

THE PRAGMATICS OF TRAUMA, RESISTANCE, AND HUMAN CONNECTION; EXAMINING SPEECH ACTS IN KATOUGH'S *AS LONG AS THE LEMON TREES GROW*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores trauma, resistance, and human belonging in Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) through the lens of Speech Act Theory (1962). Drawing upon the theoretical underpinnings of J. L. Austin and John Searle, the study examines function of language as an act of survival in times of war and migration not merely as communication. Set against the backdrop of the Syrian conflict, the novel portrays characters whose utterances reveal psychological trauma, moral dilemmas and desperate search for belonging and human connection. This qualitative study relies on textual analysis to investigate representative dialogues, monologues, and narrative expressions from Katouh's (2022) viewpoint by collecting data through random sampling technique. The findings of the study illustrates that speech acts such as promises, confessions, warnings, pleas, exclamations, and declarations become tools through which characters negotiate fear, grief, loss, identity, and hope throughout the novel. The protagonist's dialogues and language reflects the disturbed consciousness of trauma and dilemmas while simultaneously serving as a mechanism of resilience and resistance against violence and displacement. Moreover, interpersonal communication in the novel demonstrates solidarity and emotional healing, highlighting the restorative and adaptive power of human connection during crisis. The paper navigates that speech in the narrative transcends literal meaning and operates performatively to preserve humanity amidst destruction. By integrating Speech Act Theory (1962) with trauma and resistance studies, this study contributes to contemporary literary discourse on war literature and demonstrates how language becomes a vital means of survival, emotional endurance, and social bonding in conflict narratives.

Keywords: trauma, resistance, human belonging, loss, war, survival, Speech Act Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

During war times and social unrest, literature tend to serve as a strong and powerful medium for representing human suffering, trauma, resistance, and survival. Specifically, modern war fiction explores psychological and emotional imbalance caused by violence and simultaneously

emphasizing the enduring desire as well as need for hope, belonging, and human connection. A significant literary work of Katouh (2022) *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* portrays disturbing and devastating realities of civil war through the lens of displaced and traumatized individuals. Katouh

(2022) maintained that in times of distress and fear, language became a means of resilience, emotional sanity, and interpersonal communication. Through the dialogues, monologues, interactions, and emotional expressions of protagonist Salama, the text reveals the relationship between language, trauma, and social identity formation.

In literature, J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things* (1962) introduced Speech Act Theory which significantly expanded study of language. Austin (1962) expounded that "language does not merely convey information; rather, utterances perform actions such as promising, warning, apologizing, and declaring". John Searle (1969) further developed Austin's ideas, classifying speech acts into several categories such as declarations, directives, commissives, and expressives, providing strong foundation for effectively analyzing how literary characters use language to express feelings, build relationships, and react to social crises. Speech acts often reflected disturbed consciousness, compromised pain, and attempts to reinforce agency in devastating circumstances (Caruth, 1996).

In war literature, trauma tend to disrupt ordinary communication, making speech both difficult and necessary. Survivors of trauma struggle to articulate painful experiences, yet storytelling and verbal expression become essential for healing and recovery (Herman, 1992). Conversation, confessions, promises, and silences of people of war ridden areas directly symbolize the struggle to preserve and reinforce humanity in the middle of violence and displacement. In addition to this, novel illustrates role of communication in strengthening emotional resilience and social solidarity, highlighting the significance of empathy and interpersonal relationships.

This study aims to analyze the selected novel through the lens of Speech Act Theory to explore how language functions as an instrument of survival, resistance, and human connection. By examining the performative nature of speech within the narrative, the research contributes to contemporary discussions on trauma literature, war narratives, and linguistic representation in fiction.

Present paper focuses on analyzing *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (Katouh, 2022) by utilizing Speech Act Theory to examine function of language as a tool of survival, resilience, and human relations. By navigating the performative nature of speech within the war and conflict narrative, the study contributes to the modern discussions on war literature, trauma narratives and linguistic representation in fiction.

1.1 Research Questions

- How do speech acts in Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) reflect loss, trauma and psychological suffering during the course of Syrian civil war?
- How does language function as a tool of resistance and human connection in Katouh's (2022) novel through the use of performative speech acts?

1.2 Research Objectives

- To examine the representation of trauma and emotional fragmentation through speech acts in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022).
- To analyze how performative language in the novel constructs resistance, resilience, and interpersonal connection during war and forced displacement.

2. Literature Review

In modern literary and linguistic studies, the interconnected relationship between trauma, war, language, and resistance has become an important area of research. Scholars are of the view that language is not only a "communicative" tool but also an effective "performative" act through which individuals reform identity, memory, suffering, resistance, and survival. J. L. Austin (1962) asserted in Speech Act Theory that "utterances perform actions rather than simply conveying meaning". John Searle (1969) further widen the scope by classifying speech acts into declaratives, directives, assertives, commissives, and expressives. Together, their work provided an effective framework for analyzing operations of language in socio-political and emotional contexts. Modern literary studies and criticism utilized Speech Act Theory to explore role of fictional discourse in

reflecting human personal experiences of resilience, trauma, and emotional stability.

Trauma and war literature also highlighted the importance of language in successful representation of painful experiences. Traumas tend to disrupt routine communication because of struggles of survivors in articulating overwhelming experiences (Caruth, 1996). Furthermore, Herman (1992) examined that "narration and verbal expression are essential for psychological recovery, as trauma victims seek meaning through storytelling and interpersonal communication". These opinions recommended that amidst trauma narratives, speech becomes both fragmented and therapeutic. In literary texts, speech acts are responsible for revealing emotional weakness, suppressed pain, forgotten memories, and desired human connection during violence and migration.

Recent researches further illustrates the increasing interdisciplinary interest in language and trauma. In 2023, Hobyane navigated performative function of trauma and resistance through Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), suggesting that language can effectively and symbolically represent both suffering and resilience within war narratives. Similarly, Buckley (2023) explored "the role of embodied and aesthetic language in trauma-focused dramatic therapy, emphasizing how expressive communication facilitates emotional healing and psychological endurance". These researches suggested that language contains emotional and performative strength, specifically in the circumstances shaped by violence and destruction.

Contemporary studies in psychology and communication studies also supported the research between trauma and linguistic representation. Qiu et al. (2024) examined metaphorical language among war survivors and expounded that linguistic patterns tend to reveal hidden psychological distress and emotional instability. Likewise, in 2024, Quillivic et al. highlighted language markers that are associated with post-trauma stress disorder, illustrating the role of trauma in shaping communication and emotional patterns. In addition to this, O'Leary et al. (2023) further demonstrates the significance of

trauma-driven communication practices, emphasizing that "speech and language play a crucial role in emotional recovery and resilience". These perspectives suggested that through the medium of language, individuals seek to process grief, loss, fear, and survival.

In literature, war narratives tend to highlight the psychological impact of displacement and war. Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022), with the help of emotional and performative dialogues that reflect trauma, loss, hope, and resilience, effectively portrays the Syrian civil war. Existing studies on war literature widely examines themes of forced migration, identity crisis, and fragmented memory. However, limited literature specifically examines the performative nature of speech with such narratives. Katouh's characters repeatedly use warnings, pleas, confessions, promises, and emotions to preserve humanity in the course of war. These dialogues not merely function as a "communicative" tool but it also serve as various acts of survival and emotional instability.

Additionally, recent literature depicts that Speech Act Theory (1962) expanded beyond traditional linguistics into interdisciplinary domains including psychology, fragmented communication, and digital discourse. Afzaal et al. (2024) investigates that "contemporary speech act research increasingly integrates literary, social, and psychological perspectives, demonstrating the theory's relevance in understanding human interaction during crises". Furthermore, Benamara et al. (2024) emphasized that communication becomes important during political unrest and conflict, where speech acts tend to reflect fear, grief, urgency, and collective survival.

Significant amount of research exists on war narratives and Speech Act Theory independently, few studies combine these approaches in the analysis of modern war literature. So, present study aims at bridging this gap by examining role of speech acts in Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) reflect belonging, resistance, and trauma. Through a qualitative textual analysis of the novel, the study emphasize role of performative speech to cope with violence,

negotiate bonds, and reinforce hope amidst war and displacement.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This research relies on J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), later expanded by John Searle. Speech Act Theory investigates language as a form of action rather than only a system of communication. In 1962, Austin expounded that "utterances perform actions such as promising, warning, apologizing, and requesting. He categorizes speech into three interrelated acts: locutionary acts, which refer to the literal meaning of words; illocutionary acts, which represent the speaker's intended function; and perlocutionary acts, which describe the effect of the utterance on the listener". This framework provides an effective approach for understanding how main characters in literary texts use language to maintain relationships, express emotions, and respond to traumatic experiences.

Searle (1969) further refined Austin's ideas by categorizing illocutionary acts into five major categories such as directives, assertives, commissives, expressives and declaratives. Assertives tend to reflect beliefs, directives attempt to influence other's actions, commissives commit speakers to future actions, expressives express emotional states and declaratives bring about social changes through language itself. This classification is particularly relevant in analyzing war narratives, where speech seek to reflect fear, grief, survival, resistance, and emotional ambiguities.

Current study used underpinnings of Speech Act Theory to examine function of language as a framework of trauma expression, resistance, and connection in Katouh's *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022). Dialogues, confessions, warnings, promises, and emotional exchanges in the novel become performative responses to violence and involuntary displacement. Trauma scholars such as Caruth (1996) investigates that "traumatic experiences often disrupt conventional language, resulting in fragmented or emotionally charged expressions". Similarly, Herman (1992) highlights that verbal articulation and storytelling

are the essential components for emotional healing and psychological survival.

By integrating Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962) with trauma studies, this framework enables a deeper insights of how characters use language to preserve identity, resist destruction, and maintain interpersonal relationships during conflict. Therefore, theoretical framework supports the current study's objective of exploring the performative power of speech in representing trauma and resilience within modern war literature.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to examine trauma, resistance, and human connection in *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) through the framework of Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962). Qualitative textual analysis is particularly suitable for this study because it enables an in-depth interpretation of language, emotions, and thematic patterns within a text. The research focuses on analyzing selected dialogues, monologues, and narrative expressions from the novel to investigate how speech acts function as performative tools of survival and emotional resilience not merely as a communicative tool.

The primary source of data for this study is the novel itself, while secondary sources include books, journal articles, and scholarly studies related to Speech Act Theory, trauma studies, and war literature. The data analysis follows a thematic and interpretive approach. Particular attention is given to utterances that reveal fear, hope, resistance, grief, and interpersonal solidarity. Hence, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of the performative role of speech in contemporary war literature.

4. Data Analysis

This section analyzes selected dialogues and communicative interactions from the novel *As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow* (2022) through Austin & Searle's Speech Act Theory (1962). The analysis focuses on how speech acts function as mechanisms of trauma negotiation, resistance,

emotional survival, and human connection in the course of war.

4.1 Expressive Speech Acts and Trauma

In the discourse of the novel, expressives dominate and characters repeatedly employ expressions of fear, grief, guilt, despair, and longing to externalize psychological war-driven traumas. "These expressive acts reveal the inability of traumatized individuals to communicate pain directly" (Caruth, 1996).

In the novel, Salama's conversations frequently contain emotionally fragmented utterances reflecting trauma-induced instability. Her speech often contains hesitation, emotional suppression, and indirect confessions of fear. These expressive acts reveal the inability of traumatized individuals to communicate pain and suffering directly. Herman (1992) elaborated that "The expressive force behind her language demonstrates how trauma disrupts rational communication and replaces it with emotionally charged discourse". For instance, Salama repeatedly verbalizes exhaustion, stress, and hopelessness while working in overwhelmed hospitals. Such utterances function not only as emotional release but also as indicators of psychological disorder. The expressive force behind her language demonstrates disruption of rational communication in trauma and replaces it with emotionally charged discourse.

For instance, Salama states:

"Every day I wake up wondering if today will be the day I die" (Katouh, 2022).

This utterance functions as an expressive speech act communicating fear and emotional instability of the character. Rather than merely conveying information, the utterance externalizes trauma and existential anxiety. The illocutionary force of the utterance lies in expressing psychological exhaustion caused by continuous violence and displacement.

Similarly, Salama confesses:

"I am so tired of losing people," (Katouh, 2022).

The speech act here reflects grief and emotional vulnerability. The directness of the statement

reflects accumulated trauma and survivor's guilt (Austin, 1962). Through expressives, Salama attempts to process suppressed pain that exceeds ordinary communication.

Another emotionally significant utterance appears when Salama says:

"Hope is dangerous here," (Katouh, 2022).

This expressive act reveals fear disguised as caution. The statement reflects trauma-induced pessimism where hope itself becomes psychologically threatening in a war zone.

4.2 Directives as Survival Strategies

Directive speech acts appear prominently in scenes involving danger, escape, and medical emergencies in the novel. Moments of conflict and crisis tend to dominate interpersonal communication by commands, warnings, requests, and pleas (Searle, 1969).

Characters frequently use urgent directives such as warnings to flee bombings, instructions during rescue operations, and appeals for safety. These directives reflect how wartime and emergency communication prioritizes survival over conversational politeness. The directive force of language becomes particularly significant in hospital settings where communication is rapid, fragmented, and action-oriented. Salama's interactions as a medical worker demonstrate the function of directive as a practical survival mechanisms under catastrophic conditions.

Examples of directive functions include: Warning others about military attacks, urging characters to escape, requesting emotional support, encouraging hope and endurance. These directives reveal that communication in conflict zones becomes highly functional and immediate, shaped by fear and urgency.

For example, characters repeatedly issue commands such as:

"Run!"

"Get down!"

"You need to leave now," (Katouh, 2022).

These directives convey urgency to protect others from violence (Herman, 1992). Their brevity reflects the immediacy of wartime communication

where language becomes action-oriented instead of merely communication.

In another interaction, Salama pleads:

"Please don't go back out there," (Katouh, 2022).

This directive functions simultaneously as a request and emotional appeal. Beneath the literal meaning lies fear of loss, grief, and emotional dependency.

Similarly, hospital discourse contains rapid directives such as:

"Bring more bandages," (Katouh, 2022).

"Help me stop the bleeding," (Katouh, 2022).

These utterances illustrate survival communication becomes highly functional during catastrophe. Searle (1969) expounded that "the directive speech acts facilitate collective action and crisis management".

The analysis demonstrates that directives in the novel are not merely linguistic commands but performative acts necessary for physical and emotional survival.

4.3 Commissive Speech Acts and Emotional Commitment

Commissive speech acts such as promises, vows, and commitments play a crucial role in maintaining emotional resilience and instability during wartime (Searle, 1969). Characters use commissives such as promises to create psychological stability amidst chaos, violence, and uncertainty. Salama and Kenan's conversations frequently include future commitments that symbolize hope and resistance in the moment of despair. "Promises about protection, escape, or staying together provide emotional reassurance, even in uncertain survival circumstances" (Herman, 1992).

For example, promises to protect loved ones function as emotional anchors in a collapsing social environment. These commissive acts psychologically resist the hopelessness and despair caused by war.

The analysis indicates that commissives perform three major functions:

1. Sustaining emotional bonds

2. Creating hope for the future

3. Resisting psychological defeat

Thus, promises in the novel operate less as guarantees of action and more as symbolic acts of emotional survival.

Kenan reassures Salama by saying:

"I'm not leaving you," (Katouh, 2022).

This commissive speech act functions as emotional reassurance, symbolizes resistance against abandonment and despair during wartime. Another example appears when characters express dreams of escape and safety:

"One day we'll make it out together," (Katouh, 2022).

Promises about future perform hope and emotional endurance. The utterance reflects the human need to imagine survival despite surrounding destruction and devastation (Caruth, 1996).

Likewise, Salama's emotional commitments toward her family demonstrate preservation of interpersonal bonds during war.

4.4 Assertive Speech Acts and Resistance Discourse

"Assertive speech acts in the novel are used to describe violence, testify to suffering, and challenge silence surrounding war crimes," (Searle, 1969). Through statements, descriptions, and truth claims, characters resist the erasure of civilian experiences.

Salama's utterances often contain assertive acts documenting death, destruction, and fear (Caruth, 1996). These utterances function as a testimonial discourse that preserves the reality of suffering against political suppression and international silence.

The analysis demonstrates that assertives serve as:

- acts of witnessing
- forms of historical memory
- linguistic resistance against dehumanization.

By verbally acknowledging suffering, characters reclaim agency within oppressive conditions. Truth-telling becomes an act of resistance. Assertive speech acts appear throughout the novel

as forms of witnessing and resistance. Characters of the novel use assertives to testify to violence and preserve truth.

Salama narrates scenes of destruction through utterances such as:

"The hospital floors were covered in blood," (Katouh, 2022).

Traumatic memory is reserved through assertive act which documents civilian suffering. The statement functions as testimony against silence and erasure.

Similarly, the novel includes descriptions like:

"Children were dying while the world watched," (Katouh, 2022).

This utterance operates as both assertion and political criticism. The speech act condemns global indifference toward sufferings of civilian war.

Another powerful assertive statement appears when characters acknowledge the reality of war:

"Nobody is coming to save us," (Katouh, 2022).

The declarative tone communicates despair while simultaneously recognizing political unrest and abandonment. Such assertives reflect that truth-telling becomes a form of resistance (Herman, 1992).

The analysis demonstrates that assertive speech acts in the novel preserve historical memory and challenge dehumanization in war zones.

4.5 Silence, Indirectness, and Trauma Communication

An important finding of the study suggests that trauma is frequently communicated through silence and indirect speech rather than explicit verbalization.

Characters often refrain direct references to death, fear, or emotional pain. Hesitations, unfinished sentences, pauses, and metaphorical expressions reveal psychological disturbances. This indirectness portrays trauma theory's argument that painful experiences frequently exceed linguistic representation (Caruth, 1996).

The novel repeatedly portrays moments where silence becomes more powerfully than speech.

Emotional withdrawal, avoidance, and incomplete responses indicate the limitations of language under traumatic conditions (Herman, 1992).

Examples include:

"interrupted conversations, avoidance of discussing loss, emotionally restrained dialogue", For example, characters often interrupt themselves or avoid discussing painful losses directly. Salama frequently suppresses emotions and prioritize silence over verbalization.

When discussing death, conversations become emotionally restrained:

"We don't talk about them anymore," (Katouh, 2022).

This narration illustrates trauma avoidance. The indirectness reflects psychological fragmentation and emotional self-protection.

Similarly, unfinished sentences and pauses throughout the novel signify emotional overload. Silence functions as a communicative act of revealing pain that cannot be fully articulated (Austin, 1962).

Therefore, trauma communication in the novel operates not only through spoken language but also through absence, hesitation, silence, and suppression.

4.6 Speech Acts and Human Connection

Despite the brutality and destruction of war, the novel consistently portrays language as a means of preserving intimacy and humanity amidst conflict and war. Consolatory speech acts help characters to heal emotionally and survive collectively (Herman, 1992).

Expressions of comfort, affection, reassurance, and empathy strengthen interpersonal relationships in the middle of destruction. Emotional communication becomes essential for maintaining psychological stability.

The analysis reveals that human connection in the novel is sustained through:

- Comforting dialogues, supportive reassurances, shared memories, and emotionally intimate conversations.

The novel portrays communication as essential for preserving emotional intimacy and humanity, despite violence and forced displacement.

Consolatory speech acts repeatedly strengthen interpersonal relationships. For instance, characters reassure one another through emotionally supportive language:

"You are not alone," (Katouh, 2022).

This consolatory speech act reduces emotional isolation and reinforces solidarity and inclusion. Similarly, affectionate interactions such as:

"I need you here with me," (Katouh, 2022).

It demonstrate how communication sustains emotional dependence and human connection during crisis. Kenan's comforting dialogues often function therapeutically for Salama, helping her resist psychological collapse and push her towards emotional healing. Caruth (1996) elaborated that emotional reassurance becomes a survival mechanism against despair.

The analysis suggests that speech acts of consolation counteract the dehumanizing effects of war by preserving empathy, care, and interpersonal bond (Searle, 1969).

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow (2022) through the lens of Speech Act Theory (1962), demonstrating how language operates as a performative tool for expressing trauma, resistance, and human connection in a war-ridden context. Drawing on the foundational work of J. L. Austin (1962) and expanded work of John Searle (1969), the research established that utterances and dialogues in Katouh's novel function beyond literal meaning, performing emotional, psychological, and social actions. The findings of the study reveal that expressive speech acts reflect deep psychological trauma, while directive and commissive acts highlight survival strategies, moral responsibility, and resistance against violence.

The analysis further demonstrates that communication in the novel is central to sustaining human connection amid destruction. Characters use language to cope with grief, construct hope, and maintain solidarity in the face of displacement and loss. In line with trauma theory, Caruth (1996) and Herman (1992)

emphasize that "trauma disrupts language but also compels individuals to seek expression as a form of healing". As Long as the Lemon Trees Grow (2022) reflects this duality by portraying both the fragmentation and restorative power of speech.

Finally, the study concludes that language in war literature is not merely representational but performative, shaping identity, negotiating relationships, resilience, and emotional survival. This research contributes to literary and linguistic scholarship by bridging Speech Act Theory with trauma and resistance studies, offering deeper insight into how speech becomes a vital instrument of endurance and humanity in contexts of conflict and suffering (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

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