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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of Speech Act Performance in Four Khmer-Language Online Newspapers: Content related to Coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemics

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| **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports on research conducted to identify the speech act performances in articles in four Khmer-language online newspapers covering the Coronavirus or Covid-19 pandemic in Cambodia. John Searle's (1975) speech act theory has been adopted as the primary framework for categorizing speech act performances. Two datasets were collected approximately six months apart (23-29, 2020 January and 23-29 July 2020). Overall, the most frequent type of illocutionary speech act in both the headlines and the body text of the articles was the assertives. Notably, an increasing frequency of directives type speech acts was discerned in the later dataset (July 2020) in the body text of the articles especially. The study, we believe, further highlights the potential usefulness of the application of Searle's speech act framework in analyzing public health media content and accords well with relevant earlier findings established by Al-Hidawi & Ali (2018) and Qomariyah (2019).

| **KEYWORDS**

Speech Act; Locutionary Act; Illocutionary Act; Perlocutionary Act; Online Newspapers; Khmer

| **ARTICLE INFORMATION**

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic has had an almost incredible global impact across most aspects of life, including human physical health, mental well-being, and economics. Responding to this crisis, news media have been tasked with a crucial role in raising public awareness of the virus and informing the public of the current coronavirus situation in a country, region, and globally. The public and commercial media play a key role in disseminating prevention methods and other crucial messages from health and government authorities concerning the coronavirus pandemic to the general population. This function is equally the case in Cambodia as elsewhere across the globe. Utilizing a framework drawn from John Searle's (1975) speech act theory, the study examines how the headlines and the content sentences of Coronavirus-related news articles in four online commercials (i.e., not state or party-political owned) Khmer-language newspapers in Cambodia were – in a sense – linguistically designed to achieve these specific purposes.

Language is the primary means of human communication, including expressing opinions (Beard, 2000). The choice of language by journalists and sub-editors is a fundamental element in ensuring the intended purpose of the news article is effectively communicated to the audience. Moreover, it is possible to suggest that the language choices made in the headlines and body content of the articles selected for analysis reflect the thoughts and attitudes of the news editors and journalists about the events conveyed by the news (Al-Hidawi & Ali, 2018). This opportunity might serve the purposes of a type of *critical discourse analysis* (Fairclough, 2013), exploring how language forms employed in the media can distort community perceptions of such a significant public health risk. However, the scope of the research and the findings on which these paper reports are more intended to assess the usefulness of speech act theory in analyzing Khmer-language media content. Therefore, the study's key objective is to establish what language forms, in particular performative speech acts and verb use, have been used most frequently in the context of

communicating information about the Coronavirus to the public in the Cambodian context. The method of analysis can be said to belong to the sub-discipline of *pragmatics* within the broader discipline of linguistics.

Linguists take acts of communication that affect fields of everyday life as the focus of pragmatics. Mey (2001) states that pragmatics studies how people use language to communicate in real life or everyday settings and determines how language affects the audience for these communicative events. In this vein, pragmatic analysis of news article headlines and body content may represent an effective means for showing the role of headlines and the sentences in the articles in initiating and sustaining the meanings intended. Pragmatic analysis of newspaper article headlines/body content is viewed as especially effective because, according to Chiluwa (2007), pragmatic meanings depend on the writer's thoughts. Again, the role of textual analysis based on pragmatics can emerge in revealing the intentions of the text-producer that are sometimes obscured, according to Van Dijk (1977). Van Dijk (1977) suggests a pragmatics-based linguistic analysis can highlight hidden, implied, or even covert meanings and perhaps strategies of misinformation and persuasion on the part of the text-producer. Despite these critical potentials, the use of Searle's speech act framework in this study is to identify the frequency of different types of speech acts in the media in the specific context of an emerging public health crisis in Cambodia, in the Khmer language, to highlight the pragmatical linguistic techniques chosen by the news producers to effectively impart crucial information to the Cambodian public about the Coronavirus. In other words, which type of speech act might occur most frequently: assertives (made the utterers represent asserting, concluding, claiming, suggesting, stating, and reporting), directives (acted on the receiver consisting, commanding, ordering, advising, questioning and requesting), commissives (committed the speaker to some future course of action as promising, committing offering, pledging, refusing, vowing, offering and threatening), expressives (uttered on effect immediate changes like appointing, decreeing and declaring) or declaratives (used to give advice, to give warning, to declare).

2. Literature review
2.1 Definition of speech acts

The definition of a speech act has been presented in several disciplines as diverse as linguistics, philosophy, artificial intelligence, and the social sciences (Hanna & Richards, 2019). The speech act definition employed in this study is based firstly on John Austin's groundbreaking work in the philosophy of language in the 1950s that was realized in his seminal publication *How to do Things with Words* (1962). According to Black (1963), there is a class of utterances – speech acts – quite separate in function from those utterances that simply describe one or other aspect of the world or what Austin termed "Constatives." For Austin, sometimes, a particular type of utterance in its performance constitutes an action: the utterance is in itself an act. Put simply, for Austin, a speech act was when something was *done* (or was intended to be done) in the course of the utterance.

One of Austin's classic examples of a speech act was the ceremonial naming of a vessel at its launch: "I hereby name this ship the Titanic." In the declaration or speech act utterance of the declarer, an act occurs: the vessel is named. For Austin, this class of utterances (speech acts) had unique characteristics entirely separate from what he termed *constatives*: typically more general, non-referential, descriptive grammatical propositions such as "A ship is a sailing vessel" or "Trees are living organisms". By his reckoning, Austin's initial work on speech act theory in *How to do Things with Words* (1962) was always a "work in progress" and not definitive (Austin, 1962). Subsequently, his essential work would be substantially refined and elaborated by John Searle initially in his paper "Indirect Speech Acts" (1975) as well as in Searle's later works, including "A classification of illocutionary acts" (1976).

Searle (1976) contended that the speech act is demarcated as an action changing the universe of discourse when a person utters it, and a receiver grasps it. It can be spoken or written and can even be expressed in other communication forms such as sign languages. One of Searle's (1975) significant revisions of Austin's earlier work was to argue that sometimes a direct performative utterance/speech act (such as a question) can also include an indirect speech act (such as an implied request). Following Searle's significant revision of Austin's work, speech act theory became the focus of a range of scholars across several disciplines. A central theme was pervasive in our survey of several of these investigations and applications of speech act theory. That is the notion that there exists a particular class of utterances whereby when something is said/written/communicated, an act is performed or done (Bachman, 1990; Toolan, 1997; Superceanu, 2000; Andrian, Richard, Ann and Robert, 2001; Griffiths, 2006; Yule, 2010; Sulistyo, 2013; Azhari, 2018; John, Brooks, & Schriever, 2019).

2.2 Types of Speech acts

According to Austin (1962) three types of possible speech acts can be performed in a meaningful utterance:

(1) *A locutionary act:* can perhaps best be understood as a grammatical, referential act of speech. It is typically an independent clause/sentence utterance with determinate meaning, sense, and reference. In other words, the utterance refers to something specific in the world. It is meaningful and accords with the rules of grammar/syntax: for example: 'The oak tree in my garden is very old' or 'This winter was the coldest on record for 100 years.' As Oishi (2006) explains, these types of utterances or locutions can be considered speech acts as they include phonetic, phatic, and rhetic acts: something is again *done* in the utterance. Phonetic acts are performed by pronouncing sounds/writing scripts; phatic acts are actions for using words or sentences in terms

of the phonological and syntactic rules of the language. Moreover, rhetic acts occur with the performances of practicing a sentence with sense and reference.

(2) *An illocutionary act:* is an utterance that certainly includes all the aspects of a locution. Uniquely, in uttering an illocution such as a promise, request, offer, asking a question, or issuing an order, the utterance itself concludes an *action*. Put simply, with an illocutionary speech act, in the utterance, and something directly is done (a promise is made, an order issued, for example). According to Austin (1962), there were five categories of illocutionary speech acts: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. Searle's (1975) significant revision effectively argued for the re-categorization of illocutionary speech acts into a more tenable schema: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives (J. R Searle & Vanderveken, 2009). It should be noted that other speech act theorists would again seek to refine and even extend Searle's schema (Bach and Harnish, 1979; Yule, 1996; Kreidler, 1998; Huang, 2007). However, we position these refinements as derivatives of Searle's basic schema.

(3) *A perlocutionary act:* assumes the transferring of the effects of an illocutionary speech act mostly onto the second set of circumstances surrounding the original utterance. In other words, by performing the (illocutionary) speech act of declaring the Olympic Games open, a whole set of subsequent actions are realized and Austin saw these actions as perlocutionary effects of the initial speech act. According to Austin (1980), a perlocutionary speech act can also consist of the phenomenon whereby through the speaker's utterance, a significant effect (positive or negative) may be produced upon the actions, feelings, or thoughts of the receiver/audience. Some interpreters of Austin's theorizing of the perlocutionary speech act have emphasized those utterances designed by a speaker to have coercive or manipulative impacts on an audience (for example: rhetorical devices/appeals, sarcastic comments, allusions, and possibly even inferential utterances) (Habermas, 1995 Vol. 1; Zhao & Liu, 2011).

The class of perlocutionary speech acts, for example, has also been shown useful in research seeking to explicate the interaction between writer, context, and the audience/receiver in creative fields such as literature (poetry) (Liu & Zhang, 2007). Such research not only centers on a work's artistic quality and theme but also pays attention to the work's influence on the reader's subjective initiative in interpreting the creative work. According to Liu and Zhang (2007), speech act theory and the class of perlocutionary speech acts can be powerful tools to extract a poem's deep meaning, enabling a novel linguistic method to interpret poetic texts.

For the purposes of this study, we have been content to adopt Searle's framework of five types of illocutionary speech acts. One of our fundamental objectives was to trial the effectiveness of a widely accepted form of speech act theory in the task of analyzing the headlines and body text of online newspapers in the state of a health emergency (the Coronavirus pandemic) in this context (Cambodia) relative to the language of content publication (Khmer). Ongoing research in this and other domains of inquiry could possibly productively use one or other derivatives/extensions of Searle's speech act theory. Moreover, while the current study has focused exclusively on identifying illocutionary type speech acts in the headlines and body text of the four online newspapers chosen for analysis, it is acknowledged that the application of an analytical framework that is centered on perlocutionary type speech acts to the same data sources could also produce exciting results. However, such an application is also beyond the scope of this current study.

2.3 Analytical framework of the study

According to Searle (1975), speech acts are universally grouped into five types: (1) Assertives: these kinds of speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of expressing a proposition and carrying a truth-value. The performance of this type of speech act indicates the utterers commit their utterance to represent the world of belief in terms of asserting, concluding, claiming, suggesting, stating, and reporting; (2) Directives: the performance of these types of speech acts represent attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. By means of a directive, the speaker intentionally and directly elicits some course of action on the part of the receiver/audience: commanding, ordering, advising, questioning, and requesting; (3) Expressives: these types of speech acts convey a psychological attitude or state of the speaker such as to welcome, to condole, apologize, to express joy, sorrow, and likes/dislikes. This class reflects a neutral direction of fit in cases of blaming, praising, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating, and thanking; (4) Commissives: these speech acts commit the speaker to some future course of action. This category involves the expression of speakers' intention to do something by changing the world following the words and includes acts of promising, committing, offering, pledging, refusing, vowing, and threatening; (5) Declarations: those types of speech acts effect immediate changes in some current state of affairs. The direction of fit in this class is similar to that of directives, including appointing, decreeing, and declaring.

2.4 Previous studies

Several recent studies have also conducted linguistic analyses of newspaper headlines and content based on a speech act framework similar to the one used in this study. Al-Hidawi and Ali (2018) conducted a pragmatic study of CNN's and BBC News' headlines covering the recent Syrian conflict. Their study showed that assertive speech acts were most frequently performed in the examined texts. Also, quite recently, Qomariyah (2019) undertook a pragmatic study of the Jakarta Post's and Jakarta Globe News' headlines after the Indonesian General Election in 2019. Findings from Qomariyah's (2019) research showed that assertives and declaratives were the most frequent types of speech acts in the news headlines of the publications studied. In 2020, Al-Saedi and

Jabber published their *Pragmatic Study of Newspaper Headlines in Media Discourse: Iraq as a Case Study*. Al-Saedi and Jabber's (2020) results revealed that the most prominent and common speech acts were expressives and declaratives. These excellent specific studies encouraged the authors to apply similar methods and conceptual frames to a speech act analysis of the articles and headlines in online Khmer language newspapers in Cambodia. Similar to these recent studies, the current study is focused on news reporting on an exceptionally significant social issue. Our effort can be considered an attempt to bridge one small gap in the growing literature of speech act analysis of crisis-related news reporting in non-western and/or developed world contexts.

More general practical applications of speech act theory in contexts to topics and methods that resonate with that of the current study have also been conducted recently by several researchers. A primarily quantitative study of the illocutionary speech acts of 150 participants in a preschool teacher education program (apologizing, complaining, refusing, and thanking) was conducted by Bayat (2013). The results of this study recognized ten apologies, six thanking, and refusal strategies. Josiah and Oghenerho's (2015) study retrospectively analyzed the speech of Martin Luther King at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. Their analysis concluded that the three main types of illocutionary speech acts performed were, in order of frequency: representatives, directives, and declaratives, respectively.

Okoro (2017) investigated the speech acts of two political speeches of Nigeria's president Muhammad, based on the broader speech act schema of locution, illocution, and perlocution. Their findings showed that the President frequently used illocutionary speech acts such as assertives and commissives. Okoro (2017) importantly concluded that these results suggested the speaker intended to assure the audience of his honesty and personal integrity. Basra and Thoyyibah (2017) examined the types of speech acts an EFL teacher performs to teach students in the class. Their results showed that the most frequent class of speech act used was directives. The primary outcome from this recent and relevant literature survey is the *variation* in the frequency of illocutionary speech acts identified in commensurate studies. This general assessment suggests the performance of speech acts is very much 'fit for purpose' and even perhaps context-dependent.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Population and sample of the study

The articles analyzed in this study were collected from four sources, i.e., popular online Khmer-language newspapers in Cambodia. The articles examined were published from 23 to 29 January, 2020 and 23 to 29 July, 2020 on the Covid-19 outbreak and spread. The articles for the study were archived on the four official newspaper websites one week after they were published. In total, 498 articles considered to be COVID 19 relevant were collected. Since the total number of articles was large and widely dispersed, it was essential to ensure that the articles included in the analysis fairly represented each newspaper. From these, 120 articles were selected for detailed analysis (30 articles from each online newspaper). A tabulated breakdown of this initial stage of the data collection process is presented in Appendix 1. 15 articles were selected from each newspaper as first and second datasets. To do that, two steps were taken. The first step was to determine all the titles issued on each day. The second step was to select two titles for each day – three for the final day as it had the most significant number of Covid-19-related articles. For days on which no article on Covid-19 was issued in one or more of the newspapers, the researchers took additional articles published on other days to include in the target sample.

3.2 Research design and instrument

The first focus of the study was the speech acts performed in the headlines of articles in four leading online newspapers[1] in Cambodia about Covid-19 from 23-29 January (the first data set) and from 23-29 July 2020 (the second data set). Following this, the body text of the same articles was processed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted. For the qualitative method, the researchers read all texts (headlines and the articles), extracting each sentence into Microsoft Excel program with the first and second datasets in chronological order. The data was then subject to content and statistical analysis. Given the quantity of data yielded, the researchers divided the task into two-time analyses (1) researcher A analyzed 60 texts from Fresh News and Rasmei Kampuchea, and (2) researcher B analyzed 60 texts from Thmey Thmey and Sabay News.

The researchers randomly selected two texts to analyze as a pilot by counting sentences using the five types of the illocutionary act required for each analysis. The pilot analysis results were preliminary and verified by a third, more experienced researcher. The purpose of this method was to clarify the speech act performances in sentences on which the primary researchers disagreed and establish a shared set of interpretive frames. Counting sentences were defined by the full spot in Khmer (។), the exclamation mark (!), and the question mark (?). However, sentences (headlines and body text) without verbs were not analyzed in this study, and all sentence-list series were analyzed from the beginning.

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[1] Thmey Thmey, Sabay, Fresh New and Rasmei Kampuchea

3.3 Data collection, analysis and statistical procedure

The researchers checked the official websites of Fresh News, Rasmei Kampuchea, Thmey Thmey, and Sabay to retrieve articles relevant to Coronavirus or Covid-19 issued in the timeframes identified above. The researchers searched articles by using such keywords as កូរ៉ូណា កូវូ៉ណា កូរូណា កូរ៉ែ៱ កូរ៉ែ៱ កូរ៉ិ៱ កូរ៉ិ៱ or Covid-19 on the entire websites. All articles were copied and pasted into the Microsoft word program for archiving as a text database for analysis later.

Afterward gathering all articles related to Coronavirus and Covid-19, the researchers separated each sentence individually. No text in the pictures, captions, authors' names, and publication date were analyzed. The data for this study were analyzed using the computer software program called SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze the datasets for this study. Descriptive statistics provide information on frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, and range to count types of speech acts. To ensure a high level of reliability in classifying Khmer sentences into the five types of speech acts, the researchers analyzed the sentences separately and then compared their responses. Where differences occurred, the Zoom program conducted extensive discussions to reach an agreement.

4. Results of study

Analysis of the speech acts identified in the news content of the selected articles by means of the model of the study in addition to the statistical datasets in the previous study, is introduced in the following tables together with discussion of significant features. This table shows the types of speech acts employed in the four selected online newspaper data. The frequency of these speech acts appearance in the data which was retrieved from 23-29 January with the outspread of Coronavirus and then in 23-29 July 2020 after Covid-19 was termed a pandemic by the WHO (WHO, 2020) is presented in numerical terms and as percentages. Table 4.1 shows the demographic variable of online newspapers in terms of the numbers of the first dataset (23-29 January 2020) and the second dataset (23-29 July 2020). The numbers of articles selected from each newspaper were equivalent: 15 articles from each title in both the first and second datasets. The total number of articles overall was 120. Moreover, the total of the headlines and sentences analyzed in terms of speech acts is 117 (100%) headlines and 963 (100%) sentences. There are 58 (49.57%) of headlines of first dataset and 59 (50.43%) of headlines of second dataset whilst sentences of the first dataset was 493 (51.19%) and second dataset was 470 (48.81%).

Table 4. 1: Datasets in the study 1

Dataset	First dataset		Second dataset		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Number of articles by newspapers						
Resmei Kampuchea	15	25	15	25	30	25
Fresh News	15	25	15	25	30	25
Thmey Thmey	15	25	15	25	30	25
Sabay	15	25	15	25	30	25
Total	60	50	60	50	120	100
Headlines and sentences analyzed in terms of speech acts						
Headlines	58[2]	49.57	59[3]	50.43	117	100
Sentences	493	51.19	470	48.81	963	100

In the following section, the data is analyzed for each dataset and each newspaper. Combined totals are also presented to facilitate ease of overall assessment.

4.1 Results for the speech acts performed in the headlines of articles published

The first analytical task was to investigate what speech acts are performed in the headlines of articles published in four leading online newspapers in Cambodia about Covid-19.

Table 4. 2: Speech acts in the headlines by newspaper

Speech act types	Assertive		Directives		Commissive		Expressive		Declaratives		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

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[2] The total number of headlines is 60; two have no verbs and were not included in the analyses.
[3] The total number of headlines is 60; one has no verb and was not included in the analyses.

Speech acts in the headlines: First dataset												
Reksmei	10	66.7	3	20	2	13.3	-	-	-	-	15	25.9
Fresh News	12	80	-	-	3	20	-	-	-	-	15	25.9
Thmey Thmey	14	93.3	-	-	1	6.7	-	-	-	-	15	25.9
Sabay	10	76.9	-	-	1	7.7	2	15.4	-	-	13	22.4
Total	46	79.3	3	5.2	7	12.1	2	3.4	-	-	58	100
Speech acts in the headlines: Second dataset												
Reksmei	12	80	3	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	25.4
Fresh News	12	80	3	20	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	25.4
Thmey Thmey	11	78.6	1	7.1	-	-	1	7.1	1	7.1	14	23.7
Sabay	10	66.7	1	6.7	3	20	-	-	1	6.7	15	25.4
Total	45	76.3	8	13.6	3	5.1	1	1.7	2	3.4	59	100
Total speech acts in the headlines												
Reksmei	22	73.33	6	20	2	6.67	-	-	-	-	30	25.64
Fresh News	24	80	3	10	3	10	-	-	-	-	30	25.64
Thmey Thmey	25	86.21	1	3.45	1	3.45	1	3.45	1	3.45	29	24.79
Sabay	20	71.43	1	3.57	4	14.29	2	7.14	1	3.57	28	23.93
Total	91	77.78	11	9.4	10	8.55	3	2.56	2	1.71	117	100

Summary of the total speech acts in the headlines from the first and second datasets revealed that overall the most frequent type of speech act performed was assertives (77.78%): speech acts expressing a claim to truth or a committed belief on the part of the authors. The next most frequently performed type of speech act were directives (9.4%): instructional and guidance-type utterances.

4.2 Results for the speech acts most frequently used in the body text of analyzed articles

The second major research task in this study was to identify what speech acts are most frequently used in the body text of the articles published in the four Cambodian, Khmer-language online newspapers chosen for analysis.

Table 4. 3: Speech acts in body text of the articles by newspaper

Speech act types	Assertive		Directives		Commissives		Expressives		Declaratives		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Speech acts in body text of the articles: First dataset												
Reksmei	128	90.1	5	3.5	7	4.9	-	-	2	1.4	142	28.8
Fresh News	99	85.3	12	10.3	3	2.6	-	-	2	1.7	116	23.5
Thmey Thmey	128	95.5	3	2.2	1	0.7	-	-	2	1.5	134	27.2
Sabay	89	88.1	1	1.0	9	8.9	-	-	2	2.0	101	20.5
Total	444	90.1	21	4.3	20	4.1	-	-	8	1.6	493	100
Speech acts in body text of the articles: Second dataset												
Reksmei	108	76.6	19	13.5	10	7.1	3	2.1	1	0.7	141	30.0
Fresh News	85	85.9	10	10.1	3	3	-	-	1	1.0	99	21.1
Thmey Thmey	133	85.3	15	9.6	5	3.2	1	.6	2	1.3	156	33.2
Sabay	63	85.1	5	6.8	3	4.1	2	2.7	1	1.4	74	15.7
Total	389	82.8	49	10.4	21	4.5	6	1.3	5	1.1	470	100
Total speech acts in body text of the articles												
Reksmei	236	83.39	24	8.48	17	6.01	3	1.06	3	1.06	283	29.39
Fresh News	184	85.58	22	10.23	6	2.79	-	-	3	1.40	215	22.32
Thmey Thmey	261	90	18	6.21	6	2.07	1	0.34	4	1.38	290	30.12
Sabay	152	86.86	6	3.43	12	6.86	2	1.14	3	1.71	175	18.17
Total	833	86.51	70	7.26	41	4.26	6	0.62	13	1.35	963	100

The results of the analysis of speech acts in the second dataset in the body text of articles selected from the four online newspapers surveyed showed that all five categories of speech acts were performed to varying degrees of frequency. Similar to the analysis of the headlines, assertive type speech acts were clearly the type of speech act most frequently performed in the body text of the articles selected. Of note, in total, the ratio of assertives type speech acts to directives was lower in the body texts of the articles than in the headlines: headlines (approx. 8:1) and body text (approx. 12:1). The ratio of directives to assertives increased substantially in the second datasets for both headlines and body text.

The following table merges the results for headlines and body text content and shows the overall totals: first dataset + second dataset.

Table 4. 4: Speech acts in the articles and headlines by newspaper

Speech act types	Assertive		Directives		Commissive		Expressive		Declaratives		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Speech acts in the articles and headlines: First dataset												
Reksmei	138	87.9	8	5.1	9	5.7	-	-	2	1.3	157	28.5
Fresh News	111	84.7	12	9.2	6	4.6	-	-	2	1.5	131	23.8
Thmey Thmey	142	95.3	3	2.0	2	1.3	-	-	2	1.3	149	27
Sabay	99	86.8	1	0.9	10	8.8	2	1.8	2	1.8	114	20.7
Total	490	88.93	24	4.36	27	4.90	2	0.36	8	1.45	551	100
Speech acts in the articles and headlines: Second dataset												
Reksmei	120	76.9	22	14.1	10	6.4	3	1.9	1	0.6	156	29.5
Fresh News	97	85.1	13	11.4	3	2.6	-	-	1	0.9	114	21.6
Thmey Thmey	144	84.7	16	9.4	5	2.9	2	1.2	3	1.8	170	32.1
Sabay	73	82.0	6	6.7	6	6.7	2	2.2	2	2.2	89	16.8
Total	434	82.04	57	10.78	24	4.54	7	1.32	7	1.32	529	100
Total speech acts in the articles and headlines												
Reksmei	258	82.4	30	9.6	19	6.1	3	1.0	3	1.0	313	29
Fresh News	208	84.9	25	10.2	9	3.7	-	-	3	1.2	245	22.7
Thmey Thmey	286	89.7	19	6.0	7	2.2	2	0.6	5	1.6	319	29.5
Sabay	172	84.7	7	3.4	16	7.9	4	2.0	4	2.0	203	18.8
Total	924	85.6	81	7.5	51	4.7	9	0.8	15	1.4	1080	100

Assertives comprised the highest percentage of speech acts overall in the four online newspapers surveyed/analyzed (85.6%). Whilst, overall, expressives (0.8%) comprised the lowest percentage of the speech acts in the four online newspapers. In the online newspapers surveyed in the current study, clearly via the performance of assertive type illocutionary speech acts the writers tended to convey their utterances so as to provide statements of fact or to indicate what they believed to be accurate.

4.3 Results for the ways directives speech acts performed in the articles

The a *ncillary*research interest of this study was to ascertain how directive speech acts were performed in the headlines and body text across both datasets. The performative verbs of the directives were categorized into strong directives (e.g. have to) and weak/er directives (e.g. advise, remind). Moreover, we sought to distinguish those directives and their strengths according to the performers of the directive speech acts (1. news producers such as the journalists; 2. References to or direct quotations from authorities: government and health officials/sources).

As shown in figure 4.1, directives speech acts in the articles and headlines of the online newspapers were most frequently expressed or carried using the verb Have to (ត្រូវ). The next most frequent verbs or terms used in the expression of the directives were Announce (អំពាវនាវ), request (ស្នើ), Please (សូម), Command (បញ្ជា), Advise (ណែនាំ), Remind (ក្រើនរំលឹក+ រំលឹក), Warn (ហាម) and Stop (បញ្ឈប់), etc. *Most of the directives speech acts took the form of reasonably explicit statements.*

The following Table 4.5 indicates a near equivalence between directive speech acts that emanate from quoted sources of authority and the news writers' own directive utterances. In terms of the types of directives speech acts (advising, requesting, commanding, ordering, and questioning, et cetera) as classified in this study, the most frequent directive speech act took the form of requests 26 (32.10%), next, ordering: 20 instances (24.69%); advising: 18 (22.22%); commanding: 17 (20.99%). Furthermore,

directives speech acts appeared in the dataset of 81- the authority of authors, including 41 (50.62%) for authorities and 40 (49.38%) for writers. The most significant number of percentages of the strength of directives in the dataset was strong performative verbs in terms of both authorities and writers, 52 (64.20%), while weak performative verbs were 29 (35,80%). The most interesting of the strengths of directives were authorities and writers, both of whose was a similar proportion of strong and weak performative verbs.

Figure 1.1: Directives speech acts in the articles and headlines by newspaper

Table 4. 5: Total Directives Speech Acts

Datasets			Directives speech acts	
			Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Authority of authors				
		Authorities	41	50.62
		Writers	40	49.38
		Total	81	100
Strength of directives				
	Authority	Strong	27	67.50
		Weak	14	34,14
		Total	41	100
	Writer	Strong	25	62,50
		Weak	15	37.50
		Total	40	100
	Total	Strong	52	64.20
		Weak	29	35.80
		Total	81	100
Type of directive speech acts				
		Advising	18	22.22
		Commanding	17	20.99
		Ordering	20	24.69
		Requesting	26	32.10
		Questioning	-	-
		Total	81	100

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has reported on research that undertook a speech act performance analysis of headlines and the body text of articles from four Khmer-language online newspapers relating to the Coronavirus outbreak and its first wave spread in Cambodia**.** The speech acts performed in the headlines/body text of Covid-19 relevant articles in four online newspapers, in two periods, six months apart in 2020, was organized into five classifications based on Searle (1976): assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives.

We initially hypothesized that due to the increasing recognition of the pandemic's seriousness, the deepening threat to public health and the economic implications of the virus's spread, the type of dominant speech act in the Khmer language online newspapers selected for analysis in the second dataset (July 2020) would indicate the increasing performance of more *directive* type speech acts (instructional statements, for example), that is in *both* headlines and the body text. To some extent, as Table 4.4 shows, this hypothesis was borne out. However, the dominant frequency of assertive type speech acts in the headlines and the body text content of coronavirus articles in both data collection periods remained relatively stable. The findings also showed that the common performative verbs for directives class of speech act found in the articles were Have (មាន), Have to (ត្រូវ), Warn (ព្រមាន), Thank you, (ថ្លែងអំណរគុណ), Admire (សរសើរ) and Declare (ប្រកាស). Overall, the most frequently performed speech acts in all news sources, headlines, and body texts, and both periods were assertive-type illocutionary utterances. Notably, directives and declaratives marginally increased in the second dataset (July, 2020) whilst expressives and commisives showed a marginal decrease.

Based on the results of this analysis, the overwhelming majority of the speech act type headlines/body text of the 120 Coronavirus-related articles from these four online Khmer-language online newspapers (assertives) appear to mainly serve the purpose of reinforcing the truth of the propositions expressed, that is carrying a truth-value. The reasons why the journalists and editors adopted this approach would require further research of a more qualitative type, including interviews. It may be that the content producers have attempted to express the objectivity/factualness of their intentions so as to assure their audience of the veracity of the key messages being conveyed in this health crisis. The conclusions drawn from the study are consistent with Okoro (2017), Al-Hidawi and Ali (2018), and Haucsa, Marzuki and Hidayat (2020). They noted that the assertives class/type of illocutionary speech act was most often used to portray the writers' confidence in the truthfulness and accuracy of the facts they were reporting. Recommendations for further research include analyzing a more significant number of media providers to authorize the results and strengthen the findings and conclusions tentatively drawn from this study. As mentioned, some form of follow-up qualitative research (semi-structured interviews) could help ascertain the degree of deliberation exercised by these professional news content producers/writers in their language choices in this time of reporting the emerging coronavirus crisis in Cambodia.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.
Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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Appendix 1

Total number of articles collected listed by newspaper and date for two datasets

No	Fresh News		Rasmei Kampuchea		Thmey Thmey		SABAY		Total		Grand total
	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	
1	5	19	6	11	2	9	2	5	15	44	59
2	7	9	7	5	1[4]	8	0[5]	3	15	25	40
3	8	14	7	9	4	9	0	2	19	34	53
4	13	8	6	4	5	4	0	0	24	16	40
5	20	14	17	12	6	7	3	6	46	39	85
6	31	7	17	11	9	5	18	3	75	26	101
7	40	16	23	10	7	7	11	4	81	37	118
	124	87	83	62	36	49	34	23	277	221	498

Total number of articles analyzed in the study, listed by newspaper and date

Day issued on	Fresh News	Rasmei Kampuchea	Thmey Thmey	SABAY	Total
23 Jan and 23 July 2020	4	4	4	4	16
24 Jan and 24 July 2020	4	4	3	2	13
25 Jan and 25 July 2020	4	4	4	2	14
26 Jan and 26 July 2020	4	4	4	0	12
27 Jan and 27 July 2020	4	4	4	5	17
28 Jan and 28 July 2020	4	4	5	8	21
29 Jan and 29 July 2020	6	6	6	9	27
Grand Total	30	30	30	30	120

[4] For the dates no articles were published or fewer than two articles were published on Covid-19, articles were taken from the other dates as substitutes.

[5] Publication of Sabay was halted in observation of the Chinese New Year from 24-26 January 2020.