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PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECT IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A PRAGMALINGUISTIC ACCOUNT OF SPEECH ACTS AND ENGLISH–UZBEK COMPARATIVE PERSUASION

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Abstract: This article investigates the pragmalinguistic nature of perlocutionary influence in political communication by applying the speech act theory tradition (Austin; Searle) and critical discourse perspectives (CDA). Within the "locution–illocution–perlocution" framework, political utterances are treated not only as propositional contents but also as strategic actions that aim at shaping voters' cognition, emotions, and behavioural tendencies. A comparative English–Uzbek lens is employed to show how election-time discourse uses language resources such as euphemization, conceptual metaphor, evaluative lexis, and syntactic rhetoric to realize illocutionary intentions that are expected to trigger perlocutionary outcomes. The study proposes a set of parallel coding indicators linking linguistic devices to perlocutionary indicators of framing adjustment, emotional orientation, and mobilization readiness.
Keywords: political discourse; speech acts; illocutionary force; perlocutionary effect; pragmatics; comparative discourse analysis; euphemization; conceptual metaphor.

Introduction

Political communication is frequently described as an arena for information exchange; however, election-time language is also a targeted mechanism for influencing public interpretation and conduct. In this context, the central challenge for linguistics is to explain how "saying" becomes "doing" and how linguistic acts lead to real changes in the audience. Speech act theory provides an explanatory bridge between the structural properties of utterances and their pragmatic consequences.

From the perspective of Austin and Searle, speech is not merely a passive representation of reality but an action-performing practice. The locutionary level relates to the production of meaningful utterances; the illocutionary level captures the speaker's intended force (e.g., promise, directive, assertion); and the perlocutionary level concerns the effects on listeners' thoughts, feelings, and actions. In political discourse, perlocutionary influence is particularly salient because persuasion, solidarity construction, and mobilization are typically achieved through indirect or conventionally masked strategies rather than straightforward argument alone (Dylgjeri, 2017; Yardımcı, 2026).

Thus, this article focuses on two connected goals: (i) to systematize perlocutionary influence within a pragmalinguistic speech act model, and (ii) to demonstrate a parallel English–Uzbek comparative framework for analysing manipulative persuasion in pre-election speeches and campaign rallies.

The locution–illocution–perlocution model

Austin's (1962) approach assumes that in "saying something," speakers simultaneously perform multiple acts. Searle's (1969) refinement provides a typology of illocutionary forces, enabling researchers to connect political strategies with pragmatic functions. In persuasive political contexts, the illocutionary intention is often designed to generate a perlocutionary effect in the audience—such as increased trust, reduced resistance, emotional activation, or readiness to act. A pragmalinguistic reading treats perlocution as an outcome that is not fully guaranteed by intention alone: the same utterance may produce different effects depending on social, cultural, and discourse conditions. This helps explain why political language may intentionally maintain interpretive flexibility and plausible ambiguity.

Illocutionary categories as pragmatic engines of influence

In election discourse, illocutionary forces are commonly organized around persuasive functions. Searle's categories are operationalized in political contexts as follows:

- Assertives (ideological truth-claims and legitimation),
- Directives (inviting or ordering action),
- Commissives (promises and commitments),
- Expressives(solidarity, empathy, emotional alignment),

Empirical studies applying speech act theory to political settings show that indirect and context-dependent meaning-making is a salient feature of political communication, strengthening persuasive efficacy through strategic mitigation of political risk (Yardımcı, 2026; Arsith, 2015; Abdelshahid, 2024).

Political influence often requires a temporal organization of persuasion. In many campaign discourses, persuasive work begins before the utterance and continues after its reception.

Prelocutor strategies create favourable cognitive and emotional background. Typical mechanisms include:

- establishing ethos and authority,
- framing the campaign agenda,
- selecting discourse topics that activate shared values,
- preparing interpretive expectations that guide audience inference.

After an utterance, political agents seek to consolidate the audience's interpretive shift. Postlocutor strategies include repetition of key slogans, emotional reinforcement, and structural choices that support memory and acceptance. The combined prelocutor–postlocutor model is consistent with the idea that perlocutionary outcomes emerge from a discourse process rather than from isolated sentence meanings (Kramsch, 2020; Solijonova, 2026).

This section presents the language resources most frequently associated with manipulative persuasion and perlocutionary influence in pre-election discourse. Euphemization is a key strategy for softening potentially harmful realities and reducing audience resistance. Comparative work on euphemisms indicates that they not only mitigate communicative discomfort but also function as tools for veiling and distorting information in order to shape public conscience (Pavlova & Potovskaya, 2023; Prato, 2020).

For election campaigns, euphemization serves two pragmatic aims:

1) decreasing emotional opposition (mitigation), and
2) adjusting the audience's framing of responsibility and causality.

Metaphor operates as a cognitive-ideological instrument that structures how audiences interpret power, legitimacy, risk, and collective identity. Comparative metaphor studies report that metaphor families such as JOURNEY, BUILDING, FAMILY, WAR/STRUGGLE, and BODY/HEALTH create ready-made causal interpretations and moral evaluations (Jumaniyozova, 2026).

In parallel English–Uzbek analysis, metaphor realization may differ according to rhetorical goals and institutional context: English discourse may favour urgency and competition frames, while Uzbek political communication may more consistently foreground collective cohesion and continuity through culturally resonant embodied domain

Evaluative vocabulary and pronominal selection contribute to identity management (in-group vs out-group). Persuasive political discourse frequently uses "positive self-presentation" and contrastive constructions to strengthen alignment with the speaker and legitimacy claims (Gasparyan & Ayvazyan, 2026).

Syntactic rhetoric—such as rhetorical questions, ellipsis, and organized argumentation—supports interpretive guidance. Political indirectness often mitigates political risk and preserves diplomatic ambiguity, enabling speakers to influence multiple audiences without explicit direct confrontation .

Comparative English–Uzbek Framework: Parallel Coding for Perlocution

Data and scope

The proposed coding framework is designed for a representative corpus of election-time political speeches and campaign rally discourse in English and Uzbek (2020–2024). The corpus includes public addresses, candidate speeches, and campaign statements.

Methodological procedure

The analysis follows a comparative pragmatic approach:

1) Segment identification: extract utterance units relevant to persuasion (promises, directives, assertions, solidarity moves).

2) Illocutionary classification: assign illocutionary force category (assertive/ directive/ commissive/ expressive etc.).

3) Device-level coding: identify linguistic mechanisms enabling influence (euphemization, metaphor families, evaluative lexis, syntactic rhetoric).

4) Perlocutionary indicator mapping: evaluate which audience-facing outcomes the discourse is designed to generate.

Parallel indicators linking illocution to perlocution

To operationalize perlocutionary influence, this paper proposes three parallel perlocutionary indicator groups:

- Framing adjustment (cognitive):whether the discourse shifts how the audience interprets causes, responsibility, and solutions.
- Emotional orientation (affective): whether the discourse mitigates negative emotion (via euphemization) or activates positive hope/mobilization (via metaphor scenarios).
- Mobilization readiness (behavioural): whether the discourse increases willingness to participate, comply, or support.This framework supports cross-linguistic comparison because it ties both languages to shared perlocutionary evaluation dimensions, while allowing linguistic realization differences.

Results and Discussion

Although the article mainly develops and justifies a pragmalinguistic comparative model, the literature supports several theoretical expectations:

1) Illocutionary prominence in political speech: speech act analyses show that political speakers often rely on illocutionary functions more heavily than purely locutionary content, and indirectness strengthens persuasive effect (Yardımcı, 2026; Abdelshahid, 2024).

2) Euphemization as perlocutionary management: euphemistic strategies are expected to lower resistance and allow interpretive acceptance by hiding harsh agency or responsibility.

3) Metaphor as framing technology: conceptual metaphor families stabilize ideological expectations and guide inference, thus functioning as a cognitive mechanism for perlocutionary success (Jumaniyozova, 2026).

4) Cross-linguistic rhetorical differences:comparative research suggests that English political discourse may lean toward explicit contrastive argumentation, whereas Uzbek discourse may more often foreground collective identity, ethical responsibility, and socially cohesive framing (Ruzimurodova & Qo‘ldashev, 2026).

Conclusion

This article argued that perlocutionary influence in political discourse can be systematically modelled through speech act theory and pragmalinguistic coding. The locution–illocution–perlocution framework explains how political utterances function as actions, not only as information carriers. Within pre-election settings, perlocutionary outcomes are shaped by the interaction between illocutionary intentions and language devices—especially euphemization, conceptual metaphor, evaluative lexis, and syntactic rhetoric.A comparative English–Uzbek framework was proposed that maps linguistic mechanisms to perlocutionary indicators of framing adjustment, emotional orientation, and mobilization readiness. This approach enables parallel coding and cross-linguistic interpretation without reducing perlocution to speaker intention alone.

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