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# An Analysis of Speech Acts in STEAM Students' Video Blogs

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The popularity of video blogs as a medium of mass communication nowadays has reached the educational landscape, and these are now being adapted as instructional materials and assessment tools. Video blogs, more commonly known as vlogs, have given students more opportunities to communicate and can therefore be a viable source of data on students' communication skills in the second language. Using Searle's categories and taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts, this study aimed to determine the types of illocutionary speech acts derived from Oral Communication video blogs created by grade 11 STEAM students of Silliman University Senior High School. The study involved 40 students from Grade 11 STEAM strand. This study employed an observational descriptive research design using the students' video blogs about the invention they made in their Earth Science class. A total of 193 utterances were derived from the video blogs and were classified according to Searle's Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts. The students' use of speech acts as gleaned from their utterances was generally appropriate to the context of the video blogs. Although there were some illocutions that were predominant in the scripts, the students, nonetheless, used a variety of speech acts in their utterances. Furthermore, an in-depth inquiry into this present topic may be pursued to generate ideas for the teaching of speech acts and of communication in general, as well as for the preparation of appropriate instructional materials. The end goal is to provide the kind of STEAM education that enhances effective communication not just in the classroom but in society.

**Keywords:** speech acts, illocutionary speech acts, utterances, video blogs

## INTRODUCTION

“Language is ambiguous,” linguist Rodney Jones (2012) stated in introducing discourse analysis as texts. Texts are the main items that are used in analyzing discourse. The ambiguity of language does not only stem from cultural differences or from the lexicon of a language but from how that particular language is used in the “world” where it is used. This means that language is social, and it is never detached from the identity of the people speaking it. Hence, even if people who belong to the same ethnic group use the same words and expressions from their language, it is undeniable that meanings may still be taken differently. Moreover, the effects of words may vary depending on how speakers say them and how receivers perceive them.

The ambiguity of language is manifested mostly in spoken form. The interaction between interlocutors in a spoken conversation is carried out effectively if meanings are conveyed and negotiated in a way that both parties agree with each other. Otherwise, breakdown in communication occurs. These breakdowns usually come from the inappropriate choice of words, the erratic structure of phrases and sentences, vagueness of meanings, and even the directness (or lack of it) of utterances (Kaur, 2017).

Furthermore, utterances produced by speakers are not just merely spoken words, for utterances actually constitute specific actions in the real world (Parker, 1986). Such specific actions committed through speech can be understood through the study of speech acts. Speech acts are utterances that perform actions.

The concept of speech acts therefore suggests utterances are not solely and heavily based on their meaning but also on their force. This force is the “ability of the utterance to perform actions” (Jones, 2012). John L. Austin who first came up with the idea of the actions performed through utterances categorized these forces into three: (a) *locutionary* or the literal meaning of the utterance; (b) *illocutionary* or the actual purpose of saying the utterance; and (c) *perlocutionary* or the effect of the utterance to the hearer. In particular, the illocutionary force requires attention since it tends to perform something different from what has been said. Originally, five categories of illocutionary force were formulated by Austin, namely verdictives, exercitives, commissives, expositives, and behavatives. However, this categorization was deemed problematic by one of his students, John

Searle, mainly because Austin's classifications did not necessarily comprise different illocutionary acts. Instead, the classifications consisted of illocutionary verbs that suggested similar actions. Hence, Searle published a modification of Austin's categorization of illocutionary acts.

In his publication called *A Classification of Illocutionary Acts*, John Searle (1976) presented an alternative taxonomy that categorized illocutionary acts into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Telling about the truthfulness or falsehood of an utterance, the representative category of speech acts include concluding, deducing, or boasting. Meanwhile, in using directives, the speaker attempts to make the listener do something as in requesting, and giving orders or commands. Moreover, commissives are speech acts that assert the speaker's intention to perform some action in the future like promising or refusing. Meanwhile, expressives show psychological or emotional states that are assessed through the sincerity of the intention of an expression such as apologizing and thanking. Lastly, declarations are utterances that alter the status or condition of the object or person referred to in the real world. The success of this alteration depends on the degree of authority or power of the speaker performing the speech act. For example, by virtue of his/her position, an employer has the authority to nominate an employee for a position in a company. Moreover, changing someone's status from being unemployed to being employed is possible for a person who has the power or authority to hire (Searle, 1976). These categories of speech acts also suggest that utterances can perform actions that are not indicated in the syntactic form. This idea brings about the notion of directness in the enactment of speech acts. Specifically, it is important to note that speech acts can either be direct or indirect. While the intended meaning of direct speech acts is readily discernible through the syntactic structure of the utterance, the meaning of indirect speech acts have to be derived from the intention of the speaker and the situational context. Thus, the notion of indirect speech acts can be captured in the adage, "People do not always say what they mean, and people do not always mean what they say."

Communication is dynamic, and the ways of meaning making are evolving. Aside from face-to-face, real time communication, modern modes of communicating are being used. One of these modes is video blogging. In this generation, video blogging has become so popular and powerful that many people use it to communicate their intentions and achieve their

purposes. Nowadays, even in the field of education, video blogging is utilized as a way of promoting communicative approaches and innovative ways of teaching skills in different subject areas such as language communication arts. For instance, Pascual (2019) conducted a study on the effectiveness of travel blogs in teaching English as a foreign language. In his discussion, he asserted that travel blogs were sources of authentic texts and contexts where natural language and values could be observed. In addition, using travel blogs enhanced students' digital competence which is essential to successful communication in the 21st Century communication. Likewise, Watkins (2012) has posited that video blogs, commonly known as vlogs, provide avenues for increasing students' off-classroom communication, self-monitoring of speech, and practice of listening skills. Vlogs can also improve students' digital literacy and provide an excellent space for collaboration and exchange of ideas.

Since video blogging is a relatively new material used in classrooms, a limited number of studies can be found about it, especially those that deal with speech acts. Nevertheless, a number of published researches show an examination and analysis of speech acts in various texts and students' spoken discourse records. For example, Matenab-Temporal (2018) performed a conversation analysis on the speech acts of ESL students' classroom discourse. In this study, the teacher-student and student-student interactions were documented to analyze how they negotiated meaning and gave appropriate responses. Each category of illocutionary speech act was analyzed using excerpts from classroom documentations. It was found out that the most recurrent speech acts performed were apologizing, explaining, asking questions, confirming, giving emphasis, citing examples, giving suggestions, scolding, giving advice, requesting, and giving commands. It was further explained that most conversations were teacher-led, so learners were the receivers of the speech acts most of the time. It was recommended that learners be given more opportunities for communicative practice inside and outside of the classroom.

Another study by Fikaningsih in 2017 on speech acts dealt with the analysis of directive illocutionary act in the video blogs of an Indonesian vlogger. The researcher categorized the directive speech acts in the utterances of the vlogger and determined the preferred directive speech acts of the viewers. The directive illocutionary act of suggesting turned out

to be the most preferred speech act of the vlogger and the viewers. This finding suggests how vloggers and viewers would choose to be more subtle in asking people to do something for them than be blunt and imposing as in the speech act of advising or ordering.

Several related studies have focused on speech acts in different types of discourse. One of these studies, which was conducted by Surahman (2015), examined the directness and literalness of speech acts in the film, "Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides." Through documentation, the researcher sorted, organized, and analyzed the speech acts found in the script of the film and categorized them based on the taxonomy of Searle. The findings revealed that representatives were the most common speech acts in the film. This was followed in rank by directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, respectively.

Another study aimed to identify and analyze the functions of the indirect speech acts found in the film "Imitation Game." Through documentation, Dewi, Sudipa, and Savitri (2016) employed note-taking techniques and captured the scenes of the film. The researchers came up with nine indirect types of speech acts, the most common of which were declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives. Assertive (representatives) and directive speech acts were the most prominent since, as the author explained, these speech acts sounded more polite given the context of communication.

In the field of STEAM, communication is a soft skill that is given a high regard (Burowczak, 2015). Aside from mastering the sciences, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics, it is crucial for students to develop practical communication skills, especially in conducting activities that entail the need to convey messages to other people. Furthermore, the development and improvement of STEAM students' communication skills and their performance of speech acts can be helpful when they work in groups and present in front of an audience. Since the social aspect of language can either facilitate or hinder effective communication, it is necessary for students to develop their language skills in order to understand and appreciate the indirectness and meaning of speech acts. This knowledge of speech acts can be applied in the field of STEAM.

Since students nowadays are viewers and, in most cases, creators of video blogs, these media can be an effective tool for enhancing students' sociocultural, discourse, or pragmatic competence and developing their

total communicative competence. Moreover, there are still language and communication classes that employ the linguistic or structural approach which undermines the role of language functions and meaning in teaching communication. Hence, requiring students to create video blogs for classroom use can help them practice the performance of direct and indirect speech acts in a meaningful context. Moreover, the video blogs created by the students can be used as springboard to teaching speech acts and providing feedback to students regarding the direct and indirect meanings of utterances. Thus, students can learn that failure to understand the source of misinterpretation and ambiguity of meaning can lead to communication breakdown.

Thus, based on the foregoing, the study aimed to accomplish the following objectives:

- (a) to determine the most common illocutionary speech acts used by STEAM students in Oral Communication video blogs based on Searle's categories; and
- (b) to typify illocutionary speech acts of STEAM students in their Oral Communication video blogs.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed an observational descriptive research design. According to Koh and Owen (2000), an observational descriptive research approach emphasizes inductive reasoning, whereby the researcher seeks to generate hypotheses from observations. The researcher is the primary research instrument, and the researcher's insight is the key instrument for analysis. According to Williams (2007), the descriptive research approach is a basic research method that examines a situation as it exists in its current state. Descriptive research involves the identification of attributes of a particular phenomenon based on observation or on the exploration of correlation between two or more phenomena.

In this study, students' utterances recorded through video blogging were observed and explored. However, in the interest of time, the correlation between and among students' utterances and other variables will be done for future purposes. For the time being, presented in this paper are the speech acts from the video blogs and their respective illocutionary typologies.

## RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

The study was conducted in Silliman University located in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. The university is a non-profit and private Christian educational institution. The study focused on the basic education unit of the university particularly the Senior High School. The Senior High School department offers four tracks: academic, technical-vocational-livelihood, sports, and arts and design. The Academic track includes three strands: Accountancy, Business and Management (ABM); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); and Science, Technology, Engineering, Agriculture, and Mathematics (STEAM). In this study, STEAM students were involved. The Senior High School is directly under the supervision of the College of Education.

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT AND SOURCES OF DATA

The study analyzed four video blogs created and produced by students from grade 11 STEAM-A which was a section handled by the researcher. The creation of the video blogs was an integrative performance task that enabled the students to demonstrate learning competencies across subject areas including Oral Communication, which the researcher taught on the first semester of SY 2019-2020. Created as a requirement for Oral Communication class, using topics and themes from the students' Earth Science class, the video blogs contained ten-minute skit presentations of the students' inventions or products that offered mitigating or adaptive solutions to climate change. Other than the creation of the video blogs, the students were also required to submit the scripts of their skits. The scripts were used by the researcher as the main source of utterances produced by the students in the video blogs. The utterances extracted from the scripts were subjected to frequency counts and categorization based on Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts. The actual video was used as reference on the context of the utterances.

A total of 193 utterances were derived from the scripts. These utterances were then classified according to Searle's categories of illocutionary acts. Searle (1977) categorized illocutionary speech acts into five macroclasses, namely, representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The macroclasses of students' utterances were also determined.

## **DATA GATHERING PROCEDURE**

Prior to the gathering of data, the researcher sought the approval of the Senior High School principal regarding the conduct of the study. In addition, an electronic version of informed consent forms were sent to grade 11 STEAM-A students and their parents to secure their permission on the access and use the video blogs as a source of data for this study. Moreover, the students were informed of the purposes of the study and were assured that their identities as well as data derived from the analysis would be treated with utmost confidentiality. Once permissions were obtained, the researcher requested the students to upload and share their video blogs through the researcher's Google Drive folder.

The scripts of the video blogs were then subjected to a detailed observation and digital text analysis which involved a few steps. First, the illocutionary speech act utterances were identified and extracted from the video blog scripts. The extracted utterances were then organized in a tabular format and were classified according to Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary speech acts.

## **DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

As mentioned earlier, the utterances lifted from the video blog scripts were tallied and tabulated for digital document analysis. The tabulation of results was divided into four columns with the following headings: the utterance, syntactic form of the utterance, direct meaning, and indirect meaning (i.e., illocutionary force). The first column contained all the utterances gathered from the video blogs script. The second column specified the grammatical and syntactic forms of the utterance (i.e., declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory). The third and fourth columns were filled out with the meanings of the utterances (i.e., direct meaning based on the syntactic form of the utterances and indirect or underlying meaning, which carried the illocutionary force). A frequency count was done to determine the most common illocutionary speech acts found in the scripts.

Meanwhile, to typify the indirect meanings based on Searle's categorization of illocutionary speech acts, the researcher used the results

of analysis on the fourth column. An inter-rater analysis was employed to verify the researcher's categorization and establish the reliability of data. The inter-rater was a senior high school English teacher who also handled an Oral Communication class during the semester.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to identify and categorize the illocutionary speech acts in the video vlogs created by grade 11 STEAM-A students for their Oral Communication class. Moreover, the illocutionary speech acts were typified as either direct or indirect, based on a mapping of the relationship between the speech acts and the semantic form of the utterances. As mentioned earlier, a total of 193 utterances were gathered, analyzed, categorized, and typified. The typification focused on the level of directness of the speech acts.

Out of 193 utterances, 76 were considered as direct illocutionary speech acts. The considerable number of direct speech acts in the data implies that the meanings of the utterances were reflected in their syntactic form. Most of the direct speech acts belonged to the representatives which are speech acts that commit the speaker to the truthfulness of a statement. Since most direct illocutions speech acts, all their meanings are reflected in their syntactic form.

Meanwhile, there were 117 indirect illocutionary speech acts. This preponderance of indirect illocutions signifies that students may consciously or unconsciously say something and mean it while, at the same time, also trying to mean something else. According to Searle's theory, the underlying meaning of an indirect speech act can only be decoded when the interlocutors share common prior knowledge about each other's linguistic and nonlinguistic information. Hence, it can be inferred that the use of indirect speech acts was prominent in the scripts created by the students because they shared similar sets of prior knowledge and linguistic background. This can explain why the frequency of utterances containing indirect speech acts exceeded that of the direct speech acts.

Table 1 shows that the most common category of illocutionary speech acts used in the Oral Communication video blogs were expressives, which were used 59 times to be exact. This was followed in rank by 40 directives, 10 commissives, seven representatives, and one declaration.

**Table 1**  
*Frequency of Occurrence of Indirect Illocutionary Acts in Utterances*

	Frequency of indirect illocutionary act in utterances	Percentage
Representatives	7	5.98%
Directives	40	34.19%
Commissives	10	8.55%
Expressives	59	50.43
Declarations	1	0.85%

The analysis and frequency count done by one Oral Communication teacher, who served as the inter-rater, corroborated the data presented above. The inter-rater analyzed 62% of a total of 117 indirect speech acts in the students' video blog scripts. Similar to the researcher's analysis, the most common illocutionary speech acts identified by the inter-rater were expressives (34.25%), followed by directives (28.77%), representatives (24.66%), commissives (9.59%), and declarations (2.74%).

Based on the data above, the most common illocutionary speech acts that carried the underlying meanings of the utterances were expressives and directives. These were followed by commissives and representatives. Last in rank were declarations.

On the other hand, the speech acts were typified based on the items found in column four of the data analysis table. Out of the 117 speech acts typified as indirect, the majority were expressives. In particular, the most common indirect illocutionary speech act used by the students in their video blogs was complaining which is under the category of expressives. This was followed by the directives (i.e., suggesting and requesting) and commissives (i.e., promising).

The main objective of the students for creating the video blogs was to present their Earth Science inventions on climate change mitigation and adaptation; hence, their videos blogs followed a problem-solution pattern. In other words, the video blog characters (i.e., the students themselves) presented a problem related to climate change for which they invented products and mechanisms that offered probable solutions to this issue at hand.

Table 2 provides some examples of the most common indirect illocutionary acts gleaned from the utterances.

**Table 2***Common Indirect Speech Acts in Utterances*

Sample utterance	Syntactic form	Direct speech act	Indirect speech act
a. <i>The power isn't back yet Mom, and our phones are starting to run out of power.</i>	Declarative	Stating	Complaining (expressive)
b. <i>Yeah and of all times, the generator had to run out of fuel. My phone is dying. I hate this!</i>	Declarative	Stating	Complaining (expressive)
c. <i>I wonder if we could replicate the device on the commercial. We can use materials that we have here at home.</i>	Declarative	Stating	Suggesting (directive)
d. <i>Can you get wood first thing in the morning [?] and then I'll go to the market to buy more food and some coal.</i>	Interrogative	Asking	Requesting (directive)
e. <i>I know right, anyways I'll try to make use of what we have and make some food.</i>	Declarative	Stating	Promising (commissive)

The usual syntactic form of the utterances was declarative; that is, the acts were not merely stated but were used to convey other actions. According to Trosborg (1995) as cited in Ghaznavi (2017), a complaint is an expression of disapproval and negative feelings towards someone or something. Searle added that the issuance of a complaint calls for a direct response to solve the cause of the complaint and save the “face” of the complaining party. Furthermore, in Andrew Cohen’s discussion of related studies on speech acts, complaints normally start with a statement of the problem, followed by a “request or demand for repair.” This formula comprises a speech act set consists of an expressive (i.e., complaining) and a directive (i.e., making the complaine fix the cause of the complaint) (McKay & Hornberger, 1996). The dominance of expressive and directive speech acts in the students’ video blogs must have been influenced by the theme of the activity, which is about providing solutions to environmental problems through innovative and sustainable ideas. This result provides implications on the function of complaints and requests in the context of a problem-solution speech event. It can be inferred that expressing complaints was the students’ way of articulating the problem while directives were used in providing or

suggesting probable solutions. In addition, commissives, representatives, and declarations were used by the students (i.e., complainers) to provide the assurance that the problem could be solved, and to assert that the ideas they presented were plausible and could actually enact change in their specified context.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the most common illocutionary speech acts found in the video blogs of Oral Communication students were expressives. The purpose of the video blogs was to present a problem on climate change, hence the predominant use of complaints that were indirectly stated as declarative sentences. In other words, when using declarations, the students were not simply stating the issues or the problems on climate change but were actually complaining about them. Moreover, directives were followed by complaint acts (i.e., the actual complaint) to indicate that a course of action must be carried out to address the complaints. Interestingly, the complaint acts were followed by commissives and representatives. This means that the illocutions behind some utterances in the scripts intended to provide solutions to the given complaints or problems by suggesting, requesting, and promising products and mechanisms that can help society mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. Moreover, the students used assertives to argue that their ideas were valid and could be effective if properly executed. Furthermore, it was observed by the researcher that declarations provided some form of resolution that concluded the storyline of the video blogs.

In conclusion, the students' use of speech acts was generally appropriate to the context of the video blogs that they created. Although some illocutions were more predominantly occurring in the scripts, the students were still able to use a variety of speech acts in their video blogs.

It is, therefore, recommended for future studies to focus on gaining a deeper understanding of the reasons for the predominant use of certain categories of illocutionary speech acts in given communicative contexts. Moreover, other studies may focus on explaining the prominence as well as the functions of representatives and declarations in some speech events. Furthermore, an in-depth inquiry into this current topic may be pursued to generate ideas for materials preparation and the teaching of speech acts

in Oral Communication as well as for the teaching of communication in general. The ultimate goal is to provide the kind of steam education that enhances effective communication not just in the classroom but in society.

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