PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF RAFEEF ZIADAH'S "WE TEACH LIFE, SIR"

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A B S T R A K

Studi ini menganalisis elemen pragmatik dalam puisi Rafeef Ziadah "We Teach Life, Sir," dengan fokus pada bagaimana konteks linguistik, deiksis, praanggapan, dan tindak tutur berkontribusi pada lapisan makna yang kompleks. Menggunakan pendekatan analisis konten kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelami penggunaan ekspresi deiktik dalam puisi untuk menempatkan pembaca pada konteks tertentu, praanggapan yang menciptakan pemahaman bersama antara penyair dan audiens, serta tindak tutur yang melibatkan dan memancing respons. Temuan menunjukkan bagaimana elemen pragmatik ini meningkatkan dampak emosional dan politis puisi, memberikan pemahaman lebih dalam tentang pengalaman Palestina seperti yang diungkapkan melalui bahasa kuat Ziadah. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bidang analisis pragmatik dalam puisi yang lebih luas, menunjukkan nilai dari pemeriksaan nuansa linguistik dan kontekstual dalam teks sastra..

A B S T R A C T

This study examines the pragmatic elements in Rafeef Ziadah's poem "We Teach Life, Sir," focusing on how linguistic context, deixis, presupposition, and speech acts contribute to its multifaceted layers of meaning. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the research delves into the poem's use of deictic expressions to anchor the reader in specific contexts, the presuppositions that create a shared understanding between poet and audience, and the speech acts that engage and elicit responses. The findings reveal how these pragmatic elements enhance the poem's emotional and political impact, offering a deeper understanding of the Palestinian experience as articulated through Ziadah's powerful language. This study contributes to the broader field of pragmatic analysis in poetry, demonstrating the value of examining linguistic and contextual nuances in literary texts.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a universal characteristic of human beings, essential for communication and interaction (Hidayah, 2019). It serves not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a vehicle for expressing ideas, thoughts, emotions, and desires. Language can be manifested in both oral and written forms, and its effectiveness hinges on clarity and meaningfulness to prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations among speakers and listeners. Korneeva (2019) highlights that language extends beyond traditional forms of communication and can be conveyed through various media such as songs, movies, poetry, and novels. These diverse mediums facilitate the audience's understanding of the intentions behind the communication, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the conveyed message.

Poetry, as a unique form of literary expression, harnesses the full potential of language to evoke deep emotional responses and articulate intricate ideas. T.S. Eliot once remarked, "Poetry can communicate before it is understood," emphasizing the profound impact of poetic language even when its full meaning is not immediately grasped (Eliot, 1986). This inherent complexity of poetry makes it a rich subject for linguistic analysis. Dirman (2022) asserts that the essential concept of poetry was premeditated in the poet's thoughts, using figurative language, metaphors, and symbolism to create layers of meaning that resonate with readers on multiple levels. This richness in language necessitates an analytical approach capable of uncovering these hidden meanings.

Moreover, according to Jakobson (1960), the poetic function of language focuses on the message for its own sake, leading to a more intricate and self-referential form of communication. This complexity is where the field of pragmatics becomes essential. Pragmatics, the study of how context influences the interpretation of meaning, offers valuable tools for analyzing poetry. Levinson (1983) describes pragmatics as examining the relationship between signs and their users, considering factors such as speaker intention, listener interpretation, and contextual influences. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how poets convey nuanced messages and emotions.

Additionally, one of the core aspects of pragmatics is the consideration of linguistic context, which includes the physical setting, cultural background, and situational factors that affect communication. Yule (2010) explains that context shapes how listeners interpret utterances, making it crucial in the analysis of poetry. In poetic texts, the context often enriches the meaning and emotional impact of the words, allowing readers to engage more deeply with the text. Pragmatics is closely related to the study of meaning, encompassing the information or concepts that a sender intends to convey in communication with a receiver. Effective communication helps avoid misunderstandings, making the study of pragmatics vital.

Within the realm of pragmatics, deixis is a fundamental concept. Deixis refers to words and expressions whose meanings are dependent on context, such as "here," "there," "now," and "then." In poetry, deictic expressions play a significant role in anchoring the reader to specific times, places, or perspectives, thereby enhancing the immersive experience of the poem. Levinson (2004) emphasizes that deixis is central to the structure of language, influencing how messages are framed and understood in poetic discourse. The strategic use of deixis can provide readers with a spatial, temporal, and social framework that deepens their engagement with the poem's narrative.

Furthermore, presupposition involves the assumptions that a speaker or writer makes about what the audience already knows or believes. In poetry, presuppositions can create a sense of shared understanding or highlight ideological conflicts. Stalnaker (2002) states that presuppositions are propositions that the speaker assumes to be true and that the listener must accept to make sense of the communication. This element of pragmatics helps poets convey deeper meanings and connect with their readers on an implicit level, enriching the interpretive experience by tapping into common knowledge or challenging existing beliefs.

In addition, speech acts, as defined by Austin (1975), are actions performed via utterances, such as asserting, questioning, commanding, or promising. In poetry, speech acts can serve to assert identity, challenge misconceptions, or engage the reader in a dialogue. The performative nature of speech acts in poetry adds a dynamic layer to the text, allowing poets to convey powerful messages and evoke strong emotional responses. Through speech acts, poets can directly address their audience, create a sense of immediacy, and foster a participatory reading experience.

Moreover, social pragmatics considers how social interactions and cultural contexts influence language use. In poetry, cultural references and social contexts can significantly affect how a poem is interpreted. Van Dijk (2009) discusses that understanding the socio-cultural background of a text is essential for grasping its full meaning. In the poem "We Teach Life, Sir" by Rafeef Ziadah, the cultural and political context of the Palestinian experience plays a crucial role in shaping its meaning. The poem employs various pragmatic elements, including deixis, presupposition, and speech acts, to create a rich and layered narrative that goes beyond the surface meaning of the words.

Therefore, poetry often serves as a powerful medium for expressing complex emotions and socio-political realities. The poem "We Teach Life, Sir" by Rafeef Ziadah is a poignant example of how language can be used to convey the multifaceted experiences of Palestinians. Pragmatics, a branch of linguistics concerned with language use in context, provides valuable tools for analyzing this poem. It allows for an examination of how meaning is constructed not just through the words themselves but through the interaction between the text and its context. Understanding the pragmatic elements in "We Teach Life, Sir" helps to uncover the deeper implications of Ziadah's words.

Previous studies on the pragmatics of poetry have highlighted the importance of context in interpreting figurative language. Leech (1983) argues that the meaning of poetic language is often context-dependent, requiring readers to consider the situational and cultural background of the text. Similarly, Levinson (1983) emphasizes the role of pragmatic principles in understanding the implied meanings and presuppositions in poetry. Building on these theoretical foundations, this study aims to provide a detailed pragmatic analysis of "We Teach Life, Sir." By examining the linguistic context, deixis, presupposition, and speech acts in the poem, this research seeks to uncover the layers of meaning embedded in Ziadah's words. The findings of this study contribute to the broader field of pragmatic analysis in poetry, demonstrating how pragmatic elements can enhance our understanding of poetic texts. Rafeef Ziadah, a Palestinian spoken word artist and human rights activist, uses her poetry to articulate the Palestinian experience, blending powerful spoken word with poem to create a deeply moving testament to resilience and survival.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the pragmatic elements in the poem "We Teach Life, Sir" by Rafeef Ziadah. This method is appropriate for analyzing the linguistic and contextual features of poetry, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how pragmatic elements such as deixis, presupposition, and speech acts contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the poem (Creswell, 2017).

The primary data source for this study is Rafeef Ziadah's poem "We Teach Life, Sir," a powerful example of spoken word poetry that addresses complex socio-political issues. The poem was chosen for its rich use of language and its ability to convey deep emotions and nuanced messages. The analysis focuses on identifying and categorizing the pragmatic elements within the poem. These elements include deixis, presupposition, and speech acts, as defined by Levinson (1983), Stalnaker (2002), and Austin (2005). The analysis involves several steps:

1. Reading and Annotation: The poem will be read multiple times to identify instances of pragmatic elements. Annotations will be made directly on the text to highlight examples of deixis, presupposition, and speech acts.
2. Categorization: The identified pragmatic elements will be categorized into their respective types: deixis (e.g., temporal, spatial, and personal), presupposition, and various speech acts (e.g., assertions, questions, commands).
3. Contextual Analysis: The role of each pragmatic element will be analyzed in relation to the poem's linguistic and cultural context. This includes examining how deixis anchors the poem in specific temporal and spatial settings, how presuppositions create shared knowledge between the speaker and audience, and how speech acts engage the reader and convey the poem's message.
4. Interpretation: The contribution of pragmatic elements to the poem's overall meaning and emotional impact will be discussed. This involves exploring how these elements enhance the reader's understanding of the socio-political themes and the emotional depth of the poem.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, the analysis will be cross-checked by peers familiar with linguistic and literary analysis. Any discrepancies in the identification or categorization of pragmatic elements will be discussed and resolved through collaborative review (Gibbs, 2018). This process aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how pragmatic elements function within Ziadah's poem to convey its powerful message.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Tabel 1. Identification of Pragmatic Elements

Pragmatic Element	Description	Examples
Deixis	Anchors the narrative in specific	"Today," "we," "I," "my body,"

	temporal, spatial, and social contexts.	"here," "there," "sir"
Presupposition	Conveys shared knowledge and assumptions between the speaker and the audience.	"We Palestinians teach life," "Today, my body was a TV'd massacre," "You want me to speak, but I will not speak," "I can tell you stories about UN resolutions"
Speech Acts	Engages the audience and elicits a response through assertions, questions, and commands.	"We teach life, Sir," "You want me to speak about checkpoints"

Tabel 2. Analysis of Specific Pragmatic Elements

Element	Description
Linguistic Context	Use of vivid imagery and emotive language to enhance the impact of pragmatic elements.
Social Pragmatics and Cultural Context	References to cultural and political realities situate the poem within the broader context of the Palestinian struggle.

Discussion

Deixis

According to Levinson (1983), deixis is a linguistic feature that anchors utterances to the personal, temporal, and spatial context of the speaker. In Ziadah's poem, the use of deixis serves to create a vivid and immediate sense of the speaker's reality. The poem's frequent use of personal deixis ("we," "I," "my") establishes a connection between the speaker and the audience, inviting readers to share in the collective Palestinian experience. Temporal deixis ("today") emphasizes the ongoing nature of the conflict, while spatial deixis contrasts immediate suffering ("here") with perceived indifference ("there"). Social deixis ("sir") critiques power dynamics and authority. These elements together create a powerful narrative that situates the speaker within a broader socio-political context.

Presupposition

Stalnaker (2002) posits that presuppositions are propositions assumed to be true by the speaker and accepted by the listener for the communication to be meaningful. Ziadah's use of presupposition creates a shared understanding and solidarity between the speaker and audience. The poem presupposes the audience's awareness of Palestinian resilience and ongoing struggles. This is evident in lines like "We teach life, sir," which assume the audience's familiarity with Palestinian perseverance despite hardships. The poem also presupposes a lack of empathy and understanding from the international community, challenging superficial and misinformed perspectives through the speaker's confrontational tone. These presuppositions enhance the poem's emotional and socio-political depth.

Speech Acts

Austin (1975) describes speech acts as actions performed via utterances, encompassing assertions, questions, and commands. In "We Teach Life, Sir," speech acts serve to assert identity, challenge misconceptions, and provoke thought. The repeated assertion "We teach life, Sir" is a powerful declaration of Palestinian resilience and defiance, challenging the listener's perceptions. Rhetorical questions and commands engage the reader, inviting reflection on their understanding of the conflict. Ziadah's use of assertives, expressives, directives, and occasional declaratives creates a dynamic interaction that conveys the complex experiences and emotions of Palestinians under occupation.

Linguistic Context

Yule (2010) explains that context shapes how listeners interpret utterances. In Ziadah's poem, the linguistic context—marked by vivid imagery and emotive language—intensifies the pragmatic elements' impact. The poem's conversational tone, interspersed with poetic devices like imagery, repetition, and metaphor, creates an emotionally resonant narrative. The linguistic context amplifies the significance of deictic expressions, presuppositions, and speech acts, making the poem's message more compelling and accessible.

Social Pragmatics and Cultural Context

Van Dijk (2009) discusses how social interactions and cultural contexts influence language use. In "We Teach Life, Sir," the cultural references and social contexts play a crucial role in shaping the poem's message and its reception by the audience. The poem's references to Palestinian culture, history, and socio-political realities provide authenticity and depth. Cultural identity and historical context inform the audience of the broader Palestinian struggle, while critiques of media representation challenge the superficial portrayals of Palestinian suffering. These elements enhance the poem's impact, fostering empathy and understanding among listeners.

In conclusion, Pragmatic analysis in poetry, as discussed by scholars like Austin (1975), Levinson (1983), and Yule (2010), reveals how language elements function within their contexts to convey deeper meanings. The pragmatic elements in Ziadah's poem—deixis, presupposition, and speech acts—contribute to a multifaceted narrative that situates the Palestinian experience within a broader socio-political context. This analysis demonstrates how pragmatic elements enrich poetic texts, providing insights into the implicit messages and assumptions that shape the poem's emotional and socio-political resonance.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the pragmatic analysis of Rafeef Ziadah's "We Teach Life, Sir" underscores the profound impact of linguistic context, deixis, presupposition, and speech acts in enhancing the poem's meaning and emotional resonance. Through the deliberate use of these pragmatic elements, Ziadah not only conveys the complex socio-political realities of Palestinian life but also engages the reader in a dynamic, interactive narrative. This study highlights the importance of context in interpreting poetic language and demonstrates how pragmatics can uncover deeper layers of meaning in literary texts. Ultimately, this analysis contributes to the broader understanding of how poetry, as a form of literary expression, can utilize linguistic tools to communicate powerful and multifaceted messages. The poem's engagement with the audience on emotional, cognitive, and action-oriented levels highlights the profound impact of language in evoking empathy, fostering critical reflection, and inspiring solidarity and advocacy. Ziadah's work exemplifies the capacity of poetry to not only narrate personal and collective experiences but also to serve as a catalyst for social awareness and change, illustrating the transformative power of pragmatic language use in literary expression.

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