paid” (Assertive).

The speaker uses this illocutionary speech act to clarify their viewpoint on reparations. They claim that their argument is not about calling for a specific transfer of big sums of money.

“The question is, is there a debt, does Britain owe reparations? As far as...go a far longer way than some percentage of GDP in the form of aid” (Expressive).

The speaker uses an illocutionary speaking act to indicate that the major issue of argument is the principle of reparations itself, rather than digging into specific computations or reparation recipients. The remark implies that the broader notion and moral foundation of compensation are the fundamental issues being considered.

“What is required it seems to me is accepting the principle that ... if it was one pound a year for thenext 200 years after the last 200 years of Britain in India” (Directive).

Using these illocutionary speech acts, the speaker communicates their viewpoint on restitution. They emphasize the necessity of recognizing the principle of restitution, offer a specific compensation amount based on personal preference, and thank the Madam President for participating in the conversation. “Thank you very much, madam President” (Expressive).

Table 1: *Speech Acts Used by Shashi Tharoor in His Speech at Oxford Union*

Sr. No	Speech Acts	Number of Speech acts
1.	Assertive	33
2.	Commissive	01
3.	Representative	03
4.	Directive	12
5.	Expressive	13
	Total	61

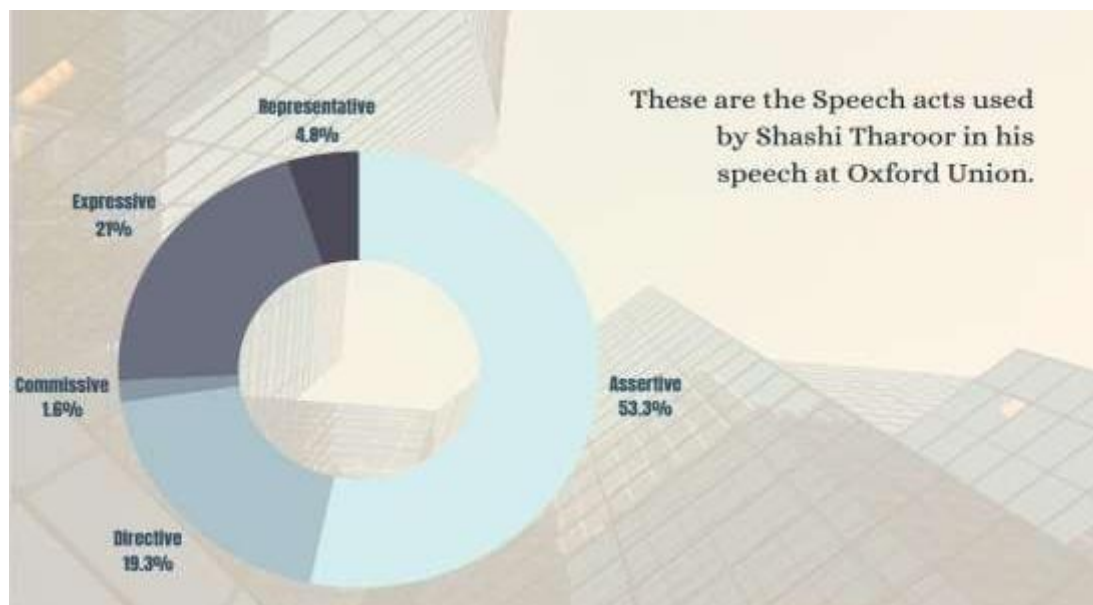


Figure 1: *Percentage of Categories of Illocutionary Speech Act Used by Shashi Tharoor in His Speech at Oxford Union*

Pragmatic Competence of Shashi Tharoor

Tharoor employs various speech acts, such as making claims, expressing emotions, and logical assertions, effectively aligning them with his communicative goals to shape audience understanding and reactions. He is keenly aware of the context, including the audience at the Oxford Union, the debate setting, and prevailing historical narratives about colonialism. Tharoor tailors his vocabulary, tone, and rhetorical techniques to suit the occasion, highlighting the importance of pragmatic appropriateness. As a fluent English speaker from India, he adeptly navigates linguistic and cultural nuances, appealing to both Indian and Western audiences. His command of English, coupled with a deep understanding of Indian history and culture, allows him to bridge cultural gaps. Throughout his speech, Tharoor skillfully adjusts his language and communication style based on audience feedback, responding to interruptions with composure and redirecting the conversation effectively. His mastery of speech acts and contextual awareness demonstrates a high level of pragmatic proficiency in English, significantly enhancing the impact of his Oxford Union lecture.

Findings and Discussion

The study provides valuable insights into the pragmatic competence of non-native English speakers, exemplified by Shashi Tharoor's performance at the Oxford Union. Tharoor's effective use of various speech acts—representatives, expressives, and directives—demonstrates his ability to engage the audience while reflecting both Indian and Western cultural dimensions. His strategic speech act usage enhances cross-cultural communication, as noted in existing literature. Tharoor's awareness of contextual factors, such as the audience's background and the historical context of colonialism, allows him to adapt his language and communication style effectively. This contextual understanding is crucial for engaging the audience and ensuring that his message resonates appropriately. The study highlights that cultural and linguistic competence significantly contribute to Tharoor's pragmatic skills. His proficiency in English and knowledge of Indian history enable him to bridge the gap between

Indian and Western perspectives. This finding suggests that pragmatic competence extends beyond language proficiency to include a deep understanding of contextual and cultural elements.

Thomas (1983) established that pragmatic-linguistic competence involves users' ability to perform speech acts across both socio-pragmatic and pragmatic dimensions. This aligns with the current findings showing how Tharoor masterfully employed various speech acts and pragmatic strategies to engage his audience. Building on Medgyes (2011) work on non-native speakers' capabilities, the study demonstrates how pragmatic competence enables effective navigation of complex cultural contexts. This is particularly evident in how competent non-native speakers adapt their communication styles across different cultural settings. Laughlin (2015) emphasized that pragmatic competence is context-dependent, requiring individuals to modify language based on social settings. The current research extends this understanding by showing how non-native speakers can excel in formal public speaking contexts. Long (1981) discussed pragmatic competence as essential for structured communication in social contexts. This research confirms and expands this notion by demonstrating how non-native speakers can effectively employ pragmatic strategies in high-profile public settings.

Conclusion

Shashi Tharoor's Oxford Union speech exemplifies the pragmatic competence of a non-native English speaker. His strong command of English, coupled with an understanding of the cultural nuances of the debate setting, allowed him to effectively engage the audience. Tharoor skillfully employed various speech acts—expressive, directive, and representative—to make persuasive claims, convey emotions, and connect Indian and Western perspectives. His linguistic and cultural knowledge facilitated this connection, enabling him to communicate effectively with diverse audiences. By reviewing the historical context and recognizing potential biases, Tharoor adapted his vocabulary and approach. His ability to respond to counterarguments, along with his use of imagery and personal anecdotes, showcased his high level of competence. The research indicates that non-native speakers like Tharoor can demonstrate impressive pragmatic skills when they command the language and consider contextual factors. This case study highlights the capacity of non-native English speakers to engage in meaningful public discourse. Overall, the analysis of Tharoor's speech underscores the importance of pragmatic competence in cross-cultural communication and the valuable contributions of non-native speakers to the global dialogue. The categorization of his speech acts further clarifies his pragmatic abilities.

Recommendations

1. Educational institutions and language programs should emphasize pragmatic competence to enhance communication effectiveness. This requires customized curricula that prioritize context and persuasive skills while balancing grammar with appropriate language use.
2. Instructor training must include pragmatic skills, and communication programs should offer practical exercises for style adaptation. Encouraging students to reflect on cultural norms can deepen their understanding of communication.
3. Mentorships between non-native speakers and proficient communicators can further develop these skills.
4. Organizations should foster inclusive environments for non-native speakers, and future research should examine the pragmatic abilities of both native and non-native speakers to inform educators and policymakers.
5. Collaborative efforts are crucial for creating strategies to improve the pragmatic skills of non-native English speakers.

References

- Andrade, M. S., Evans, N. W., & Hartshorn, K. J. (2014). Linguistic support for Non-Native English Speakers: Higher education practices in the United States. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 51(2), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jsarp-2014-0020>
- Austin J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words* University Press, Oxford 1975: *How to do things with words*, new revised edition, M. Sbisà & J. O. Urmson (eds), Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Bhatt, R. M. (2002). Experts, dialects, and discourse. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), 7–109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1473-4192.00025>
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Daniel, R. K. (2017). India and the English Language: A combined synoptic / case study of South Indian educators' perceptions of factors influencing English as the world's lingua franca. <https://doi.org/10.4225/03/58b769ca374e9>
- Deda, N. (2013). The role of Pragmatics in English language teaching. *Pragmatic competence*. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(4), 63-70.
- Herman. (2015). Illocutionary Acts Analysis of Chinese in Pematangsiantar. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 4 Issue 12, PP.41-48.
- Kentmen, H., Debreli, E., & Yavuz, M. A. (2023). Assessing tertiary Turkish EFL learners' pragmatic competence regarding speech acts and conversational implicatures. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3800.
- Laughlin, V. T., Wain, J., & Schmidgall, J. (2015). Defining and operationalizing the construct of pragmatic competence: review and recommendations. *ETS Research Report Series*, 2015(1), 1–43. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ets2.12053>
- Long, M. H. (1981). *Input, Interaction, and Second-Language*
- Medgyces, P. (2011). The NNEST lens: Non-native English Speakers in TESOL. *ELT Journal*, 66(1), 122–124.
- Mey, J. L. (1994). *How to do good things with words: A social pragmatics for survival*. *Pragmatics*. Quarterly Publication of the International Pragmatics Association (IPA), 4(2), 239-263.
- Saleem, T., Anjum, U., & Tahir, S. (2021). The socio-pragmatic and pragma-linguistic strategies in L2 pragmatic competence: A case of Pakistani ESL learners. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 50(2), 185-206.
- Searle J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tharoor, S. (2015, May 28). *Shashi Tharoor Oxford University speech transcript*. Scribd. Retrieved December 8, 2024, from <https://www.scribd.com/document/294197901/Shashi-Tharoor-Oxford-University-Speech-Transcript>
- Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied linguistics*, 4(2), 91-112.
- Yan, Y. (2022). The effect of pragmatic competence on the communicative competence of second language learners. In 2022 3rd International Conference on Language, Art and Cultural Exchange (ICLACE 2022) (pp. 368-372). Atlantis Press.
- Yazan, B., & Selvi, A. F. (2012). Book review: The NNEST lens: Non-native English speakers in TESOL. *Language Teaching Research*, 16(3), 435–438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168812436929>