

## A Pragmatic Study of Speech Acts in Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*: Performing Love and Longing

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### Abstract

This article examines how Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* employs language to convey love, obsession, and emotional control. This study is based on Searle's speech act framework, reinforced by pragmatic and cultural contexts. Kemal, the main character, expresses his emotions through a variety of expressive and commissive acts, particularly in his letters to Fusun, reflections, and monologues. These speech acts highlight the tension between personal desires and social expectations in late 20th-century Istanbul, functioning as linguistic acts influenced by the norms of performance culture. The study analyses in depth how expressive speech acts, such as apologies and declarations of love, and commissive speech acts, including vows and promises, are used to construct and negotiate Kemal's identity in a multicultural environment, while also conveying emotions. The results reveal how language functions as a means of emotional expression and intercultural exchange, highlighting how speech acts are deeply influenced by social hierarchy, indirectness, and politeness norms. This study emphasizes literature as a crucial channel for exploring interpersonal meaning in a globalized world, situating speech act theory within the broader context of cultural pragmatics. It provides insights into how language conveys love, loss, and longing across cultures, advancing literary pragmatics and intercultural discourse analysis.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Orhan Pamuk, The Museum of Innocence, Cultural Dialogue*

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### Introduction

The link between language, emotion, and culture has become increasingly important in literary studies and pragmatics, especially with the rise of global communication and culturally rooted narratives [1], [2]. Literature acts not only as a space for exploring and negotiating the meanings of emotions such as love, desire, and loss, but also serves as a platform for artistic expression [3]. Novels that focus on identity and emotional struggles across different cultures, like Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), are especially significant for their pragmatic qualities.

The study of speech acts in literary texts has attracted attention. Scholars have examined how characters employ various illocutionary acts to convey their social roles, power relationships, and intentions [4], [5]. However, the majority of research focuses on contemporary Western novels or drama. Literature set in multicultural or non-Western contexts, like Pamuk's *Istanbul*, is rarely studied [6]. Furthermore, few studies examine how

culturally unique politeness techniques impact expressive and commissive speech acts – two crucial components of emotional commitment and love [7], [8].

Three new contributions are made by this work to close these gaps: (1) It examines the relationship between speech acts and emotional expression in a non-Western literary context; (2) It applies speech act theory and cultural pragmatics to determine how social norms, indirectness, and politeness impact the language of love and longing; and (3) It highlights how speech acts – particularly letters and monologues – help to shape character identity and emotional growth over time.

These contributions aim to further the subject of literary pragmatics and deepen our understanding of how language produces interpersonal meaning in a culturally ingrained setting [9], [10]. Thus, the research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) Which verbal acts are most frequently used by the main character to express desire and love? (2) In terms of cultural norms and politeness strategies, how are these speech acts realised? and (3) What role do speech acts play in the novel's narrative development of identity and emotional development?

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## Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology with a literary pragmatics foundation to analyse speech acts. The objective of this study is to investigate how expressive and commissive speech acts are not only used to reveal love and longing in Orhan Pamuk's *The Museum of Innocence*, but also how these acts are affected by sociocultural norms.

A textual analysis methodology that combines close reading and pragmatic analysis is used in the study design. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Searle's Speech Act Theory improve the study by capturing cultural variations in the implementation of speech actions, particularly in the expressive and commissive categories.

The main source of the analysis is Pamuk's novel *The Museum of Innocence*, which was translated into English by Maureen Freely in 2009 [11]. This novel is analysed, with special focus on: (1) Kemal's inner monologues; (2) Fusun's correspondence; and (3) Significant interactions involving emotional or relationship stress. 24 instances of speech acts were specifically selected because they were relevant to the subjects of emotional expression and cross-cultural contact.

Because this study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, the researcher herself serves as the key instrument to elicit data from its source [12]. The main tool is a coding sheet designed to categorise and interpret various speech act types. These coding categories include: (1) speech act type (e.g., expressive, commissive, according to Searle); (2) contextual function (e.g., expressing affection, regret, or making a promise); (3) cultural politeness traits (e.g., indirectness or face-saving techniques); and (4) narrative function (e.g., character development, tension building).

The research was carried out in the following stages: (1) identifying emotionally charged interactions through first reading; (2) coding and classifying relevant utterances using speech

act theory; (3) interpreting the cultural and contextual influences of politeness standards and cultural expectations on these behaviours; and (4) using literature cross-referencing to ensure analytical coherence and support interpretative validity.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The study demonstrates that the main character, Kemal, regularly employs expressive and commissive speech acts to convey his complex emotions, such as love, regret, and longing, in a culture that values indirectness, politeness, and restraint. Beyond being entirely conversational devices, these speech acts are essential to the novel's emotional growth and narrative structure. Below is a thorough examination of these results in light of earlier studies.

Acts of expressive communication predominate in Kemal's inner monologue and private correspondence. Rather than merely recounting events, he often apologises, bemoans, and gives sentimental views that evoke emotions. For example, "Please forgive me for the thousand things I failed to say," conveys remorse and emotional openness.

According to Culpeper and Haugh (2021), this supports the idea that expressive activities in literary texts function as relational labour, helping characters attain or fall short of social and emotional alignment with others [1]. Kemal's self-directed and Fusun-focused activities imply that emotional communication includes a reflexive element. Research by Locher and Jucker (2021), who argue that literary dialogue replicates facework in real life, as speakers face challenging social and emotional environments [2], is further supported by the emotional complexity and self-reflection of these speech acts.

### Cultural Restrictions and Commissive Acts

Kemal's commissive acts – promises of eternal love, vows to wait, and promises to build a museum – are linguistically structured through indirectness and repetition. For instance, "Even if I live to be a hundred, I will never stop waiting for you" is a sentence that combines lyrical language with a serious determination. Instead of striving for Fusun's favour, Kemal performs love as a one-sided, enduring tale, further solidifying his individuality.

This finding supports Liu's (2021) research on politeness and emotional indirectness in non-Western literary contexts, where commissive gestures are commonly designed to prioritise self-control and social peace over aggressiveness [3]. Kemal used indirectness as a face-saving strategy in a culture where overt expressions of romantic interest could be viewed as insulting.

The analysis also finds that the speech actions in the novel *The Museum of Innocence* are essential to the story. Kemal's unwavering, obsessive emotional trajectory is shown in his frequent displays of certainty and regret. Many of his commissive acts remain unfulfilled, which leads to a sense of emotional lethargy. Kemal's language reflects his delayed growth and incapacity to transcend longing, and fictional speech acts frequently function as psychological markers or foreshadowing (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2022).

Furthermore, the incorporation of these actions into monologue and narration suggests that speech acts in fiction can be performed as a type of self-narration without the presence of

an actual hearer. This supports Burke's (2020) claim that speech acts often confuse communication with introspection in fiction, especially in first-person tales [5].

### **Intercultural Communication and the Worldwide Reader**

Pamuk's storytelling style, which blends Turkish social realism with postmodern self-reflection, offers a unique case study in cross-cultural pragmatics. By presenting a protagonist who, despite his language efforts, maintains his emotional isolation, *The Museum of Innocence* challenges the expectations of Western readers who would expect reciprocal connection and emotional reconciliation.

This bolsters Spencer-Oatey's (2023) assertion that intercultural communication requires knowledge of cultural patterns of identity formation and emotional expression in addition to language forms [6]. By doing this, the book becomes a forum for intercultural dialogue, enabling readers from all over the world to engage with a culturally rooted speech act usage style that goes against the norms of Western communication.

### **Contribution to Theory and Discipline**

This study contributes to the growing field of literary pragmatics by presenting a framework for investigating how speech acts function as identity performances, narrative mechanisms, and social actions. It also highlights that context is needed when applying speech act theory to literary works, especially those from non-Western cultures. Even if Searle's taxonomy is a useful starting point, this study demonstrates that cultural pragmatics must be taken into account to comprehend the meaning of literary language.

Additionally, this study supports the desire for greater interdisciplinary work across linguistics, literature, and cultural studies and reflects Gregoriou's (2021) focus on the value of cross-disciplinary pragmatics in literary interpretation [7].

### **Discussion**

The pragmatic analysis of a few selected words from Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Museum of Innocence* yielded the following significant findings:

#### *Expressive and Commissive Acts Predominate*

Kemal, the protagonist, mostly employs expressive and commissive speech acts throughout the narrative. Expressive activities are used to communicate emotional states such as regret, longing, and romantic affection, whereas commissive acts are used to convey loyalty, promises, and future intentions. These two categories support both personal emotions and societal communication rules in the novel's social context.

#### *Using Indirectness as a Cultural Approach*

The extensive use of indirect and metaphorical language in speech acts reflects Turkish values of politeness, which highly value moderation, humility, and avoiding disputes. Kemal steers emotional conversation away from overt pronouncements and towards poetic, nostalgic, and self-effacing phrases. This supports the notion that indirectness is a cultural communication strategy, particularly when delicate emotions are involved.

### *Emotional Language for Identity Performance*

Kemal's continuous use of similar expressive and commissive acts over time serves as an example of how language is used to perform and establish identity. He uses apologies, vows, and passionate monologues to support his position as the "eternal lover linguistically." This implies that rather than merely describing emotions, speech acts in literature perform them to produce a cumulative emotional narrative.

### *Narrative Integration of Speech Acts*

Instead of existing as distinct linguistic events, the speech actions in the book are deeply interwoven into the storyline. Longing persists without resolution, promises are made but rarely fulfilled, and apologies are repeated without consequence. These trends have an impact on the novel's themes of memory, cultural conflict, and emotional stagnation. Consequently, the speech acts in the text serve both structural and interpersonal purposes.

### *A Contribution to Literary Pragmatics Across Cultural*

This study demonstrates how literary representations of emotion are influenced by culture. Kemal's use of speech acts to express love differs greatly from Western romantic conventions. As a result, the study clarifies the connection between language, emotion, and social norms in a non-Western literary context, and it also raises our understanding of how speech acts shape intercultural communication.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has demonstrated that, in addition to being tools of emotional communication, Orhan Pamuk's expressive and commissive speech acts in the novel *The Museum of Innocence* are also powerful narrative devices that effectively convey the cultural and psychological complexity of the protagonist, Kemal. According to the research, which is based on a pragmatic analysis under the heading of speech act theory and cultural context, Kemal's utterance expresses love, longing, and regret in ways that align with Turkish social standards, particularly those related to politeness, indirectness, and emotional reserve.

Three significant contributions have come from this study. By expanding the use of speech act theory beyond dialogic interaction to encompass literary self-expression and introspective narrative, it first emphasises the performative function of language in literature. Second, it demonstrates how emotional speech in fiction may function as culturally situated behaviours that both reflect and replicate societal norms and hierarchies, particularly when it comes to expressions of love and devotion. Third, it demonstrates that Pamuk's writing serves as a platform for intercultural dialogue, in which non-Western emotional expressions simultaneously contradict and reinforce accepted notions about communication and identity.

Lastly, this work contributes to literary pragmatics and cross-cultural discourse analysis by demonstrating how fictional speech acts can provide information about the emotional, psychological, and cultural dynamics of human interaction. The next research could examine how different cultural readers interpret the emotional content of these texts or contrast

Pamuk's use of speech acts distinct with those of other postmodern authors, which are related to the scope of pragmatic literary studies.

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