

EXPRESSING IDEAS ABOUT AI: A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF EXPRESSIVE SPEECH ACTS IN SWAMI SIVASUBRAMANIAN'S TED TALK

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the use of expressive speech acts in the TED Talk entitled " *Everything You Need to Know About AI Agents* " delivered by Swami Sivasubramanian. The objectives of this research are to identify the types of expressive speech acts and to explain their communicative functions in the talk. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method within the framework of pragmatics, particularly the theory of speech acts proposed by Searle (1969). The data were collected through the observation method by watching the video repeatedly and examining its transcript to identify utterances containing expressive speech acts. The results of the study show that a total of 33 expressive speech acts were identified, which are classified into admiration, appreciation, optimism, enthusiasm, encouragement, concern, humility, amusement, reflection, and pride. Among these, expressing admiration occurred dominantly, followed by encouragement and optimism, reflecting the speaker's positive attitude toward technological development, especially artificial intelligence agents. These characteristics manifest in both explicit and implicit manners. Explicit expressions use direct emotive language, while implicit expressions use evaluative comments, metaphors, rhetorical inquiries, and personal reflection. The speaker uses expressive speech acts to show how they feel and what they think, get the audience interested, and stress the inspirational message regarding AI agents' future role in human existence. Therefore, expressive speech acts play an important role in strengthening the persuasive and motivational aspects of the presentation.

Keywords - *pragmatics, speech acts, expressive speech acts, TED Talk, AI agents*

Introduction

Pragmatics focuses on how people use language to do things, say what they mean, and reach certain communication goals (Levinson, 1983). Semantics, on the other hand, focuses on the literal meaning of words and sentences. In pragmatics, meaning is affected by more than just the words used. It is also affected by the relationship between the speakers, the social setting, and the circumstances in which the utterance is made. One of the most important ideas in pragmatics is speech act theory. Austin introduced this concept in 1962, and Searle elaborated on it in 1969. (Searle, 1969) mention that when individuals articulate utterances, they are not just conveying information but also performing an action. This quotation means that language is a kind of action. Speech acts are the things that people do with words. Speech act theory helps us understand how words can be used to make assertions, ask for things, promise things, say sorry, or show how we feel.

(Searle, 1969) puts speech actions into five groups: representatives, directions, expressive, commissive, and declaratives. People utilize representative speech act to share their thoughts, ideas, or descriptions of the world as it is. Directive speech acts are meant to get the person who hears them to do something, such requests or orders. Expressive speech acts show how the speaker feels or what their mental state is like. Commissive speech acts make the speaker promise to do something in the future, while declarative speech acts affect social reality by saying things. This classification offers a structured framework for examining how speakers utilize language to execute diverse communicative functions.

In the digital era, websites like YouTube have become important places for sharing ideas and information through audiovisual content, like TED Talks. TED Talks are a type of semi-formal communication that is different from informal social media exchanges. In TED Talks, presenters give structured messages while also sharing their own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about certain topics. It's important to analyze expressive speech acts because they show how the speaker is feeling and help the listener connect with them on an emotional level. TED Talks often use expressive actions like saying thank you, praising someone, feeling sorry, or being excited on purpose to build connections, emphasize important points, and change how people see things. Also, even when the communication seems well planned, expressive speech acts in this case are still based on the situation and may have hidden meanings. TED Talks are a type of semi formal communication that is different from casual conversations on social media. In TED Talks, speakers share structured messages while also sharing their own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes about certain topics. It is important to evaluate expressive speech acts because they show the speaker's mental state and help the audience connect with them emotionally.

Several studies have looked at expressive speech acts in different situations. (K. S. Ramadhani & Rido, n.d., 2022) in their study entitled "Expressive Illocutionary Acts in Taylor Swift's Commencement Speech at New York University 2022". The result of this study show that Taylor Swift uses expressive illocutionary acts to keep her message balanced between emotion, humor, and authority. This lets her motivate her audience, build a sense of community, and show how important it is to accept yourself and be strong. This study can help people learn more about how expressive acts are used in public speaking and give useful ideas for future research in pragmatics and speech analysis.

The second study, entitled *Tindak Tutur Ilokusi Ekspresif pada Tayangan Youtube Catatan Demokrasi TV One Episode 'Pagar Laut,'* was conducted by (D. L. Ramadhani et al., 2025). The results reveal that expressive illocutionary acts are vital for keeping things courteous and encouraging peaceful conversation in online political discussions. It also aids to show how the speaker's feeling. These things help the members of the forum communicate better with each other. This study is relevant to the current one because it looks at expressive speech acts on YouTube, which is similar to the platform used in the current study.

The last study conducted by (Panjaitan & Ambalegin, 2024) in their study entitled "Expressive Illocutionary Speech Acts in The Summer I Turned Pretty TV Series". The result shows that the characters use a wide range of expressive speech acts. The most common expressive activities are those related to emotional reactions, like thankfulness, regret, and complaint. These findings suggests that interpersonal connections and emotional expression are vital to the plot of the series. The study also shows that the context of interaction, including character relationships, situational elements, and the scene's emotional intensity, often affects expressive

speech behaviors. This study gives useful information about how context and emotional expression create meaning that can be use in the current analysis.

There aren't many studies that focus on speech act analysis in technical public speaking. One well known example is Swami Sivasubramanian's TED Talk "Everything You Need to Know About AI Agents." The speaker tries to make technology more human by using rich verbal expressions that make difficult AI topics easier to understand. The transcript of this talk, is a valuable resource for pragmatic analysis, especially when looking at expressive speech acts. The objective of this study is to analyze the various expressive speech acts found in the TED Talk "Everything You Need to Know About AI Agents." It seeks to identify the types of expressive speech actions and evaluate their functions in conveying the speaker's optimism and perspective on AI agents through an examination of the employed speech acts. The findings are expected to enhance the understanding of speech actions within professional and technological discourse, particularly in digital public speaking contexts, thereby contributing to the field of pragmatics.

Methodology

The data source of this study was a TED Talk video called "Everything You Need to Know About AI Agents," which was given by Swami Sivasubramanian and was taken from the official TED YouTube channel. The video lasts about 18 minutes and 32 seconds and has clear, well organized content with lots of examples of language use that are good for pragmatic analysis. This talk was chosen because it has a relevant and current topic about artificial intelligence, which is becoming more and more a part of everyday life as well as this talk use interesting and convincing language. The theory of speech acts proposed by Searle (1969) was used in this study's descriptive qualitative approach. The data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques by repeatedly watching the video and examining the transcript. The data were examined by categorizing the utterances into various types of expressive speech acts and determining their communicative purposes. The analysis also looked at the difference between explicit and implicit expressions based on the situation. The interpretation of implicit meanings was further reinforced by (Halliday and Hasan, 1985) concept of context of situation, which examines field, tenor, and mode in the comprehension of meaning.

Finding and Discussion

Finding

According to Searle's (1969) classification, ten types of expressive illocutionary acts were identified in Swami Sivasubramanian's talk: admiration, encouragement, optimism, appreciation, enthusiasm, concern, humility, amusement, reflection, and pride. The speaker often shares positive feelings when he use these types. Table 1 shows how often each kind occurs.

Table 1. Types of Expressive Illocutionary Acts in Swami Sivasubramanian's TED Talk

No.	Types	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Admiration	8	24%
2.	Encouragement	5	15%

3.	Optimism	5	15%
4.	Appreciation	3	9%
5.	Enthusiasm	2	6%
6.	Concern	3	9%
7.	Humility	1	3%
8.	Amusement	2	6%
9.	Reflection	1	3%
10.	Pride	1	3%
	Total	33	100

Tabel 1 reveals that there were 33 expressive illocutionary acts, with admiration being the most common form, occurred 8 times. Next followed by encouragement and optimism, which both occurred five times. These expressive illocutionary acts can be done in both explicit and implicit ways. Explicit occurred 23 times and implicit occurred 10 times. Direct emotional language is used in explicit expressions, while evaluative comments, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and personal reflection are used in implicit expressions. The speaker also uses expressive illocutionary acts to share their own thoughts and feelings, get the audience involved, and stress the uplifting message about the future role of AI agents in human life.

Discussion

People usually employ expressive speech acts to show how they feel, what they are thinking, or how they are feeling. The speaker used both direct and indirect illocutionary acts. Words like "love," "precious," "excited," "amazing," "incredible," "great," and "optimistic" are examples of explicit expressions. Implicit expressions, on the other hand, are expressed through metaphor (like "It opened up worlds to me"), evaluative comments (like "I got to make every second count"), rhetorical question (like "How much easier would it be with these powerful AI agents?"), and personal reflection (like "I got to make every second count"). The use of these implicit statements, such "I got to make every second count," requires more thought to understand but makes the discourse more effective. The speaker's capacity to portray emotions clearly and convincingly is shown by the mix of explicit and implicit expressions. The occurrences of each type of expressive illocutionary act were analysed below.

Expressing Admiration

The most common category in this study is expressing admiration. The speaker often employs very favourable evaluative adjectives like "amazing," "incredible," and "transformative." The speaker also employs superlative forms and passionate verbs a lot. The purpose of this type is to create a positive story about AI agents and get people to accept new technologies. The use of this type explicitly can be seen below.

[1] "What I **love** about technology is that it can help us do things we could never have imagined." (00: 04)

[2] "But in Amazon, I got an opportunity to build **amazing** things." (02:32)

[3] "One of the most **transformative** technology shifts of our time." (03:27)

The speaker said "I love" in utterance [1]. As a way to start the presentation, this phrase is utilized at the beginning. It is a clear expression of admiration since it directly states how the speaker feels about technology's skills. It also gets the audience's attention and sets a positive, excited tone for the presentation. In utterance [2], the speaker clearly shows admiration by using the term "amazing things," which underlines the speaker's accomplishment in joining Amazon. The word "opportunity" shows that the speaker is grateful for the experience. This phrase is not only a way for the speaker to reflect on themselves, but it also helps to develop credibility and deepen their connection with the audience. In utterance [3], "the most transformative" shows a lot of respect for new technologies. These remarks stress how important and useful AI agents could be, which makes the topic more intriguing and convincing to the audience.

Expressing admiration also conveyed implicitly by the speaker. He use metaphorical expression like utterance [4] below.

[4]“**It opened up worlds** to me that I could have never thought possible.” (02:59)

Utterance [4] shows an implicit statement of respect because it uses metaphors to show that he thinks technology is good. The expression "opened up worlds" is a metaphor because the speaker doesn't really open up the worlds, we can't physically open worlds. What does the speaker mean is technology gives him a lot of chances and fresh options for his life. The metaphor suggests adoration to make the idea stronger and more important.

Expressing Encouragement

Encouragement is another type of expressive speech act that was found in the data. The speaker pushes the audience to act in both direct and indirect ways. The following phrases are expressing encouragement.

[5] “The future we will share will be shaped by those with the ability to **think big** and even **dream bigger**”. (06:29)

[6] “Where success is determined by your ideas and your ability to describe **what you want to build?**. (18:07)

[7] “Now if you go back to your two-minute TED recap, **how much easier would it be for you** with this task if you have these powerful AI agents?” (16:04)

Utterances [5] and [6] exemplify expressive communication that motivates the audience to acknowledge and realize their own potential. Data [5] shows that motivational language, like the phrases "think big" and "dream bigger," which create a positive attitude, is used to provide people support. As seen by the phrases "your ideas" and "your ability," which give listeners

control and boost their confidence. Data [6] encourage people by focusing on their strengths. Even though they weren't given in a hurry, these words softly encourage the listener by using creative and positive language. Also, rhetorical questions give people an indirect way to feel better in data [7]. This sentence uses a rhetorical question to give encouragement in a roundabout way. The speaker doesn't give the audience explicit instructions, instead, they ask them to think about how AI agents could make their job easier. The question "how much easier would it be for you...?" which softly and persuasively invites the audience to see the benefits of AI agents, is a nice way to end. These comments are aimed to get the audience to think of new ideas and consider themselves as active players in the progress of technology.

Expressing Optimism

The speaker often talks about how optimistic they are about the future of AI. The example of optimistic is shown below.

[8] "I can't help but be **optimistic**" (03:12)

The word "optimistic" in sentence [8] show that someone is hopeful. He is positive thinking about technology when he says, "I can't help but be optimistic." It shows how hopeful he is that technology will continue to improve. The speaker's strong faith in AI, especially when it comes to new technology, makes the audience feel safe and confident.

Expressing Appreciation and Enthusiasm

Expressions of appreciation and enthusiasm are also identified in the data, as presented below.

[9] "Every second was **precious**" (0:44)

[10] "We were really **excited**" (11:19)

An expression of appreciation is reflected in data [9]. He starts his speech by talking briefly about his childhood. The speaker came from a poor family and grew up in a rural section of India. His school only had one computer that everyone could use, so he couldn't use his own. Because of this, he could only use the computer for 10 to twenty minutes a week. He said, "Every second was precious," which hints at his past experience of not having easy access to a computer. This is meant to be a reflective statement. The term "precious" shows how much he valued the time he had, which makes his solid judgment even more important. He really wanted to learn programming, so every second became more significant to him, and he learned to value his time more.

Data [10] shows enthusiasm. The word "excited," which is an emotive term that clearly shows the speaker's positive emotion, shows that the statement "We were really excited" is an

expressive expression of enthusiasm. The word "really" makes the speaker's strong emotional reaction to the creation of the AI agent, Amazon Q, even stronger. This statement shows how excited the speaker is about the agent's potential and skills as he talks about how it was first made in that specific occasion. This statement is an explicit expressive speech act since it plainly shows how the speaker feels and doesn't need to be understood in context. It also gets the audience involved by sharing a new and exciting event, which makes the presentation more interesting and easy to follow.

Expressing Concern

The speaker also expresses concern to indicate awareness of the limitations and challenges of AI technology. It can be seen in utterances [11] and [12].

[11]“We are not there yet”(06:34)

[12]“We do things, it isn’t helpful”(17:30)

The speaker talks on the difference between the current state of AI and the future he sees in this sentence, which shows an oblique expression of dread. In spite of his initial positive outlook, the phrase "But we are not there yet" shows that the goal has not yet been entirely reached. The phrase "there are three milestones these AI agents need to achieve" suggests that there are still problems to solve, which makes this anxiety even worse. The speaker displays concern by pointing out current problems and calling for more progress. Data [12] also shows that people are worried. The speaker in this statement criticizes AI for not being able to do anything or respond to real-world situations. The phrase "isn't helpful" shows that someone is worried in a roundabout way. It means that even while current systems are very advanced, they still have problems.

Expressing Humility

The speaker also expresses humility, particularly when referring to achievements in AI development. The utterance is:

[13]“This is just a small start”(12:56).

By saying, "This is just a small start," the speaker shows humility by downplaying the importance of the achievement. The phrase "small start" and the word "just" downplay the progress made, which shows that the person is modest and humble. To keep the audience's trust and avoid bragging, the speaker talks about the growth in a way that downplays success.

Expressing Amusement, Reflection, and Pride

Other expressive types found in the data include amusement, reflection, and pride. Humorous anecdotes are used to convey amusement, as in data [14].

[14] "I still remember my mom's reaction when I told her." (02:17).

The phrase "I still remember how my mom reacted" starts a hilarious and ironic personal story that could be viewed as a sign of enjoyment. The fact that the mother thinks of Amazon as merely a bookstore, yet it will be far more important in the future, is what makes it humorous.

Reflection can be seen in the speaker's memories of earlier events, as in data [15].

[15] "I distinctly remember calling my mom." (02:08)

The term "distinctly remember" in the sentence "I distinctly remember calling my mum" suggests that the person is thinking about something, since it means they have a clear and significant memory of a past event. The speaker tells a story about an important event by using personal experiences. This keeps the listener interested while also giving them emotional meaning without outright saying it.

Pride is shown when the speaker mentions his achievement of being the first in his family to go to college, as in data [16].

[16] "I was the first generation in my family to go to college." (01:17)

The speaker is proud of a big personal achievement when he say, "I was the first generation in my family to go to college." Even though there isn't a direct proclamation of pride, the achievement itself makes people feel proud when they think about it.

Conclusion

In the TED Talk "Everything You Need to Know About AI Agents," the researcher makes a lot of guesses about how expressive speech acts are used. This study found 33 expressive speech acts, which can be grouped into the following groups: admiration, encouragement, optimism, appreciation, enthusiasm, concern, humility, amusement, reflection, and pride. Among them, the most common are showing admiration, giving encouragement, and being optimism. Both explicit and implicit manifestations of these categories exist. Evaluative comments, analogies, rhetorical questions, and personal reflection are all examples of implicit expressions. Direct emotive language is what makes explicit expressions different from implicit ones. Some direct emotive words are "love," "precious," "excited," "amazing," "incredible," "great," and "optimistic." On the other hand, implicit expressions are shown through metaphors like "It opened up worlds to me," evaluative statements like "I got to make every second count," rhetorical questions like "How much easier would it be with these powerful AI agents?" and introspective statements like "I got to make every second count." These implicit statements make the talk more effective at communicating, but they need a more

in depth interpretation. The speaker's skill in conveying emotions effectively and persuasively is demonstrated through the utilization of both explicit and implicit expression. Because of this, expressive speech act are very important for making the presentation more convincing and motivating.

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