English-Arabic Translation of Speech Acts: A Comparative Pragmatic Analysis of *King Lear*

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Abstract

This study investigates the translation of English speech acts into Arabic, focusing on pragmatic shifts, illocutionary force, and cross-cultural adaptation in literary texts. Grounded in speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975) and contrastive pragmatics, the research examines how different speech act types—representatives, directives, declarations, commissives, and expressives—are rendered in Arabic. The corpus consists of 25 purposefully selected speech acts from Act I of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and their Arabic translation by Jabrā (2000). Data analysis follows a descriptive and comparative-analytic design, employing Searle's (1975) framework for English and Arabic pragmatic classifications (Matloob, 1986; Abu Saree, 1989) to identify patterns of illocutionary force, directness, and perlocutionary effect. The findings reveal systematic shifts in translation, including the preference for constatives and requestive performatives, mitigation of directives through politeness strategies, and adaptation of declarations, commissives, and expressives to conform with Arabic cultural and rhetorical norms. High-commitment acts such as orders, threats, or oaths are carefully modulated, while expressive acts often employ interrogative or constative forms to convey emotion. These results underscore that effective translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but a culturally and pragmatically informed process, where maintaining the speaker's intention and illocutionary force is central. The study contributes to translation theory by providing empirical evidence of cross-linguistic pragmatic adjustment and offers pedagogical implications for translation education. It emphasizes the importance of context-aware, pragmatics-focused training to enhance translators' ability to convey both meaning and communicative effect, thereby ensuring translations that are faithful to both the source text and the target culture.

Keywords: Speech acts; Illocutionary force; Literary discourse; English-Arabic translation

Introduction

A speech act is an utterance that performs a function in communication. With each utterance, a speaker conveys information and at the same time takes an action, such as requesting, greeting, inviting, complaining, or advising (Austin, 1962). Akmajian et al. (2010, p. 395) define speech acts as "the acts performed in uttering expressions," while Schiffrin (1994, p. 60) emphasizes that the study of speech acts concerns "what people 'do' with language – with the functions of language."

Speech acts theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969, 1975), has been the foundation of pragmatics and has become a vigorous area in translation studies (Mohamedamin, 2025). Given that pragmatics focuses on meaning beyond the literal utterance—examining speakers' intentions and implied meanings (Yule, 1996)—speech acts have long been central to pragmatics studies. In translation, this meaning is conveyed based on the speaker's intent, the social context, and cultural nuances. According to Kitis (2009), translating speech acts requires conveying both the propositional content of an utterance and the pragmatic meaning embedded within it. Baker (2018) further highlights that pragmatic meaning extends beyond what is produced by the linguistic system and includes meanings negotiated, conveyed, and strategically manipulated by participants within a communicative context.

Central to speech act theory is the concept of 'illocutionary force', the intention behind an utterance that allows speakers to perform communicative acts such as congratulating, requesting, or advising. Searle (cited in Schiffrin, 1994, p. 57) indicates that "the basic unit of human linguistic communication is the illocutionary act". Hatim and Mason (1997) argue that translation strategies should prioritize illocutionary force over mere propositional content, while Kitis (2009) maintains that focusing solely on literal meaning is insufficient; the translator must concentrate on the function and pragmatic force of each utterance. Differences in cultural norms and language structures complicate this process as the functions of linguistic behaviors can vary significantly across cultures, leading to potential mismatches in illocutionary force or shifts in style and register (Bruti, 2019, pp. 16-32).

The shift from a focus on truth conditions to the function of language (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) has marked a significant evolution in our understanding of communication, making speech acts an essential field of inquiry in both linguistics and translation studies. However, much of early research has extensively explored speech act theory and its categorization, such as (Austin, 1962; Bach & Harnish, 1979; Katz, 1977; Searle, 1975; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1983), creating a noticeable research gap in corpus-based comparative analyses of speech act translation across languages and cultures, particularly between English and Arabic. Additionally, while Arab scholars have categorized speech acts into constatives and performatives (Al-Sakaki, 1983; Matloob, 1986), these frameworks have rarely been integrated with Western pragmatic approaches to assess how illocutionary force and pragmatic meaning are preserved in translation. Consequently, the extent to which pragmatic meaning and communicative intent of speech acts are maintained in English-to-Arabic translations remains underexplored.

The present study addresses this gap by exploring the translation of speech acts from English into Arabic, with a focus on the preservation of illocutionary force in literary discourse. By examining selected speech acts from Act I of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and their Arabic translation by Jabrā (2000), the study seeks to uncover how pragmatic meaning is conveyed across two linguistically and culturally distinct systems. The focus is on identifying the pragmatic shifts and cross-cultural adaptation in translation.

Literature review

Speech acts theory

Speech acts theory deals with the function of language in context, focusing on the speaker's intention and its effect on the listener. Unlike the traditional view of language as primarily producing true or false statements, Austin (1962) distinguishes between constatives and performatives. Constative utterances describe events, processes, or states of affairs and can be evaluated as true or false. Performatives, in contrast, are used to perform actions rather than assert facts and thus do not possess truth value. This strict distinction was then abandoned by Austin himself, emphasizing that all utterances simultaneously involve saying and doing, with meaning dependent on the context of issuance (Al-Hindawi, 1999).

Austin's foundational concepts classify utterances into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to the utterance and its propositional meaning, the illocutionary act conveys the speaker's intention, and the perlocutionary act concerns the effect on the listener (Levinson, 1983). Considering the illocutionary act as the basic unit of linguistic communication, Austin (1962) categorizes illocutionary force into five types: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. Searle (1969) critiques Austin's system for overlapping criteria and inconsistencies, refining the taxonomy into five classes: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1975); each encompassing sub-types such as asserting, questioning, thanking, blaming, agreeing, and apologizing (Bach, 2006, pp. 147-167).

Although the categorization of illocutionary force has been subjected to other amendments by some scholars, such as Bach and Harnish (1979), Katz (1977), and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1983), Searle's (1975) classification remains widely accepted. Al-Malik (1995) highlights Searle's classification as having a tighter structure and consistency compared to Austin's original framework and its economy relative to the classifications of Ohman (1972, pp. 115-141), Fraser (1975, pp. 187-210), and Bach and Harnish (1979).

In Arabic, speech acts have been approached by grammarians, rhetoricians, and jurisprudents from different perspectives. According to Al-Hindawi (1999), Arabic speech act theory is grounded in pragmatic meaning, emerging from the interplay of speaker intention, hearer comprehension, situational context, and speaker–hearer relations. Nonetheless, most Arab linguists have integrated speech acts within general rhetoric rather than pragmatics, maintaining the constative–performative distinction (Al-Qazwini, 1993; Al-Suyuti, 2008).

Constative is an utterance intended to inform the addressee about a state of affairs and possesses truth-value. When a constative aligns with reality and the speaker believes it, it is considered true; otherwise, it is false (Al-Sakaki, 1983; Al-Qazwini, 1993). Matloob (1986, pp. 464–466) further distinguishes three types of constatives: initial constative (neutral, for unknown information), requestive constative (using an emphasis particle to eliminate addressee doubt), and denial constative (using multiple emphasis particles to persuade a disagreeing addressee).

Performative involves utterances aimed at eliciting action rather than asserting facts (Al-Sakaki, 1983; Al-Jurjani, 1992). Haroon (2001) explains that performative requires the execution of actions such as requesting, prohibiting, or questioning, rather than being judged for truth or falsity. Performative in Arabic is further classified into two subtypes: requestive and non-requestive (Abu Saree', 1989; Ateeq, 2009). Requestive performative calls for an action not yet performed, such as imperative, negative imperative, interrogative, vocative, and wish. Non-requestive performative, by contrast, involves actions that take effect at utterance, including contractual formula, oath, and expressions of hope, praise, or

astonishment. Matloob (1980) notes that non-requestive performatives have attracted less attention, as many are simply constatives transferred into performative meaning.

Cross-cultural adaptation of speech acts

The translation of speech acts goes beyond the mere substitution of words between languages. It requires pragmatic competence, including understanding the speaker's intent, recognizing social context, and navigating cultural nuances. Mason (1998) defines translation as a communicative act negotiated through presupposition, implication, and inference. Similarly, Newmark (1988) emphasizes that effective translation balances literal rendering with pragmatic adaptation to achieve communicative equivalence. Speech acts, thus, sit at the intersection of linguistic form and social convention (Saeed, 2009), as functions like requesting, ordering, or questioning rely on both language and context.

The main challenge in translating speech acts arises from cultural variation and contextual embedding. Blum-Kulka (1982) identifies potential loss of illocutionary force as a major risk, while Bruti (2019) maintains that even when forms are preserved, differences in illocutionary strength can affect impact. Skinner (1974) emphasizes that cultural and environmental factors shape language use, requiring translators to decode and re-encode pragmatic cues appropriately. Translators must anticipate how utterances are received in the source culture and convey equivalent reception in the target culture. Sensitivity to these nuances is essential for maintaining intended meaning, tone, and socio-cultural embedding (Newmark, 2009; Nord, 2005; Sadikov & Naimova, 2025).

Some empirical studies illustrate these challenges further. For example, Tursunova (2025) reports that commissive and assertive speech acts in the detective genre are difficult to translate due to the need to preserve tone and communicative intent across cultural and linguistic boundaries. In this vein, Farghal (2014) highlights the importance of capturing indirectness, including presuppositions, implicatures, and politeness, which demand context-sensitive interpretation. Anis et al. (2022) note that while locutionary meaning is generally preserved in Arabic–Bahasa Indonesia translation, illocutionary force often shifts toward perlocutionary effect, reflecting adaptation to target-language norms. AlBzoor (2011) attributes frequent misrenderings of illocutionary acts and implicatures in literary translation to formalistic strategies, cultural misinterpretation, and excessive literalism.

From a pragmatic perspective, Bruti (2019) notes that translation of speech acts may involve shifts in style, register, and social representation, while Kitis (2009) stresses that translators must focus on the pragmatic force behind utterances, not only propositional content. Additionally, Hickey (1998) asserts that translation is fundamentally pragmatic, with success determined by the alignment between the translator's understanding and audience comprehension.

Drawing on the notion of 'pragmatic transfer', Polcz (2020) distinguishes negative transfer, which produces unintended shifts in implicature and speech act type, from positive transfer, which preserves functional equivalence. Similarly, Hassan (2011) argues that literal translation often fails to convey illocutionary force and recommends a holistic approach, interpreting speech acts within the broader illocutionary structure to ensure coherence and pragmatic effect.

In summary, translating speech acts is a complex process involving semantic, pragmatic, and cultural considerations. Successful translation balances literal meaning with illocutionary force and socio-cultural appropriateness. In literary contexts, this ensures that both the intended message and the nuanced social relations embedded in the text are preserved. Building on this foundation, the present study investigates the translation of English speech acts into Arabic in literary texts, focusing on pragmatic shifts and cross-

cultural adaptations. By situating the analysis within literary discourse, it explores how translators negotiate the tension between fidelity to the source text and pragmatic appropriateness in the target text, thereby contributing to understanding the role of pragmatics in cross-cultural literary translation.

Research aims

Due to the different linguistic, discoursal, and conversational strictures between languages, translating speech acts is viewed as a complex process, which involves semantic, pragmatic, and cultural considerations. However, existing research on speech acts and illocutionary force focuses either on theoretical categorization or general cross-cultural differences, leaving a gap in understanding how translators preserve—or modify—the illocutionary force, pragmatic meaning, and communicative function in translation. This gap is especially significant in the context of English-to-Arabic literary translation, where linguistic structures and cultural norms differ substantially. To address this gap, this research aims to make a comparative, corpus-based evaluation of the translation of speech acts in a controlled literary context, providing insights into the pragmatic shifts used to balance literal meaning with illocutionary force and socio-cultural appropriateness. Building on these foundations, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. How are the major types of speech acts realized in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Jabrā's (2000) Arabic translation?
2. What pragmatic shifts occur in the translation of English speech acts into Arabic?
3. How does the Arabic translation of speech acts maintain both the communicative intent and socio-cultural appropriateness embedded in the source text?

By situating the analysis within literary discourse, it explores how translators negotiate the tension between fidelity to the source text and pragmatic appropriateness in the target text, thereby contributing to understanding the role of pragmatics in cross-cultural literary translation.

Method

This study adopted a descriptive and comparative-analytic design, suitable for exploring linguistic phenomena across languages within natural contexts. Specifically, it applied principles of contrastive pragmatics and speech act theory to examine how speech acts are realized in English and Arabic through a comparative analysis of selected extracts from a literary text and its translation.

The descriptive aspect allowed for a detailed identification and categorization of speech acts in both the source text (English) and the target text (Arabic). The comparative dimension facilitated the exploration of cross-linguistic similarities and differences, while the analytic approach enabled a deeper understanding of the pragmatic functions and cultural nuances behind the use of the selected speech acts.

The corpus consisted of 25 speech acts extracted from Act I of Shakespeare's play *King Lear* and their Arabic translation by Jabrā (2000). Following Searle's (1975) classification, the selected speech acts were distributed equally between five categories: representatives, directives, declarations, commissives, and expressives. Act I of *King Lear* was chosen as the focus of this study because it establishes the central themes, characters, and conflicts in the play, making it particularly rich in speech acts that carry significant pragmatic force. Additionally, this act contains a variety of speech acts that set the stage for the unfolding tragedy, thus providing a fertile ground for analyzing illocutionary meaning. The purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure variation in both types of speech acts and speaking

characters, thereby capturing a representative range of pragmatic functions. Moreover, limiting the scope to Act I helped ensure a more focused and manageable analysis without compromising the depth of the study.

The data were analyzed in three stages. English speech acts were first examined pragmatically using Searle's (1975) framework of speech acts, focusing on illocutionary force, directness, and communicative function. The corresponding Arabic translations were then analyzed using Matloob's (1986) and Abu Saree's (1989) classifications of constatives and performatives to assess how illocutionary forces were rendered in the target language. Finally, cross-linguistic comparisons highlighted similarities and differences, interpreted in terms of linguistic structures and discourse conventions in both languages. Examining how these crucial acts are translated into Arabic allowed for an insightful evaluation of the extent to which the communicative intentions and sociocultural nuances of the source text are preserved in the target version.

Results

This section presents the results of the comparative analysis of English speech acts in Act I of *King Lear* and their corresponding Arabic translations. The evaluation is structured according to Searle's (1975) taxonomy, encompassing representatives, directives, declarations, commissives, and expressives. The results focus on how each class of speech acts is rendered in Arabic, highlighting patterns of pragmatic shifts, adjustments in illocutionary force, and the strategies employed to reconcile linguistic and cultural differences. This section lays the foundation for understanding the cross-linguistic tendencies in translating speech acts and provides empirical support for the subsequent discussion.

Translation of representatives

Representatives commit the speaker to the proposition truth, ranging from low-commitment forms (e.g., stating, predicting) to high-commitment forms (e.g., asserting). The Arabic translation of the representatives selected from the play is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Arabic translation of the representatives in Act I of King Lear*

Source text		Arabic text	
Utterance	Illocutionary force	Utterance	Speech act
1. "No, my lord"	stating	" لا يا مولاي" No, my lord.	constative (initial)
2. "I am made of that self-metal as my sister"	asserting	"ما أنا إلا من معدن أختي نفسه" I am only of the same metal of my sister.	constative (requestive)
3. "I think our father will hence to-night"	predicting	" أظن أن أبي سيرحل الليلة" I think my father will leave tonight.	constative (initial)
4. "Better thou hadst not been born than not to have pleas'd me better."	complaining	"لو لم تولدي من ألا تسريني خيراً مما فعلت" If you had not been born, you would not have made me do better than what you do.	constative (requestive)
5. "I tell you all her wealth"	stating	"أعلمتك بكل ثروتها" I told you all about her wealth.	constative (initial)

The results in Table 1 show that representatives are translated into Arabic consistently as constatives, reflecting their truth-value orientation in the target language. However, the illocutionary force of the source utterance seems determinant in adopting the translation pattern. For example, low-commitment acts of stating (items 1 and 5) and predicting (item 3) are translated as initial constatives, conveying straightforward information without emphasis, thus mirroring the tentative illocutionary force of the original. On the contrary, high-commitment acts of asserting (item 2) and complaining (item 4) are rendered as requestive constatives with emphasis particles like (ما أنا إلا) *I am only*, which serves to reinforce the certainty of the speaker's claim and persuade the addressee to acknowledge it. This strategy illustrates how Arabic accommodates the pragmatic nuance of commitment while adapting to its semantic conventions.

Translation of directives

Directives aim to induce the hearer to perform an action, with degrees ranging from mild advice to strong orders. Table 2 presents the Arabic translation of the directives selected from the play.

Table 2. *Arabic translation of directives in Act I of King Lear*

Source text		Arabic text	
Utterance	**Illocutionary force**	**Utterance**	**Speech act**
6. "Goneril, our eldest-born, speak first"	requesting	"غونريل، يا بكرنا، تكلمي أنت أولاً" Goneril, our eldest-born, speak first.	requestive performative (imperative)
7. "What says our second daughter, our dearest Regan?"	requesting	"ماذا تقول ابنتنا الثانية، عزيزتنا ريغن؟" What says our second daughter, our dearest Regan?	requestive performative (interrogative)
8. "Brother, I advise you to the best"	advice	"أخي، نصيحتي لخيرك" My brother, my advice is for your best.	constative (initial)
9. "I do beseech you to understand my purposes aright"	begging	"أرجوك أن تفقه ما أرمي إليه على وجهه الصحيح" I implore you to understand my purpose correctly.	requestive performative (wish)
10. "Acquaint my daughter no further with anything you know than comes from her demand out of the letter."	prohibition	"لا تُعلم ابنتي بما تعرف أكثر مما يتأتى عما توحيه الرسالة من سؤال" Don't acquaint my daughter with anything you know that comes from her demand out of the letter.	requestive performative (negative imperative)

Table 2 demonstrates that most directives are rendered as requestive performatives in Arabic, reflecting the language's reliance on semantic secondary meanings rather than the English focus on perlocutionary outcomes. For instance, begging (item 9) conveys a wish in Arabic, while requests (items 6 and 7) may assume imperative or interrogative forms, respectively, based on contextual urgency. Similarly, the act of prohibition (item 10) is translated as a negative imperative, denoting the authoritative tone of the source utterance. Contrariwise, a low-force act of advice (item 8) is rendered as initial constative, showing that minor illocutionary impact is often expressed descriptively rather than performatively. The translation strategies reveal that Arabic frequently recasts the speaker's intent into culturally conventional forms, such as using interrogatives for polite requests or imperatives for orders, ensuring the speech act retains its intended social function.

Translation of declarations

Declarations are performatives whose effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs. The defining characteristic of declarations is that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality (Al-Malik, 1995). The Arabic translation of the declarations selected from the play is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. *Arabic translation of declarations in Act I of King Lear*

Source text		Arabic text	
Utterance	**Illocutionary force**	**Utterance**	**Speech act**
11. "Know we have divided in three our kingdom"	resigning	"اعلموا أننا قد قسمنا مملكتنا ثلاثاً" Know that we have certainly divided our kingdom into three.	constative (requestive)
12. "I do invest you jointly with my power and pre-eminence"	bequeathing	"إني لأهبكما معاً سلطتي وسؤددي" I surely bestow you jointly my power and pre-eminence.	constative (requestive)
13. "Of all these bounds, we make thee lady"	appointing	"لقد جعلناك سيدة على هذه الحدود كلها" We do make you lady of all these bounds.	constative (requestive)
14. "To thee and thine, hereditary ever, remain this ample third of our fair kingdom"	declaring	"ليبق لك ولنسلك يتوارثونه أبداً هذا الثلث الرحب من مملكتنا الجميلة" May this spacious third of our beautiful kingdom be for you and your descendants to inherit forever.	constative (requestive)
15. "Here I disclaim all my paternal care"	dismissing	"إني هنا أتبرأ من حنوي الأبوي" I hereby disavow my paternal affection.	constative (requestive)

Despite their differing illocutionary forces, Table 3 displays that all declarations are rendered as requestive constatives in Arabic. The use of one or more of doubt-eliminating emphasis particles (قد, لـ, لقد، إن) in all items of this category signals certainty and seeks the addressee's acknowledgment, functioning similarly to the felicity conditions in English declarations. This approach allows Arabic to preserve the authoritative and formal tone of the original speech while adapting to the syntactic and pragmatic norms of the target language. The translations reveal a consistent strategy of semantic reinforcement, aligning the declarative's intended social effect with culturally acceptable expression.

Translation of commissives

Commissives commit the speaker to future action, with degrees of intensity reflecting the strength of the promise, threat, or oath. Table 4 displays the Arabic translation of the commissives selected from the play.

Table 4. *Arabic translation of commissives in Act I of King Lear*

Source text		Arabic text	
Utterance	**Illocutionary force**	**Utterance**	**Speech act**
16. "Now, by Apollo"	swearing	"قسماً بأبولو" By Apollo.	non-requestive performative
17. "I will not	promise	"لن أنام يا مولاي حتى أسلم رسالتك"	constative

sleep, my lord, till I have delivered your letter."		I will not sleep, my lord, till I have delivered your letter.	(initial)
18. "An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped."	threatening	"والله لو كذبت لأمرنا بجلدك" By God, we'll have you whipped if you lie.	non-requestive performative
19. "By Jupitar, this shall not be revok'd."	vowing	"قسماً يجوبيتر، لن ننقض هذا" I swear by Jupiter, we will not break this.	non-requestive performative
20. "I do serve you in this business."	offer	"إني أخدمك في هذا الأمر" I serve you in this matter.	constative (initial)

Table 4 shows that high-commitment commissives, such as swearing (item 16), threatening (item 18), and vowing (item 19), are rendered as non-requestive performatives, functioning as oaths in Arabic and emphasizing the speaker's seriousness. Lower-commitment commissives, such as promise and offer (items 17 and 20, respectively), appear as initial constatives, which focus on asserting intention rather than compelling action. Notably, these results reveal that Arabic translations often shift the perlocutionary force—while English commissives can aim to provoke action, Arabic non-requestive performatives primarily assert belief or expectation, reflecting language-specific strategies to maintain force without direct coercion.

Translation of expressives

Expressives communicate the speaker's emotional or attitudinal stance towards a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. Table 5 presents the Arabic translation of the expressives selected from the play.

Table 5. *Arabic translation of expressives in Act I of King Lear*

Source text		Arabic text	
Utterance	Illocutionary force	Utterance	Speech act
21. "She is herself a dowry."	praising	"إنها بحد ذاتها مهر ثمين" She is herself a dowry.	constative (initial)
22. "I am sorry, then, you have so lost a father that you must lose a husband."	apology	"يؤسفني إذن أنك فقدتِ أباً فكان عليك أن تفقدي زوجاً كذلك" I am sorry you have lost a father, then you must lose a husband too.	constative (initial)
23. "Why so earnestly seek you to put up that letter?"	deploring	"فيمَ اللهفة في إخفاء تلك الرسالة؟" What for so earnestly putting up that letter?	requestive performative (intorregative)
24. "What! Fifty of my followers at a clap, within a fortnight?"	surprise	"ماذا؟ أخمسون من أتباعي بضربة واحدة في أسبوعين اثنين؟" What? Fifty of my followers at a clap, within a fortnight?	requestive performative (intorregative)
25. "I thank thee, fellow; thou servest me, and I'll love thee."	thanking	"شكراً يا رجل. إنك لتخدمني. ولسوف أحبك." Thank you. You serve me and I will love you.	constative (initial)

Table 5 demonstrates that expressives exhibit varied treatment in Arabic. For example, acts of praising, apology, and thanking (items 21, 22, and 25, respectively) are rendered as initial constatives, emphasizing declarative reporting of sentiment rather than performative enactment. Acts of deploring and surprise (items 23 and 24), on the other hand, become interrogative requestive performatives, which convey exclamatory force through question forms—a conventional strategy in Arabic for expressing incredulity or strong emotional reaction (Al-Malik, 1995). These shifts illustrate the cultural and linguistic adaptation necessary to convey the speaker's attitude while aligning with Arabic rhetorical norms.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of English speech acts selected from Act I of *King Lear* and their Arabic translations revealed consistent patterns of pragmatic adaptation shaped by linguistic, cultural, and contextual considerations. Building on these trends, this section interprets the cross-linguistic adjustments in terms of illocutionary force, pragmatic adaptation, and cultural norms across all speech act types.

Data analysis shows that English representatives, ranging from stating, complaining, and asserting, are predominantly rendered as constative utterances in Arabic, reflecting the language's preference for propositional content aligned with truth-value judgments (Al-Malik, 1995). This pattern is particularly true with the low-commitment acts of stating, which are translated as initial constatives. On the other hand, the use of emphasis markers (e.g., ما أنا الا!) in translating high-commitment representatives, such as asserting, creates a subtle shift toward requestive constatives that strengthen the speaker's commitment. This trend demonstrates a pragmatic tendency in Arabic to heighten assertiveness lexically and syntactically (Matloob & Al-Baseer, 1982), without altering the propositional core.

Directives demonstrate a strong tendency to be recontextualized as requestive performatives in the Arabic language, even when the English utterance employs imperatives, interrogatives, or advisory forms. This reflects Arabic politeness strategies, particularly in hierarchical contexts, where performatives soften commands. Additionally, strong illocutionary forces, such as orders and prohibitions, are mediated through secondary meanings (e.g., wish or interrogative), aligning with Arabic rhetorical conventions that favor indirectness and deference (Al-Hindawi et al., 2014). The perlocutionary intent of English directives is often diluted in Arabic, prioritizing relationship preservation over direct action. This pattern confirms Blum-Kulka's (1986) 'politeness universality hypothesis', which posits that indirectness is a universal strategy of politeness but manifests differently across cultures.

Declarations show a distinct shift toward constative realizations, reflecting a pragmatic move from institutional performativity to assertive discourse. Authority in Arabic is often constructed through epistemic assertion rather than explicit performative verbs (Matloob, 1980). Emphatic particles, such as (قد, لـ, لقد، إن), are used to strengthen assertions rather than replicate performative forms, as performative verbs are rarely, if at all, used in the informal or standard variety of Arabic (Al-Shaer, 2013). The change thus signals a transformation of institutional force into asserted legitimacy, revealing how power is discursively constructed in Arabic literary translation.

Commissives exhibit a dual pattern of adaptation. High-commitment acts of swearing, threatening, and vowing retain their performative nature but are mediated as non-requestive, which requires nothing to request but has to do with contractual formula, astonishment, oaths, hope, and praise or dispraise (Ateeq, 2009). Arabic translations tend to calibrate the strength of obligation or promise based on contextual cues and cultural expectations of modesty and sincerity (Abu Saree, 1989). On the contrary, lower-commitment commissives, such as promise and offer, are rendered as initial constatives, effectively downgrading the

perlocutionary effect. This reflects Arabic's cautious approach to commitment, often expressed indirectly to avoid face-threatening acts in collectivist cultural contexts (Hatim & Mason, 1997). These pragmatic adjustments ensure that the degree of commitment aligns with Arabic norms of intention and interpersonal propriety, achieving functional equivalence (Nida & Taber, 1982) while maintaining illocutionary coherence.

Finally, expressives display bifurcated strategies. While praising, apologizing, and thanking are translated as initial constatives, deploring and surprise are rendered as interrogative requestive performatives—functioning as exclamatory utterances. Rather than directly articulating feelings, Arabic discourse often conveys emotion through rhetorical questions or evaluative statements, which preserve emotional depth while adhering to social decorum. This duality indicates structural-pragmatic asymmetry in the two languages. While English labels expressive force directly, Arabic channels it through constative or interrogative forms (Al-Hindawi et al., 2014), conveying emotion via tone and syntactic construction rather than explicit markers (Al-Malik, 1995). This reflects a culturally mediated approach to emotional expression, where affect is contextualized within communal and relational discourse rather than individualized spontaneity (Wierzbicka, 1991).

Table 6 summarizes the empirical patterns observed in translating English speech acts into Arabic, highlighting recurring shifts and their pragmatic implications.

Table 6. *Patterns of pragmatic shifts in English-Arabic translation of speech acts*

Speech act type	Common shift in Arabic	Pragmatic implication
Representatives	Constative (initial/requestive)	Strengthened assertion; emphasis on truth-value
Directives	Requestive performative	Softening of directives; indirectness; politeness
Declarations	Requestive constative	Authority expressed through assertion rather than performative
Commissives	- High commitment: Non-requestive performative - Low commitment: Constative	Degree-based modulation of commitment; functional adjustment to cultural norms
Expressives	Constative (initial) or Interrogative performative	Emotional expression through rhetorical or interrogative forms

Taken collectively, these findings reveal that pragmatic shifts in English–Arabic translation are guided by the translator's sensitivity to socio-cultural norms, discourse structures, and pragmatic felicity conditions (House, 2015). The translator operates as a pragmatic negotiator, ensuring that the target text achieves communicative effectiveness, social appropriateness, and interpretive coherence (Baker, 2018; Kádár & House, 2020). Such adaptations confirm that pragmatic equivalence in translation is not purely semantic but involves a dynamic interplay of illocutionary intent, cultural resonance, and relational meaning.

Consequently, the analysis underscores that the translation of speech acts in literary discourse demands an awareness of cross-cultural pragmatics, where meaning is reconstructed to maintain both the aesthetic and interpersonal dimensions of the original. This study thus contributes to understanding how pragmatic shifts function as mediating mechanisms that balance fidelity to the source text with cultural and communicative appropriateness in the target language.

Conclusion

This study examined the translation of speech acts in Act I of Shakespeare's *King Lear* from English into Arabic, focusing on the preservation of illocutionary force, pragmatic meaning, and communicative function. The findings substantiate the view that translation is a complex cultural negotiation, where pragmatic equivalence often outweighs formal correspondence. They also align with core principles in pragmatic translation theory, emphasizing the need to consider illocutionary and perlocutionary effects within the target cultural framework (House, 2015).

Across all categories, the results demonstrate that English speech acts undergo strategic adaptations in Arabic to align with linguistic preferences, socio-cultural norms, and rhetorical conventions. Representatives are predominantly rendered as constatives, with emphasis markers strengthening illocutionary force and assertive commitment. Directives are largely transformed into requestive performatives, reflecting Arabic politeness strategies and mitigating face-threatening acts. Declarations, inherently performative in English, are often recontextualized as requestive constatives, emphasizing authority through assertion rather than explicit performative action. Commissives exhibit degree-based modulation: high-commitment acts retain performative forms (e.g., oaths), while lower-commitment acts shift to constatives, reflecting cultural caution in expressing commitment. Expressives follow dual pathways, with praising and apologizing rendered as initial constatives, and acts of deploring or surprise conveyed through interrogative performatives functioning as exclamations, illustrating a structural-pragmatic asymmetry between English and Arabic.

Overall, the outcomes reveal that Arabic literary translation favors indirectness, pragmatic modulation, and rhetorical adaptation, ensuring that communicative intent is preserved while conforming to cultural expectations. They also emphasize the deliberate employment of emphasis markers, adaptation of performatives and constatives, and considering contextual and socio-cultural factors to maintain intended meaning and impact in the target text.

In sum, this study pinpoints that effective translation emerges from balancing literal accuracy with pragmatic and cultural sensitivity. It also underscores the centrality of pragmatic competence in translation, where effective transfer of speech acts requires sensitivity to illocutionary and perlocutionary forces, contextual cues, and cultural norms. These insights contribute to understanding the cross-linguistic speech act translation and provide practical implications for translators, highlighting that successful literary translation integrates linguistic precision with pragmatic and cultural awareness.

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