Chapter 5

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

As mentioned previously, to have a successful persuasion, particularly in written texts, is difficult. Teaching and learning persuasive writing was then also deemed difficult and demanding. The difficulties even increase when the purpose is to persuade people to take environmental action. Interestingly, in the US, persuasive texts that were published in mass media seemed to be able to influence public views on one of the most difficult environmental issues, climate change. Examples of such persuasive texts are newspaper opinion articles. This research has then become important as it sought to study persuasive strategies in U.S. online newspaper opinion articles that talk about climate change. In particular, the present research tried to discover the types of illocutionary act and illocutionary force indicators that were used by the writers in their efforts to achieve persuasion.

The results of the analysis revealed that the writers' choices of illocutionary acts and illocutionary force indicators are to some extend related to the features of the genre and goal or purpose of persuasion. In the articles, indirect illocutionary acts were more preferred than the direct ones. Besides, implicit illocutionary force indicators were also favoured over the explicit, especially in direct illocutionary acts. These preferences were in line with the fact that opinion articles have been considered as an implicit form of persuasion that contains implicit persuasive strategies. Then, under the category of indirect illocutionary acts, the writers had mostly performed assertives. This is in accordance with the goal or purpose of persuasion, which is to complete the move from constative to directive or from believing in something to actually doing something. Such preference is also in in line with the communicative purpose or social function of the genre, which is to inform readers.

Besides the genre features and purpose of persuasion, the writers' preferences over certain types of illocutionary acts and illocutionary force indicators are apparently also related to the topic or issue being discussed. This was evident from the less presence of expressive acts in the 10 selected articles. As

expressive acts are not verifiable and subjective in nature, the writers rarely performed them in the articles. It was because discussions about environmental issues, especially climate change, mostly involve scientific or objective knowledge. This establishes a relation between the writers' choices of illocutionary acts or illocutionary force indicators and topic or issue being discussed.

The findings also provided evidence of the fact that persuasion needs to be subtle and implicit to have the desired effect. In the present study, the predominant strategies found in the selected texts are implicit in nature. In terms of the types of illocutionary act, the writers had used more indirect than direct illocutionary acts. In particular, they had performed the assertive type of acts in a more frequent manner than the other three types. Then, as a strategy to achieve persuasion, the writers had also used more implicit illocutionary forces to indicate illocutionary forces. In the US, applying all of these strategies in media texts like newspaper opinion articles has apparently triggered attitude change. As mentioned earlier, in 2016, the Americans had taken global climate change issues more seriously than at any time in the past eight years. They had even agreed to do more to slow global warming and to

support climate change and energy policies. This attitude change could suggest that the opinion article writers had achieved the desired effect by means of the more subtle and implicit persuasive strategies.

At the same time, it was discovered that directness or explicitness is also necessary for achieving persuasion. In 77 out of 197 illocutionary acts, the (opinion article) writers chose to use directives, which belong to direct illocutionary acts, to get readers to do something. They did so, among others, to make readers recognize their persuasive intention and further to increase the text's persuasiveness. Moreover, in indirect illocutionary acts, the writers had preferred to use explicit indicators for indicating illocutionary forces. This is due to the fact that the use of implicit indicators can cause ambiguity, while the use of explicit illocutionary force indicators can create less doubt.

In view of the above, it can be argued that in order to attain persuasion, persuasive writers have to carry out a balancing act. They need to be implicit or indirect to make less obvious the intent to persuade and eventually minimize the level of resistance. At the same time, they should also incorporate elements of explicitness or directness to secure

uptake, i.e. to facilitate readers' understanding, and further achieve perlocutionary effects. In the present study, this balancing act was reflected by the fact that direct illocutionary acts still occurred in a high number of occurrences and percentage. It was also suggested by the use of illocutionary force indicators. To reduce the level of explicitness in direct acts, the writers had mainly used implicit indicators to indicate the utterances' forces. Conversely, to eliminate ambiguity or vagueness in indirect acts, they had mostly used explicit indicators to encode illocutionary forces.

Additionally, the results also suggested some illocutionary act verbs that were preferred and might therefore be more persuasive than others when performed in persuasive texts that talked about environmental issues. Under the category of directives, there were three types of illocutionary act verb that were dominant. Those verbs were urging, demanding, and suggesting. In these illocutionary acts, the writers tried to galvanize readers into action by creating a sense of urgency, expressing their strong will, or just making a weak attempt. Then, under the category of assertives, four types of illocutionary act verb were found dominant. Those verbs were informing, assuring, warning, and describing. In these acts, the

writers tried to spur readers into action by relying on information-giving, eliminating doubts, making dire predictions, and giving more complete information about the subject of the discussion.

Suggestions

As mentioned above, in the field of pragmatics and speech act study, speech act researchers have often raised a key question. That question is how the illocutionary force of an utterance is indicated when no (explicit) illocutionary force indicators appear. This study has provided some answers to that key question. It has mainly recognized the role of implicature, especially conversational implicatures, in indicating illocutionary forces when no explicit indicators were found. It has also identified the role of other pragmatic elements such as deixis, referring expressions, presuppositions, and even contextual clues in encoding illocutionary forces. Future studies might, for example, try to find different types of implicit illocutionary force indicators or explore about the use of such implicit indicators in different types of text.

Furthermore, while the present research included only illocutionary acts, future research can take one step further by

investigating perlocutionary acts or effects. The study can be conducted by analyzing readers' comments, which were posted as an attachment to an article. Such comments can reflect well public opinions towards the article. They can therefore be a good source of data to identify types of illocutionary acts that are likely to be effective for achieving persuasion. Otherwise, applying the speech act theory, further research can examine other forms of persuasion that discuss the same issue (i.e. environment) or in other fields (e.g., politics, health, religion, and so on). As the writers' choices of illocutionary act types and illocutionary force indicators are to some extend related to the genre features, a further study might be able to reveal different choices or strategies used by persuasive writers to attain persuasion.

Finally, further research that involves media texts or specifically newspaper opinion articles can also be conducted in the field of applied linguistics. As mentioned earlier, media texts that contain persuasive illocutionary acts are good sources of authentic materials to teach persuasive writing. Materials development researchers can therefore do more research to find out whether such type of texts can or should be included in textbooks about writing

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