

RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES: A STUDY OF TAYLOR SWIFT (NYU 2022) AND MARIA RESSA (HARVARD 2024)

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Abstract: This study looks at how Taylor Swift and Maria Ressa use different types of speech acts in their commencement speeches at NYU (2022) and Harvard (2024). It focuses on five types: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Using a qualitative approach, the study explores how these speech acts are used directly or indirectly and how they shape the message and impact the audience. The results show that both speakers use different strategies to connect with their listeners, inspire them, and express personal or social values. This study also highlights how understanding speech acts can improve communication skills in English language learning, helping learners use language more effectively in real-life situations.

Keywords: illocutionary acts, pragmatics, speech analysis, communicative competence.

ANALISIS PERBANDINGAN TINDAK ILOKUSI LANGSUNG DAN TIDAK LANGSUNG DALAM PIDATO WISUDA: STUDI PADA TAYLOR SWIFT (NYU 2022) DAN MARIA RESSA (HARVARD 2024)

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis tindak ilokusi dalam pidato wisuda Taylor Swift (NYU 2022) dan Maria Ressa (Harvard 2024), dengan fokus pada lima jenis: representatif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa keduanya menggunakan berbagai strategi untuk berkomunikasi, memotivasi, dan menyampaikan nilai-nilai. Studi ini juga menyoroti peran tindak ilokusi dalam meningkatkan keterampilan komunikasi dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: tindak ilokusi, pragmatik, analisis pidato, kompetensi komunikatif.

INTRODUCTION

Language is more than just words; it is a powerful tool that allows people to express ideas, share emotions, and influence others. Communication is not only about exchanging information but also about performing actions through language. This is the essence of speech acts, where words are used to achieve specific purposes. According to Searle (1979), speech acts are categorized into five types: representative (stating facts or beliefs), directive (giving commands or requests), commissive (making promises or commitments), expressive (conveying emotions or feelings), and declarative (making official or institutional statements that bring about change). These categories help us understand how language functions in real-life interactions, shaping the way people communicate in different contexts (Bachman, L. F., 1990).

One interesting setting to analyze speech acts is in commencement speeches. These speeches are not just formalities; they are carefully crafted messages meant to inspire, motivate, and connect with the audience. Unlike casual conversations, commencement speeches involve a blend of storytelling, advice, and personal experiences, making them rich sources of different types of speech acts. While speech acts in political or business speeches have been widely studied, there is limited research on commencement speeches, particularly in terms of direct and indirect speech acts. Many studies focus on rhetoric, persuasion, or leadership discourse, but few have examined how public figures use speech acts in academic ceremonies. This leaves a gap in understanding how speakers deliver messages effectively in an educational setting. To address this gap, this study analyzes the commencement speeches of Taylor Swift (NYU 2022) and Maria Ressa (Harvard 2024). These two speakers come from different professional backgrounds, Taylor Swift as a songwriter and performer, and Maria Ressa as a journalist and activist, which influences their speech styles. This research focuses on how they use direct and indirect illocutionary acts to shape their messages and engage their audience. By examining their speech act patterns, this study provides insights into how different speakers adjust their language to create meaningful connections with listeners. This study is particularly relevant to English language learning, especially within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). One key aspect of language proficiency is pragmatic competence, which involves understanding how meaning is constructed in different contexts (Nggawu, L. O., & Thao, N. T. P., 2023). By analyzing real-life speech acts in commencement speeches, this study offers valuable examples for language learners. Students can gain a deeper understanding of how language functions beyond grammar and vocabulary, helping them improve their speaking skills, discourse strategies, and overall communication effectiveness.

However, like any research, this study has its limitations. First, it only focuses on two speeches, which means the findings may not be generalizable to all commencement speeches (De La Rosa, V. M., & Lázaro, L. M., 2022). Additionally, the analysis is limited to illocutionary acts, without examining other elements such as persuasion techniques, rhetorical devices, or nonverbal communicationlike tone and gestures. Future research could explore a broader range of speeches from different cultural backgrounds, or compare speeches by speakers from various fields, such as politicians, educators, or business leaders, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how speech acts function in public discourse. By examining how Taylor Swift and Maria Ressa use speech acts in their commencement speeches, this study contributes to the understanding of pragmatic competence in public speaking and its applications in language education (Yule, G. (1996; Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R., 2002). It highlights how language is not just about words, but about how speakers deliver meaning, connect with their audience, and achieve communication goals effectively.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the use of illocutionary acts in the commencement speeches of Taylor Swift (NYU 2022) and Maria Ressa (Harvard 2024). A

descriptive qualitative method is used to examine how these speakers deliver their messages through direct and indirect illocutionary acts, based on Searle's (1979) classification: representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. This study aims to identify the dominant speech acts used by each speaker and analyze how their choices contribute to their communication style and engagement with the audience (Creswell, J. W., 2014). The data in this study consists of the official transcripts of both speeches, obtained from reliable sources and cross-checked with the original speech videos to ensure accuracy. Each utterance in the transcripts was carefully analyzed to determine the type of illocutionary act performed. The categorization process followed Searle's (1979) classification and involved identifying whether each speech act was expressed directly or indirectly. To maintain data reliability, the coding process was conducted systematically and verified multiple times.

The data analysis process involved several steps. First, the speeches were broken down into individual utterances. Each utterance was then classified based on its illocutionary force, identifying whether it functioned as a representative, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative act. Next, the study examined whether these acts were delivered directly or indirectly, considering how the speakers framed their messages. The frequency and patterns of these speech acts were recorded to determine the dominant types used by each speaker. Finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to their implications for language learning, particularly within the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework (Savignon, S. J., 2002). Since this research is based on publicly available speeches, ethical considerations primarily focus on proper citation and acknowledgment of sources (Jasim, M. T., 2023). However, to ensure academic integrity, all data sources were clearly documented, and the analysis was conducted objectively, avoiding personal bias.

By analyzing these speeches, this study provides insights into how different public figures use speech acts to connect with their audience. The findings can contribute to language education, helping learners understand the pragmatic aspects of communication and apply them effectively in real-life conversations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the use of illocutionary acts in the commencement speeches of Taylor Swift (NYU 2022) and Maria Ressa (Harvard 2024). The findings reveal distinct patterns in how these speakers utilize direct and indirect speech acts, shedding light on their unique communication styles. By examining these speeches, we gain insight into how influential figures employ language to inspire, persuade, and engage their audiences. The analysis also highlights the implications of these findings for English language learning, particularly in fostering pragmatic competence among learners. The data analysis identified variations in the use of speech acts across the two speeches. The table below presents the frequency of each illocutionary act found in Taylor Swift's and Maria Ressa's speeches, highlighting their preferred communication strategies.

Table 1
Direct Illocutionary Acts in Taylor Swift's and Maria Ressa's Speeches

No	Type of Direct Illocutionary Acts	Taylor Swift	Maria Ressa
1	Representative	31	26
2	Directive	7	6
3	Expressive	22	7
4	Commissive	2	2
5	Declarative	1	1
	TOTAL	63	42

The analysis of direct illocutionary acts in Taylor Swift's speech shows that representative acts are the most frequent (31 instances), where she shares facts, insights, and personal experiences. Expressive acts (22 instances) also appear frequently, as she conveys emotions such as gratitude and pride. Directive acts (7 instances) are used when she invites or encourages the audience, while commissive (2 instances) and declarative (1 instance) acts are the least common, mainly involving promises or formal statements. These findings indicate that Swift's speech focuses more on sharing thoughts and emotions rather than making commitments or official declarations. In Maria Ressa's speech, representative acts are also the most dominant (26 instances), as she presents facts and arguments based on her experiences in journalism. However, unlike Swift, Ressa uses fewer expressive acts (7 instances), focusing more on conveying information rather than personal emotions. Directive acts (6 instances) appear when she advises or encourages the audience, while commissive (2 instances) and declarative (1 instance) acts remain minimal. These findings indicate that while both speeches emphasize representative acts, Swift's speech is more emotionally expressive, whereas Ressa's speech is more focused on information and persuasion.

Table 2

Indirect Illocutionary Acts in Taylor Swift's and Maria Ressa's Speeches

No	Type of Direct Illocutionary Acts	Taylor Swift	Maria Ressa
1	Representative	3	8
2	Directive	4	10
3	Expressive	2	3
4	Commissive	2	2
5	Declarative	0	0
	TOTAL	11	23

Based on the data, Taylor Swift's speech mostly uses directive acts (4 times), where she gives advice or encourages the audience to take action. This is followed by representative acts (3 times), where she shares ideas or facts, making her speech both informative and motivational. She also uses expressive acts (2 times) to show her feelings and commissive acts (2 times) to make promises or commitments. No declarative acts are found in her speech. This suggests that Swift's communication style focuses on motivating and connecting with her audience through encouragement, storytelling, and personal reflection. On the other hand, Maria Ressa's speech relies more on directive acts (10 times), showing her strong focus on urging the audience to take action. Representative acts follow (8 times), indicating that she also emphasizes sharing knowledge and facts to support her arguments. Expressive acts (3 times) allow her to reveal personal emotions, while commissive acts (2 times) show commitment to her message. Like Swift, she does not use declarative acts. The higher number of directive and representative acts in Ressa's speech suggests that she aims to inform, persuade, and push her audience to think critically and act. Overall, both speeches use directive and representative acts the most, showing that both speakers engage their audiences by offering guidance and sharing insights. However, Ressa's speech is more direct and action-driven, while Swift's speech is more balanced between encouraging, sharing, and expressing emotions, making it feel more personal and relatable.

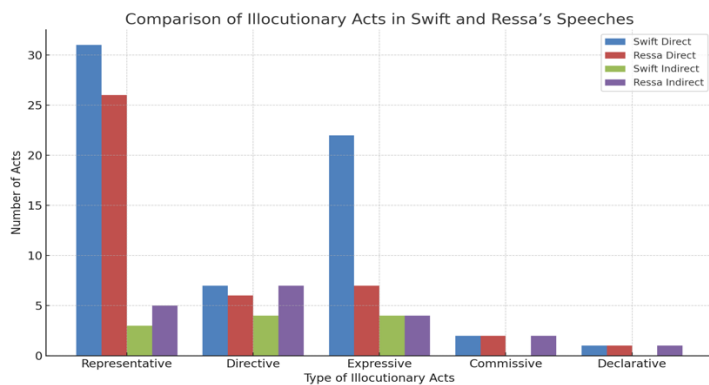


Figure 1
Comparison of Illocutionary Acts in Swift and Ressa's Speeches

The graph shows that Taylor Swift mostly uses representative and directive speech acts, meaning she tells stories and gives advice. Maria Ressa, on the other hand, uses representative and expressive acts more, which means she focuses on facts and emotions to make an impact. Both speakers also use indirect speech, but Swift's way of giving advice and Ressa's way of expressing emotions stand out. This difference shows how their speaking styles match their backgrounds, Swift as an artist and performer, and Ressa as a journalist fighting for truth.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the use of illocutionary acts in the commencement speeches of Taylor Swift (NYU 2022) and Maria Ressa (Harvard 2024), highlighting the differences in their communicative strategies. The findings indicate that Swift predominantly employed representative and directive speech acts, using personal storytelling and direct advice to engage her audience. In contrast, Ressa relied more on representative and expressive acts, emphasizing truth, responsibility, and emotional appeals to reinforce her messages. These variations reflect the speakers' distinct backgrounds, Swift as an artist and performer and Ressa as a journalist and activist, shaping how they structure their speeches and interact with their audiences. These results have important implications for English language learning, especially in improving pragmatic competence, the ability to use language effectively in different situations. By studying real speeches from well-known public figures, language learners can better understand how different speech acts work in real-life communication. This study supports the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which encourages learning through real-world examples. Understanding speech acts can help students improve their communication skills, express ideas clearly, and use language appropriately in different contexts. However, this study has some limitations. It only analyzed two speeches, so the results may not represent how all public speakers use speech acts. Future research could include speeches from different people, cultures, and professions to get a broader perspective. Studying how gestures, tone of voice, and audience reactions contribute to meaning could also provide deeper insights. Additionally, looking at how audiences interpret and respond to different speech acts could help connect linguistic analysis with real-life communication. Overall, this study highlights the importance of speech acts in public speaking and their role in shaping messages, persuading audiences, and creating engagement. It also shows that learning about speech acts can help English learners communicate more effectively in various settings. By studying real-life examples, students can develop better speaking skills, understand language in context, and become more confident communicators.

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