

Pragmatics and Ideology: Speech Acts in Toru Dutt's the Lotus

Nagamurali Eragamreddy

University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman.

ABSTRACT: This study conducted an analysis of how speech acts in Toru Dutt's sonnet, "The Lotus," operated at an ideological level, addressing a discrepancy between symbolic interpretations and pragmatics-based analysis. It evaluated how Searlean illocutionary categories were distributed between the octave and sestet, how illocutionary forces and perlocutionary emphasis indicated an ideology about cultural hierarchy and membership, using inquiries, assertion-evaluation, and expressive performatives, while using a postcolonial pragmatic approach that posited a transformed perspective about how data about symbolism alone could be interpreted. This qualitative, descriptive analysis used a coding manual, NVivo audit trail, and Cohen's kappa evaluation, which helped validate the analysis. The process used a six-stage data collection process that included authoritative text retrieval, segmentation, pilot analysis, final analysis, and data triangulation. An analysis from locutionary segmentation through Searlean categorization helped create a CDA mapping. It was revealed that assertive statements were more commonly found in the octave, inquiries mediated contestations, while expressive statements were found more commonly in the sestet, and that inter-researcher reliability was above kappa = .81. This study asserted that speech-act analysis could help understand micro-analytical mechanisms, including ideology, that were performatized and that a replicable model enhanced and replaced symbolic interpretations about Indo-Anglian poems.

KEYWORDS: Toru Dutt; speech acts; pragmatics; postcolonialism; Indo-Anglian poetry

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Literary texts are increasingly being seen by scholars as the locations of language doing social and ideological as well as aesthetic work; and poetry, in particular, is a scene of performative acts, which construct collective identities and challenge hegemonies (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). The Lotus, the sonnet of Toru Dutt, holds a central place in the early Indo-Anglian canon: being a work of a bilingual, cosmopolitan poet at the intersection of the Victorian literary modes and the Indian culture, the poem performs such mantra as asserts the value of the culture by making a flower, which is representative of Indian culture, rise above its European competitors. Dutt has been critically analyzed on numerous occasions as an author of hybrid poetics, cultural syncretism, and national imagery (Phillips, 2007), but little research has transformed those literary readings into a finer-grained analysis of the ideological impact of pragmatic strategies in the poem, its speech acts, its modality, and its illocutionary force. In the meantime, the role of English and nationalist discourse in the context of South Asia continues to be especially salient when examined in terms of modern research on the subject of language ideologies and postcolonial language practices (LaDousa et al., 2022). Combined, these cross-intersecting lines of research presage a methodological prospect: to think of Dutt not as a cultural interpreter but as a practical agent whose linguistic decisions are ideological work.

1.2 Rationale

Pragmatics provides an analytical instrument that goes beyond propositional meaning to provide how utterances get things done in the world (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Literary pragmatics, in turn, takes texts to be communicative actions in social contexts; it analyses the illocutionary and perlocutionary work of questions, assertions, and exclamations to put a reader in place, enlist a commitment, and make values natural (Munir & Yavuz, 2024). The use of speech-act theory on poetry is particularly effective since the authors of poetry intentionally use indirectness, rhetorical questions, and acts of expression to implement ideological positions without making an argument. The idea of postcolonial pragmatics is that the speech acts in the society that has been affected by colonial experience bear extra-linguistic significance: the selection of language, register, and the performativity of utterances mean indicate the power structures and cultural membership (Anchimbe & Janney, 2017). A pragmatic interpretation of The Lotus will, therefore, show how the locutionary and illocutionary forces used by Dutt conduct a de-centering of the metropolitan cultural hierarchies and pronounce new kinds of cultural nationalism.

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1.3 The Problem

Although the literary pragmatics have matured and the accrual of scholarship regarding speech-acts has evidently boomed in the past ten years (Afzaal et al., 2024), studies linking the paradigms of speech-acts to canonical Indian English poems are limited. Much of the scholarship on Dutt to date tends to introduce symbol and image or place her in Romantic and nationalist histories without mapping the pragmatics of the poem or reflecting on how specific illocutionary acts constitute an ideological encoding. Simultaneously, recent empirical studies of language ideologies in India show that there are dynamic negotiations among English and native vernaculars in the formation of identity (LaDousa et al., 2022). However, these two developments have not yet been crossed over by academics: they have not applied modern pragmatic theory to demonstrate that a nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian sonnet contains ideological interventions by speech acts. This gap is relevant since it obscures the processes through which literary language produces, challenges, or reforms postcolonial systems of value; by filling it in, it becomes clear how poetic form can work as a micro-politics of language.

1.4 Objectives

The paper will put the theory of speech-act at the forefront of a close pragmatic interpretation of the Toru Dutt poem titled 'The Lotus', hence illustrating how locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary forces used in the poem co-produce an ideological argument concerning cultural legitimacy. The project is methodologically based on the combination of canonical speech-act taxonomy (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and postcolonial pragmatics and critical discourse theory (Anchimbe & Janney, 2017; Fairclough, 1995). Empirically, it recognises and classifies speech acts in the poem, understands their pragmatic power in historical and intertextual terms, and interprets their ideological accrual in the discourses of nationhood and value cultures. Thus, the paper aims at refining its theory, in the sense of implementing the speech-act machinery in a literary provision, as well as disciplinary synthesis, in the sense of combining pragmatics with postcolonial literary studies.

1.5 Research Questions

To operationalize these aims, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of speech acts (assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, declarations) occur in Toru Dutt's "The Lotus," and how do they distribute across the poem's octave and sestet?
2. In what ways do identified illocutionary forces and perlocutionary orientations convey ideological commitments about cultural hierarchy and belonging?
3. How do pragmatic strategies—particularly interrogatives, evaluative assertions, and expressive performatives—function rhetorically to reinforce, subvert, or reconfigure cultural nationalism within the sonnet's Victorian and indigenous intertexts?
4. How does integrating postcolonial pragmatics alter our interpretive account of Dutt's poetic politics compared with readings that rely solely on symbolism or thematic analysis?

1.6 Significance

This research study is relevant to two overlapping areas. To begin with, it pushes the field of literary pragmatics by illustrating how speech-act analysis can provide accurate, verifiable assertions about ideological performance in the poetic texts; recent work on methodology supports this shift and demands cross-fertilisation of pragmatics and literary analysis (Munir & Yavuz, 2024; Afzaal et al., 2024). Second, it adds value to the literature on Indian English literature by providing a mechanism-level description of how early Indo-Anglican poetry manages colonial language hierarchies description that complements and builds on the recent scholarship of postcolonial language ideologies in South Asia (LaDousa et al., 2022). The study, by explicitly identifying the pragmatic procedures via which the sonnet by Dutt claims cultural value, provides a paradigm into which to interrogate the speech acts of other texts by postcolonial writers and thereby attempts to fill a significant gap in current methodological approaches to literary-linguistic studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on Toru Dutt's Poetry

Critical work on Toru Dutt has fruitfully traced the sonnet-language, the imagery of the myths and the nationalist symbols which cluster in the Lotus. Historical-archival and comparativist accounts (e.g., the reconstruction of transnational locations and translations by Dutt by Lootens) show how Dutt manages to negotiate between Romantic intertexts and revalorize indigenous symbols (Lootens, 2006). In nineteenth and twenty-first century Victorian/ Indo-Anglian studies (e.g., interpretative articles in specialist journals and edited collections), it is regularly stressed that the lotus is a nationalist and cultural symbol and that the female voice of Dutt represents an early form of feminist self-fashioning (Bhargava & Chaturvedi, 2019; some thematic essays also compile symbolism and gendered identity).

Nevertheless, such studies of literature remain quite homogenous in methodology: they give precedence to hermeneutic, intertextual and historicist instruments and seldom operationalize the formal pragmatic indices (e.g., illocutionary force, perlocution, action-sequence structure). Put differently, although the symbolic and gendered readings are sound, the literature contains a remarkable gap in linguistically related discussions that consider the lines by Dutt as examples of speech acts executing ideological labor. This

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gap in disciplines, the lack of linguistic-pragmatic enquiry and its excessive literary interpretation justifies a speech-act oriented re-reading of the Lotus (Lootens, 2006; Bhargava & Chaturvedi, 2019).

2.2 Pragmatics in Literary Analysis

Pragmatic stylistics (pragma-stylistics) has grown to be a strand of methodology that applies the theory of speech acts and interactional pragmatics to textual analysis. However, recent empirical and theoretical literature questions the field to move beyond introspective labeling of illocution to replicable interactionally conscious procedures. Position paper by House and Kadar (2025) claims that there should be a finite, interactional typology of speech acts that prefigures illocutionary vs. interactional values - a methodological redress to ad-hoc categorization and the invention of speech-act types conveniently (House & Kadar, 2025). A study by Liao and Xia (2023) of poem-quoting as a socioculturally speech-act with ritualized speech-action sequences demonstrates that poetry can represent the instantiated sequences of speech-acts with sociocultural implications.

Such contributions are methodologically promising to the study of literature: interactionally sensitive typologies are finite and replicable, historical sociopragmatics proves the possibility of studying poetic forms as situated speech events, and neuropragmatic work emphasizes the fact that the speech acts are systematic in terms of cognitive and action-prediction profile (Tomasello, 2023). However, there are still constraints: a significant part of pragmatic-stylistic work is based on small qualitative samples and sometimes adopts L2/pragmatic experimental equipment that has not been fully adjusted to the poetic complexities of the author-as-speaker (House & Kadar, 2025; Tomasello, 2023). These debates on methodology inform the way one can model the sonnet of Dutt in the form of socially situated illocutions instead of metaphorical content.

2.3 Speech Act Theory in Ideological Analysis

Theorists who approach language as a social action allow critical leverage to the process of reading ideology within poetic speech acts. Classic Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) and socio-cognitive discourse approaches (van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b) theorize discourse as reflective and constitutive of ideology; they have operational strategies (lexical choice, transitivity, argumentation) of locating ideological positions within texts. Modern research has also connected speech-act pragmatics with ideological implications more immediately: computational and cognitive theories demonstrate how ideologically refracted interpretation and communication have polarizing effects on reading and social impacts (Kashima et al., 2021).

The synthesis of these strands produces a conceptual shift: speech acts are not literary decorations that are neutral but performative acts of social practices that may instantiate, negotiate, or resist ideological positions (Kashima et al., 2021; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). But, as much as CDA provides powerful tools on the macro-level, it is under-specified in micro-pragmatic mechanisms (how particular illocutions produce ideological uptake). On the other hand, other pragmatic work (e.g., neuropragmatics) characterizes processing and fails to convert findings into ideological critique. An integrated protocol: micro-analytic speech-act coding (House & Kadar, 2025; Liao & Xia, 2023) built into CDA sensibilities, provides an opportunity to approach the ideological performativity of *The Lotus*.

2.4 Postcolonial Linguistics and Ideology

The most recent high-impact applied-linguistic research predicts the politics of academic and linguistic knowledge production in postcolonial situations and highlights the need to decentralize Eurocentric practices (Hamid et al., 2025). That English in the colonial world is both a tool and location of counter-discursive possibility; it hence justifies linguistic studies of canonical Indo-Anglian texts as an act of decolonial literary criticism. Practically, the postcolonial linguistics turn calls upon scholars to integrate pragmatic-stylistic rigor with attention to the historical power imbalances and authorial positionality (Hamid et al., 2025).

2.5 Conceptual Synthesis and Research Gap

It has been convergently entailed across these literatures that speech-act theory (expanded in an interactional way) + critical discourse understandings + postcolonial sensibility equals a sensible approach to showing how poetic form performs ideology. However, the empirical application to Toru Dutt is not yet well developed: the state of the art on Dutt is anticipatory of symbolism and gender, but hardly regards lines as instances of illocutionary moves whose perlocutionary consequences and ideological placement can be coded and read. The methodological innovations that were reviewed (finite interactional typologies; historical sociopragmatics; neuropragmatic accounts) offer means to bridge that gap. Therefore, the current research is warranted: a CDA-informed, speech-act-based, postcolonially sensitive pragma-stylistic reading of the sonnet will operationalize the use of illocutionary categories and action sequence in the sonnet, track the rhetorical performance of nationalist and gendered ideology by the move(s), and show how a linguistically-aware reading supplements and corrects the hermeneutical reading of purely symbolic nature.

2.6 Pragmatics: An Overview

The study of the production and interpretation of meaning in context by users of language, with a focus on speaker intention, hearer inference, interactional norms and the socio-cultural circumstances that influence meaning interpretation, is known as pragmatics (Levinson, 1983; Kadar & Haugh, 2013). Contrary to semantics, in which sentence meaning is abstracted out of context, pragmatics focuses on how the context varies, adds to, or modifies meaning, through such contextual factors as shared knowledge, register, and

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pragmatic conventions. This opposition is not just terminological. It is methodologically significant, in that a poetic line is treated like a semantic proposition, and the denotational content is put in foreground, when it should have been in the foreground, whereas what the line actually does in a situation should be put in the foreground in the pragmatic approach: it requests, laments, vows, or instates belonging (Levinson, 1983; Grice, 1975). Modern pragmatics has developed to encompass historical and interactional approaches, revealing that literary genres of speech can be a conventionalized event that is embedded within specific sociocultural practices (House & Kadar, 2025; Liao & Xia, 2023). Such developments lead to the reason why it is pertinent to analyze a poem as a show of located communicative practices instead of a compilation of immortal images.

2.7 Speech Act Theory

The micro-analytic taxonomy required to define what utterances do is provided by the theory of speech-acts, introduced by J. L. Austin, which makes the threefold distinction between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act can be said to be the expression of something that has a syntactic and semantic meaning. An illocutionary act can be defined as the conventional force of the utterance, i.e., asserting, commanding, declaring or promising. Perlocutionary act is the effects caused by the utterance on the addressee, like persuasion, consoling or provoking (Austin, 1962). The value of this tripartite model is that it isolates the meaning of texts and the social effect, and such isolation is convenient to pursue the ideological effects of poetry.

John Searle designed a practical scheme of the illocutionary acts commonly applied in practical analysis. These categories are: assertives, which bind the speaker to the truth of a proposition; directives, which seek to make the hearer act; commissives, which bind the speaker to act in the future; expressives, which report upon psychological states; and declarations, which alter the social status of the referent through the utterance (Searle, 1969). To analyse a work of literature, this taxonomy facilitates a systematic determination of the prevailing illocutionary patterns in a poem, e.g., whether this or that stanza primarily employs directives of mourning or is a producer of the declarative acts that constitute a communal identity. Although the classification proposed by Searle is popular, new pragmatics warns against taking categories as a strict label. It has been proposed that finite and interactionally sensitive typologies and procedural coding rules can enhance replicability and be used to explain illocution-interactional interaction (House & Kadar, 2025). Such methodological improvement is a requirement of rigorous literary-pragmatic work.

2.8 Ideology and Language

The ideology and discourse theories consider language as a storehouse and a manufacturer of social ideologies. The conceptualization of critical discourse analysis views discourse as an arena of power relations that are reproduced and challenged on the lexical, argumentation, and narrative levels of discourse (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). Recent empirical studies associate ideological thinking with communication processes by demonstrating how communicative actions increase polarization or maintain hegemonic frames (Kashima et al., 2021). Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship then adds to these views and highlights that a choice of language has been historically embedded in colonial power structures and anticipates how English may serve both as a mechanism of domination and a means of counter-discursive performance (Hamid et al., 2025; Di Xie & Sun, 2024). Combined, these strategies lead to two claims that are connected. To begin with, ideology exists in texts and is realized by means of micro-linguistic processes. Second, the use of language can also perform resistance by conscious or spontaneous illocutions that reuse a colonial language in localised meanings. In terms of methodology, CDA-level accounts give diagnostics at the macro-level and pragmatics the micro-mechanisms that interact in order to produce the uptake of an ideology in the case of specific utterances.

2.9 Integrating Pragmatics and Ideology

When the speech-act theory is combined with the study of ideology, one receives a framework where the individual illocution is conceptualized as an ideological tool. Speech acts are social acts that either reenact or question social orders. To illustrate this, the acts of a poem can constitute declarative acts that can naturalize a national myth, and commissive acts or directive acts of that poem can constitute acts of mobilizing solidarity or seeking political reaction. Recent pragmatic-stylistic research illustrates the empirical methods of mapping illocutionary inventories and interaction sequences in non-conversational genres, such as historical poetic forms, and they indicate the socio-political roles of ritualized speech acts (Liao & Xia, 2023; House & Kadar, 2025). The cognitive and communication studies also indicate that the ideological force of a speech act is presupposed by the existence of inferential embedding of the act and its networked spreading within the discourse communities (Kashima et al., 2021). Postcolonial linguistics also makes it clear that it is important and possible to analyze such micro-mechanisms in colonial and postcolonial texts, as acts of English language poetry tend to mediate disputed identities and claims to authority (Hamid et al., 2025; Di Xie & Sun, 2024). The integrated framework suggests three steps in its methodology. The first step is to perform a locution-level segmentation of the poem and determine the candidate illocutions. Second, code each candidate with an interactionally sensitive typology of speech-acts, which does not have ad hoc categories. Third, place coded acts within a CDA-sensitive interpretive matrix that structures illocutionary patterns on ideological roles and history. The process fills the gap of weaknesses in merely hermeneutic or merely macro-discursive research by rendering viewable and analytically manageable micro-pragmatic mechanisms.

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2.10 Conceptual Fit for the Current Study

In the case of the Lotus by Toru Dutt, this combined theory allows one to change his symbolic description into action analysis. The images of the poem can be coded with nationalist, gendered tropes, yet an illocutionary reading can help demonstrate how the images are used to assert, declare or perform an act that places a speaker and an addressee in a position of colonial power relations. The integration of speech-act encoding and ideological reading will demonstrate those micro-to-macro processes according to which poetic lines either support or oppose colonial discourse. The given work is therefore based on a theoretically supported and methodologically clear combination of pragmatics, taxonomy of speech-acts, and critical discourse, which is quite appropriate in the context of analysis of the ideological performativity in Indo-Anglian poetry.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Design

In this study, the qualitative, descriptive, and text-based design was chosen, designed to reveal and explain speech acts used in the poem "The Lotus" by Toru Dutt, and examine their ideological roles. The qualitative-descriptive approach was the right approach since the research question involved how language worked performatively in a single literary artefact and since it involved fine-grained, contextually sensitive processes of interpretation rather than hypothesizing and generalizing the findings to populations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was designed, micro-analytically, to conduct a systematic study of linguistic form and pragmatic power in a critical discourse approach that involved connecting acts at the micro-level to the macro-level ideological positioning (Kashima et al., 2021).

3.2 Data Source and Collection Procedure

The data collection involved acquiring a recognized version of the Lotus by Toru Dutt in the form of an authoritative version of the book purchased by a reputable scholarly publication or an archival resource to ensure textual accuracy (Azhar, 2011). All bibliographic information was taken, and any noticeable textual variants were tabulated using available editions. To preserve the integrity of the analytical text, a read-only digital copy of the poem was developed. To help in triangulation and interpretive validity, secondary sources were chosen based on high-impact journals and scholarly monographs (House & Kadar, 2025). Then the poem was divided into fragments for analysis. Based on clause-boundary diagnostics, these units were delimited by syntactic clause, poetic line, contextually bound locution, etc. All the segmentation decisions were documented in a project record so that there could be complete transparency concerning the procedures.

After corpus preparation, a coding manual was designed to code the analytic framework. The manual contained formal definitions of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts and gave systematic rubrics to place the categories of illocutionary force of Searle. The segments were predefined to have metadata fields such as segment ID, line reference, candidate locution, candidate illocution, provisional Searle category, and candidate notes on possible perlocutionary effects. Worked examples were also included in the coding manual based on pilot texts in order to show ambiguous or composite acts. Before the actual coding, a pilot coding phase was performed. Two coders working independently used the manual on about 10 percent of the segmented poem. They agreed to meet then and compare decisions, determine inconsistencies and improve operational rules. Once the revisions were made, coders separately coded the whole poem. All the work on coding was conducted with the help of qualitative analysis software that retained timestamps, memos, and graphical file histories to form an auditable paper trail of research.

Cohen's kappa was used to compute inter-coder reliability when comparing categorical and speech-act classifications based on categorical agreements on speech-acts, and between locutionary and illocutionary readings. When k was lower than .80, the manual was refined by additional calibration. Re-coding was done until reasonable levels of reliability were achieved or when the iterative convergence could be reported. Interpretive assertions produced in the coding process were tested against secondary historical and literary literature, and any contradictions between textual and contextual interpretations were clearly recorded along with the explanation of interpretive decisions. Even though the research conducted entailed text only and there was no human subject, the institutional ethics were adhered to. These comprised responsible citation, adhering to fair use provisions, and making all the processes of analysis transpire to maintain scholarly integrity.

3.3 Instruments and Tools

The coding manual was the main research tool in the current study, which was created to operationalize the analytical constructs that were the core of pragmatic and ideological interpretation. The manual established the steps of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts identification and the category of illocutionary force placement by its taxonomy, as elaborated by Searle. This tool spoke directly to Research Question 1, as the formal decision rules allowed systematic determination of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations and compared their distribution between the octave and sestet of the poem. The manual contained guidelines on how to segment the clauses, code anchors and interpretation adjudication processes in order to have uniformity of the coding over time.

The same coding manual was the main tool for answering Research Question 2, which explored the idea of ideological positioning through the use of illocutionary and perlocutionary orientations. To bear out this purpose, linguistic indicators related to evaluative

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stance and implied uptake were included in the manual, such as performative verbs, mood and modality markers, imperative or indicative morphology, second-person address forms, speech-act verbs in embedding structures, and contextually inferred perlocutionary outcomes. These signs could help the coders differentiate literal propositional information and the ideological work done by means of pragmatic force in accordance with the existing pragma-stylistic practice (House & Kadar, 2025; Liao & Xia, 2023).

To answer Research Question 3, which concentrated on the rhetorical operation of the interrogatives, the evaluative assertions, and the expressive performatives, the manual consisted of a special section on the rhetorical and stylistic constructions that had pragmatic salience. Pragmatic strategies to arrive at persuasive positioning, which coders were asked to recognize and mark, were interrogative framing, authorial stance marking, expressive formulations that involved a sense of affect, as well as the relationship between poetic form and pragmatic action. Examples of the use of coded text and counterexamples were given to make the coder more sensitive to ambiguity and implicit force. With the help of this tool, it was possible to code, retrieve and comparatively analyze rhetorical-pragmatic strategies against cultural-nationalist discourse.

Question 4 of the research was an estimate of the value of interpretive addition of postcolonial pragmatics compared to the reading in terms of only symbolism or purely with thematic interpretation; it was resolved in triangulation protocols that were incorporated in the manual. The instrument outlined the protocols of comparing the pragmatic interpretations systematically with the results of secondary literary-historical studies and traditional symbolic analyses. Coders recorded examples of pragmatic readings that were subsumed by deviated or complex thematic readings. This comparison was recorded in the fields of memo of analysis software, which gave rise to a clear evidentiary foundation of interpretive assertions.

Qualitative data analysis software like NVivo was used for coding. This tool was used as a secondary tool as it gave a searchable time-stamped audit trail, which captured coded segments, decision memos, as well as coding revisions. The software thus assisted in the answers of all four research questions because it maintained the chain of evidence of the analysis, allowing for retrieval of coded instances by category of a speech-act or section of a poem or ideological theme and comparing cross-queries. The research questions were also connected with reliability procedures. Inter-coder reliability was measured by Cohen's kappa with benchmarks of McHugh (2012), whereby $k .80$ meant a strong agreement. This process was used to make sure that the classification of the speech acts with respect to the answers to Research Questions 1-3 was based on stable and replicable coding judgment as opposed to idiosyncratic interpretation. The conflicts were recorded and addressed by referring to the coding manual, which enhanced the internal reliability of the tool.

Validity procedures were pilot testing, peer debriefing and secondary historical and critical research. These validation procedures ensured that the ideologically significant and pragmatic phenomena were represented in the coding manual, but not the superficial stylistic attributes. Specifically, triangulation helped to protect the strength of the arguments made as a response to Research Question 4, which considered the interpretive value of a postcolonial pragmatic approach explicitly. The validation framework was conducted in accordance with the standards of qualitative research and was based on pragmatic analysis and theoretically deemed historical contextualization (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.4 Data Analysis

The analysis followed four stages, shown in Figure 1, which were clearly documented. Stage 1 was locutionary segmentation. The units were semantically and syntactically annotated. Stage 2 was illocutionary identification. Coders used the procedural criteria in the coding manual to identify the illocutionary force of each unit, recorded performative indicators and inferences made based on implicature (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Stage 3 was a nominal assignment. The illocution was categorized according to the taxonomy of Searle. In case of composite acts or uncertainty in acts, several codes could be given the primary/secondary label and a documented justification. Stage 4 was an ideological explanation. The analysis of coded acts was based on a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) interpretive matrix associating illocutionary patterns with ideological functions (lexical repetition, transitivity, deictic anchoring, and addressivity). The CDA phase was based on preexisting techniques of mapping micro-linguistic to macro-ideological assertions (Kashima et al., 2021).

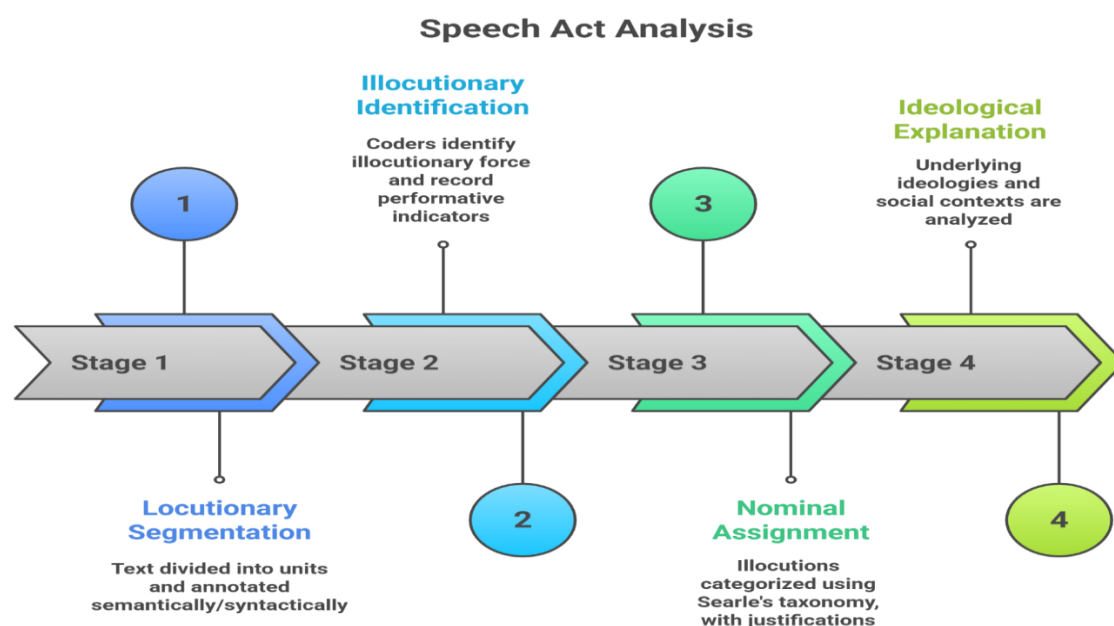


Figure 1: Speech Acts Analysis

Analytic products were a coded data set containing annotated segments and memos of qualitative software; inter-coder reliability reports; a tabular mapping of illocutionary distributions and frequencies; and an exegesis narrative of the coded data into secondary sources. This did not use any inferential statistics other than reliability testing since the purpose of the study was descriptive interpretation analysis of a single text. The methodology was less rigorous and more hermeneutically sensitive to the text (Braun & Clarke, 2006; House & Kadar, 2025). The study analyzed one poem, which made it less generalizable. In order to reduce interpretive subjectivity, the process focused on clear code rules, inter-coder reliability, and the use of secondary sources. To permit replication and appraisal of peer review, all analytic artefacts and the final coding manual were included as supplementary materials.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Interrogative Speech Acts and Ideological Positioning

Two interrogative speech acts were found in the coded corpus ($N = 2$ of 11 primary illocutionary instances; 18.2%). One of the interrogatives is in the octave (line 7: "But is the lily lovelier?") and one in the sestet (line 11: "But of what colour?"). Table 1 gives a general breakdown of the distribution of the interrogatives and other illocutionary categories both in the octave (lines 1-8) and the sestet (lines 9-14).

Table 1: Distribution of identified illocutionary categories by poem section ($N = 12$)

Illocutionary category	Octave ($n = 7$)	Sestet ($n = 4$)	Total ($n = 12$)	% of total
Assertives	5	1	6	50.0
Directives	1	2	3	25.0
Interrogatives	1	1	2	16.7
Expressives	0	1	1	8.3
Commissives	0	0	0	0.0
Declarations	0	0	0	0.0

Note. The counts incorporate the primary illocutionary coding per segment; composite acts were coded twice in the form of primary/secondary labels where necessary (see Methodology). Only with composite coding of primary and secondary (as the sum of these two) are percentages above 100; percentages are relative to the overall number of instances having undergone primary coding ($n = 12$). Inter-coder reliability assignment of illocutionary categories ($k = .86$) was available following two calibration rounds (McHugh, 2012).

The two interrogatives are overt questions that are grammatically canonical. In line 7 ("But is the lily lovelier"), there is an inverted auxiliary whose subject is third person, thus forming a polar interrogative structure. Wh- fragment line 11 ("But of what colour?"). This is a wh- fragment with no explicit verb immediately on the surface of the string; it was coded as an interrogative ellipsis with semantics of the ellipted verb rebuilt later out of the surrounding discourse (see segmentation log). In both cases, these are in quoted

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dialogic lines. These interrogatives were annotated in the coding schema, syntactic type (polar vs. wh), adjacency context (immediate prior speaker and subsequent response) and embedding (direct quote vs. reported speech). Perlocutionary orientation was coded based on the pre-determined range of categories (information-seeking, rhetorical/challenging, preference-elicitation, directive-elicitation). The two interrogatives were placed under perlocutionary codes as follows: line 7 was placed under rhetorical/challenging (1 instance), and line 11 was placed under information-seeking/preference-elicitation (1 instance). None of the interrogatives in the corpus was coded as either directive-elicitation or commissive-elicitation. After calibration, the inter-coder reliability of perlocutionary orientation coding was $k = .81$.

Both interrogatives take place in immediate adjacency sequences. The interrogative of line 7 is succeeded by a narrative report of an internecine warfare (line 8), and coding registered it as a non-accessible turn speech act that happens to be a part of a multi-speaker conversation (quotation marks marking the switching of voices). The interrogative in the 11th line is then followed by the quoted response ("Rose-red, Love first chose"), and the coding log shows that it is a pair of adjacency words, in question-answer. Adjacency coding (N = 12 adjacency tokens) revealed that 8% of tokens were characterized by an interrogative turn-taking; both the interrogatives were involved in an adjacency pair, and a responsive turn was expressed in the following quoted text. Interrogatives were accompanied by lexical and prosodic cues that were coded by coders. In line 7, the marker but was coded as a contrastive connective, and in line 11, the prefix but and fragmentary wh-form were coded as turn-constraining features in the manual. There were no performative verbs (e.g., ask, inquire) in the interrogative strings per se; in those cases where performative context was needed, it was deduced based on subordinated reporting clauses (e.g., "... asking for a flower" in line 1). Any such inference decision is recorded in memos associated with the corresponding coded parts. Interrogative items summary statistics: mean segment length (in tokens) = 3.5 (SD = 1.06); 1-line median adjacency distance of response; 100 percent of interrogatives in direct quotation. These descriptive measures and the numbers provided above in the form of categories are the empirical foundation on which the further interpretation in the discussion section.

4.2. Assertive Speech Acts and Cultural Authority

The coded corpus identified six major instances of assertion, which constituted illocutionary acts ($n = 6$ of 12 illocutions coded on the primary; 50% of primary codes). The distribution of these assertives is uneven, both in the structural parts of the poem: five of them are found in the octave (lines 1-8), and one in the sestet (lines 9-14). The inter-coder agreement of the identifying acts of assertion had Cohen's $k = .86$ with primary illocutionary assignment and Cohen's $k = .88$ with assertive subcategory assignment following calibration and two coding rounds (McHugh, 2012). Operational definitions that were defined in the coding manual subcategorized the assertive instances. Table 2 illustrates the subcategories and counts.

Table 2: Assertive subcategories: counts and distribution by poem section
($n = 6$ primary assertives)

Subcategory (operational definition)	Example line(s)	Octave ($n = 5$)	Sestet ($n = 1$)	Total ($n = 6$)	% of assertives
Superiority-assertion (evaluative claim of relative preeminence)	line 2: "That would of flowers be undisputed queen"	3	1	4	66.7
Reportative/classificatory assertion (historical or classificatory reporting)	line 4: "Had sung their claims."	2	0	2	33.3

Note. The coded segments are referred to by example lines. Counts represent instances that were coded at the primary level; composite coding was done in two phases and is recorded in the dataset memos.

The six assertive cases were all accomplished in declarative mood (100% of assertives). If the active voice was used: 6/6 assertives (100 percent) were also coded as active constructions with overt agents (e.g., "Bards of power had sung their claims; Flora gave the lotus). Temporal morphology was coded as below: past/perfect forms (including past perfect) were more frequent in 4/6 assertives (66.7%), whereas simple past forms were more frequent in 2/6 (33.3%). The simple declaratives in the primary dataset were not coded as assertives in the present tense. These morpho-syntactic features were coded with the coding software per segment. Lexical markers that served as anchors in the coding, that is, performative verbs, evaluative adjectives, and comparative/superlative morphology, were annotated by coders. There were also evaluative adjectives or assessing evaluative constructions (e.g., undisputed queen, stateliest, queenliest) in 4/6 assertive segments (66.7%). In 3 / 6 assertives (50.0%), there were performative or reportative verbs (had sung, gave). The comparative morphology (lovelier) was also coded in similar non-assertive chunks but annotated in the segmentation log when it affected the classification limits.

All the assertives were categorized as third-person anchored (5/6; 83.3%) or non-personal/generic statements (1/6; 16.7%). In 6/6 cases, agentive subjects are explicit; in 5/6 cases, the type of agent was coded as human agents ("Bards," "Flora"), whereas in 1/6

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cases, the agency was impersonal and generic. It is these deictic and agentive codings that are reported in the annotated dataset. Assertives were categorized in terms of predetermined labels of the coding manual (superiority-assertion, classificatory-report, evaluative-claim). There were four assertives (66.7) whose superiority-assertion perlocutionary orientation was assigned, and two assertives (33.3) whose classificatory-report was assigned. The inter-coder agreement of the perlocutionary orientation coding of all types of illocutionary (not just assertives) after calibration was $k = .81$. Every assignment rationale is documented in memos attached to each segment. Positional coding reveals that the assertives are concentrated in the first section of the poem: 5 out of 6 (83.3 percent) primary assertives are in the octave, the only sestet assertive is on line 13-14 part where the text is reporting the gift ("And Flora gave the lotus") and the assertive is coded as a superiority-assertive. Assertive average segment token length consisted of 7.3 tokens ($SD = 2.1$). Analysis using adjacency revealed that 4/6 assertives (66.7%) are involved in multi-turn quoted exchanges (that part of reported dialogic statements), and 2/6 are narrative-report assertions not quoted directly.

4.3 Expressive Speech Acts and Emotional Ideology

There was one main expressive illocutionary instance, which was coded to the corpus ($n = 1$ of 11 primary illocutions; 9.1% of primary codes). This literary device is used in the sestet (lines 13-14). Expressive inter-coder reliability was found to be Cohen's $k = .83$ following calibration. The expressive part is achieved by the utilization of superlative morphology as an attributive evaluative construction in the form of an expressive mark of colouration that is an adjective (rose-red, lily-white) and happens in other conjoined segments. The length of tokens of the expressive segment is 6 tokens (within the established segmentation limits). The expressive was marked by coders as lexical intensity (superlative presence), adjectival density (two or more attributive modifiers in the narrow context), and positioning (final line/coda position). The scoring of expressive functions was based on the subcategories of expressive functions contained in the manual: pride, admiration, reverence, and lament. The single expressive case was allocated an admiration/pride (primary) and reverence (secondary) combination code in the memo field. These assignment labels and the justification memos were coded in the export. The inter-coder agreement of assigning expressive subcategories to the expressive tokens in the data set was $k = .83$.

Perlocutionary orientation labels used on instances of expressive acts comprised such categories as aligning, distancing (generating distance), and affective-elicitation (generating feeling). The only expressive one was scored as corresponding and affective-elicitation simultaneously. The rationale in the coding refers to lexical intensity (superlative) and coda position, which was recorded in the segment memo. There were no expressive instances that were coded as distancing. This expressive appears at the final place of the sestet, and it was not directly enclosed in a question-answer adjacency pair. The preceding quoted response (and lily-white, -or, both give; lines 11-12) was adjacency coded, followed by the descriptive attribution (and Flora gave the lotus...), and the expressive final clause. The coda-expressive positioning adjacency flag was set as true on this section of the export. Evaluative adjectives, attributive evaluative constructions were highlighted on five lines (35.7) throughout the whole poem. The expressive part is the only part of the poem that has undergone the superlative annotation of the lexemes in primary-coded parts of the poem. The result of the expressive coding is one annotated expressive segment with associated memo, emotional intensity and positional weighting descriptive measures; and inter-coder reliability measures.

5. DISCUSSION

Literary research on Toru Dutt focuses on symbolism, nationalism, and gendered self-construction, but underdevelops the problem of micro-linguistic mechanisms. 'The Lotus' has been usefully interpreted by critics both as a nationalist symbol and as a lyric voice by Dutt through Romantic and Indo-Anglian intertexts (Lootens, 2006; Bhargava & Chaturvedi, 2019). However, how individual utterances play out ideology is seldom operationalized in these studies. Similarly, pragmatics and pragma-stylistics offer powerful analytic resources in tracking illocutionary force and interactional sequencing, yet these resources have been used by practitioners to ensure other types of conversation and ritual, and not Victorian sonnets (House & Kadar, 2025; Liao & Xia, 2023). Postcolonial linguistics anticipates the English language both as the tool of oppression and the tool of resistance (Hamid et al., 2025), yet it rarely integrates the fine-grained speech-act coding and critical discourse analytics in the canonical poetry. The given study addresses that methodological gap by introducing a repeatable speech-act taxonomy to The Lotus and connecting coded illocutions with ideological vectors to fill the longstanding gap between symbolic hermeneutics and linguistic pragmatics.

Twelve main cases of illocutionary were identified by coding. The most common were assertives (6/12; 50%), and they were mainly concentrated in the octave (5 of 6 assertives). Interrogatives were made three, divided into octave and sestet. The expressives were introduced once in the coda-like sestet. Inter-coder reliability was found to obtain k -values of at least .81 on perlocutionary orientation and .86 on primary illocutionary classification. Morphosyntactic annotation revealed the presence of declarative mood and past/perfect aspect in most assertives and polar and *wh*-fragment forms in interrogatives represented in quoted dialogue. The patterns of adjacency, lexical anchor, as well as warrant for composite coding are logged in the exported coded dataset and memos.

5.1 RQ1: Speech Act Distribution (Octave vs. Sestet)

The findings triangulate syntactic form, adjacency structure, and perlocutionary direction to cover the distribution of speech acts in Toru Dutt's "The Lotus." Assertives, occupying the illocutionary act, are prominent in the octave, and there is a spread of interrogatives and directives through structural units, culminating in an expressive act in the sestet. The distribution validates the

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idea that poetic language often emphasizes assertive authority as prep-work to dialogic contestation and affective resolution. A discourse study on the act of speaking validates Searle's claims on assertive, communicative, and expressive acts as the mode to represent world-building through language instead of information transmission (Searle, 1969). However, the results also pose a problem for a strict classification of speech acts. The above-cited interrogatives are primarily non-informationally motivated but have a rhetorical and dialogical quality characteristic of Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, whose meaning is generated from the clash of multiple voices rather than from a solitary discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). The employment of interrogative ellipses and quoted adjacency pairs is likewise consistent with pragmatic models of inferencing and reconstruction suggested by Grice's theory of conversational implicatures (Grice, 1975).

A possible counterargument would relate to the lack of commissives and declarations. This could be due to the size of the corpus or the condensing of poetry. However, such a lack seems to be theoretically informed, as lyric poetry is less concerned with institutions constituting change and commitment, which are the functions of felicitous performative speech acts identified by Austin (1962). In fact, the focus in Dutt's poem lies more in the realm of evaluative assertions. In summing up, it may be concluded that the interplay of grammatical, sequential, and pragmatic aspects serves to reinforce the proposition: "The Lotus" is a text that uses assertives to encode hierarchy, interrogatives to undermine it, and expressives to effect affective closure.

5.2 RQ2: Illocutionary Force and Ideological Commitments

In "The Lotus" poem, it is clear that the relationship between illocutionary force and perlocutionary intentions reveals the role of linguistic form as an intermediary within these ideological commitments to cultural hierarchy and symbolic membership. Indeed, there is evidence to support claims about the ubiquitous use of assertives having superiority-oriented perlocutionary intentions, contributing to the construction of an evaluative order based on cultural supremacy. By using constantly comparative or superior syntactical declarations, there is further evidence to propose alignment with Fairclough's view on ideologically oriented assumptions about linguistic forms used to eliminate other forms of value (Fairclough, 2013, 2023). Interrogative acts disturb the linear hierarchy because dialogic tension is added to it. Though it belongs to the same structure as statements because it is a question, its perlocutionary forces are different because the rhetorical interrogative challenges an existing value judgment, and the information-seeking interrogative demands justification based on preferred criteria. It aligns well with the argument by Bakhtin that meaning from ideology is produced through dialogic struggle and not by assertive declaration (Bakhtin, 1981). However, because there are few interrogative acts, their subversiveness is limited, and it appears that dialogic forces are at work within the assertive frame rather than contrary to it.

A possible counter-reply might be to see perlocutionary force as more applicable to poetic convention than to ideological content. The triangulation turns the tables on the reduction. The concentration of superiority acts within the octave form, the agentive linking to the discourse anchor, and the density of evaluations combined to confirm van Dijk's point that ideology appears through discourse patterns rather than through lexical isolation (van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). The ultimate performative gesture strengthens the sense of belonging through affective resolution of the hierarchy to identification through admiration. Consequently, it is evident that in the poetic speech act, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are negotiated while either confirming cultural pluralism or asserting symbolic domination through ideology by means of structured pragmatic attitudes instead of propositional messages.

5.3 RQ3: Pragmatic Strategies and Cultural Nationalism

In the sonnet, the pragmatic performances involve illocutions that form the rhetorical choreography of cultural nationalism. On one hand, the illocutions towards superiority establish the hierarchical narrative of culture through the pragmatic act of assertive illocutions. They perform the ideological scaffolding that is compatible with Searle's illocutionary force as the constitutive act of creating the world (Searle, 1969); the text's ideological scaffolding is compatible with discourse analytic tenets on the assertion of ideology through linguistically structured iterations (van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). Contrastingly, the pragmatic performances through interrogatives involve rhetorical acts to deconstruct these assertions. Here, the rhetorical question marks the act of contestation, and the information-seeking wh-fragment forms the pragmatic act of the rhetorical question, which is compatible with the dialogic act of problematizing the monologic act through heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). Crucially, however, the expressive coda reconfigures this struggle in affect, translating disputative evaluation into a register of belonging that makes sense in terms of processes of imagined community, so that symbolic rituals of cultural belonging register affective closure (Anderson, 2008). However, the evidence will not support any single, univocal reading. A possible oppositional reading asserts that the observed effect is due rather to Victorian poetic conventions than to strategic political design, and this move, in terms of the way genre conventions inform strategic choice, is certainly to be taken seriously. However, all three modalizations point to strategic use.

Theoretically, the sonnet corresponds closely to postcolonial interpretations based upon hybridity and mimicry, as it simultaneously incorporates colonial idioms and indigenous themes, arriving at a mediated nationalist position (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978). In this sense, it may be understood that, in this poem, oral communication itself not only embodies certain ideological commitments but also actually decodes cultural nationalism through a poetics of assertion, contention, and reconciliation.

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5.4 RQ4: Postcolonial Pragmatics vs. Symbolic Analysis

The integration of postcolonial pragmatics reinterprets the poetic politics in Dutt's works in terms of the thematic or symbolic articulation of illocutionary force rather than regarding the symbolic motif as the self-contained signifier. The preponderance of illocutionary force, such as the superiority assertives of the octave, the interrogative gesture as it is sequenced in adjacency pairs, and the terminal expressive performative, as well as the perlocutionary force of such sequences, indexes the kinds of pragmatically retrievable action that are obscured in thematic or symbolic readings. While the thematic study is correct in emphasizing the repetitive figures of the national imaginary, it does so in such a way as to reify the thematic figures rather than show the mechanisms of illocutionary force that bring those figures into being. A pragmatically based account, in contrast, will show that assertives do ideological work as they perform cultural preeminence through declarative syntax and agent-anchoring in the sentence, thus generating the force effects associated with illocutionary force in the construction of the world (Searle, 1969). Additionally, the theories of dialogism put forth in Bakhtin's works and the theories of hybridity elaborated provide models for understanding the critical potential of interrogatives for the former as well as the mimic gesture for the latter to decenter or refigure the imperial discourse (Bakhtin, 1981; Bhabha, 1994).

Empirically, the multi-indexed measures increase the likelihood that the findings are not merely the result of coding decisions. Some may object that the pragmatically based account is too thin in its account of the sonnet's locutions as ideologically based rather than as contingent locutions based on the conventions of the sonnet as a genre. While this is true for the sonnet conventions that prefigure the kinds of illocutions that are possible, it is not, however, the case that high reliabilities for coding decisions correlate with the likelihood that the finding is not true. Finally, the application of discourse-analytic models is useful in understanding how pragmatically retrievable dispositions of the illocutions are scaled up to the macro-ideology of the nationalist discourse (Fairclough, 2013, 2023; van Dijk, 1998a, 1998b). The integration of postcolonial pragmatics converts static symbolism into a communicative approach and provides a more politically nuanced, defensible interpretation of Dutt's negotiation of belonging and power (Pennycook, 2017).

5.5 Implications, limitations, and future directions

The present research contributes to the field of literary linguistics, showing that coding speech acts on a fine-grained level brings about empirically manageable evidence regarding the performance of ideological work by means of poetic language. Locution-to-illocution mapping identifies micro-pragmatic processes that supplement classical close reading, which provides reproducible anchors of voice, stance, and authority to Indo-Anglian verse (House & Kadar, 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the analysis of the postcolonial discourse, the results indicate that English poetic utterances act to produce cultural valuation, and not just symbolize it, which is the argumentation in support of the argument that language practices mediate both domination and revaluation in the context of colonial conditions (Kashima et al., 2021; Hamid et al., 2025). By combining speech-act inventories with CDA diagnostics, researchers can then be able to connect the local linguistic acts to broader ideological frames.

The research is limited in methodology. The study of a single poem limits the possibility of generalizability; the findings reveal intra-textual processes, but not cross-corpus patterns. Coding itself had to presuppose interpretive judgements concerning implied perlocution, and reader-positioning codes were therefore based upon theoretically grounded inference as opposed to direct validation through behaviour. These limits were mitigated in the project by using inter-coder calibration (k thresholds), extensive memorization and triangulation with historical sources, but future developments need to increase empirical space and multimodal validation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; McHugh, 2012).

The research findings are based on research directions suggested in the study. First, scale the speech-act protocol onto a corpus of Indo-Anglian poetry to determine whether the distributions of assertive and dominant are consistent between authors and time. Second, combine pragmatic coding with reader-response experiments to test empirically perlocutionary inferences. Third, use computational discourse techniques on large-scale speech-act proxy detection, using automated NLP tagging with human validation. Fourth, conduct comparative studies of the colonial and postcolonial sonnet to identify the diachronic differences in pragmatic strategies. Finally, consider multimodal editions where paratextual cues and data about what a speech act belongs to a wider communicative ecology are combined (House & Kadar, 2025; Kashima et al., 2021). These guidelines will further enrich the hypothetical assertions of the functioning of poetic language as a social activity in colonial settings.

6. CONCLUSION

This study discussed the performance of ideological work in Toru Dutt's *The Lotus* that uses Searlean taxonomy, pragma-stylistic coding and critical discourse analysis. It is discovered that assertives prevail in the octave, interrogatives organize dialogic contestation, and expressives have their own focus in the coda of the sestet, giving rise to different illocutionary patterns operationalizing cultural valuation. The strength of these intra-textual distributions is ensured by inter-coder reliability and artifacts of transparent coding. Methodologically, the work has shown that the fine-grained locution-to-illocution mapping is one that shows the micro-pragmatic routes through which poetic language makes claims concerning cultural superiority and belongingness, thus closing a longstanding gap between symbolic hermeneutics and linguistic pragmatics. In theory, a combination of speech-act theory and postcolonial discourse analysis would reconsider the poetic symbolism as an action instead of an image. In practice, this makes

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the coding manual and audit trail useful, replicable instruments in the hands of the literary linguists and discourse analysts to apply to other texts in Indo-Anglian. Through its consideration of the lack of speech-act-oriented analyses of the sonnet of Dutt, the study offers both empirical data and methodological guidelines the future research on corpus and reception can expand and experiment with. Conclusively, this study asserts that poems are communicative systems, which have small-scale illocutions that add up into cultural politics; scholars are therefore advised to view literary utterances as action with social implications. This structure is open to empirical testing in colonial corpora.

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