

Expressive Speech Acts in the BBC World Service Video Entitled “Could AI Chatbots Replace Human Therapists?”

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ABSTRACT

As a huge media entertainment, youtube serves not only as an entertainment site but also as a powerful medium for education, information sharing, and social awareness. This research investigates the use Expressive speech acts in the BBC World Service video entitled “Could AI chatbots replace human therapists”. The research focuses on the comments on BBC Youtube content entitled “Could AI chatbots replace human therapists?”. This research examines expressive speech acts in the comment section of that video. It aims to identify the types of expressive acts used, and determine each of type is most employed by the commenter. The study applies Searle and Vanderveken’s (1985) classification, which encompasses acts like expressing gratitude, offering apologies, giving congratulations, showing praise, expressing sorrow, boasting, assigning blame, and greeting. It is along with Leech’s (2014) framework of speech act functions, namely competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. Descriptive qualitative method is employed by the researcher for this research. The data were collected using a note-taking technique, focusing on 20 comments which found on the that video. The finding reveals that there are expressive act found in these data. These act mostly collaborative, convivial and conflictive functions. Furthermore, there are five types of expressive speech act found such as, thanking, praising, sorrowing, blaming, and boasting.

Keywords: *ExpressiveAct, CommentSection, BBC News*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a fundamental role in human’s life especially in reaching the communication goals. Human communication encompasses a range of linguistic actions, including making requests, promises, and statements (Safitri et al., 2021). In linguistics study, pragmatics take an important role which concern on exploring meaning that influenced by context (Mey, 1993; Yule, 1996). A central element of pragmatics is the concept of speech acts, referring to utterances that accomplish actions such as requesting, apologizing, or promising (Leech, 2014). Based on Austin (1962), there are three categories of speech act, *locutionary acts* the act of (producing an utterance), *illocutionary acts*(the speaker’s intended meaning or function), and *perlocutionary acts*(the resulting effect on the listener). Within these, illocutionary acts, particularly expressive acts, are vital for revealing a speaker’s emotions and psychological states (Searle, 1976; Vanderveken, 1990). Expressive speech acts encompass utterances such as thanking, congratulating, apologizing, or expressing feelings of happiness or regret (Cutting, 2020).

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), communication is no longer limited to human interactions but has expanded to human machine exchanges. Recent advancements in natural language processing and machine learning have enabled AI systems to engage in increasingly human-like conversations and emotional simulations (Russell & Norvig, 2021). The BBC World Service video entitled “Could AI Chatbots Replace Human Therapists?” explores this evolving dynamic by questioning whether AI-driven chatbots could replicate or replace the empathetic and expressive functions of human therapists. The discussion features

real-life demonstrations of AI therapy tools, expert commentary, and reflections on the emotional authenticity of AI responses (BBC World Service, 2023).

An analysis of the YouTube comments section reveals a diversity of expressive acts from viewers, such as skepticism “AI can’t feel empathy like humans do”, curiosity “I wonder how close AI is to real emotional understanding”, and concern “This could make therapy less personal”. These reactions highlight how audiences use expressive language to convey personal emotions, beliefs, and attitudes toward the role of AI in mental health contexts (Herring, 2013; Dynel, 2020). Among these expressive speech acts are particularly significant, as they reveal the speaker’s psychological or emotional state through utterances such as thanking, apologizing, or congratulating (Searle, 1979; Cutting, 2020). This study aims to examine expressive speech acts from a linguistic and pragmatic perspective, exploring how expressive speech acts linguistically realized in the BBC World Service video “Could AI Chatbots Replace Human Therapists?” in its comment section.

2. RESEARCH METODOLOGY

This research focuses on analyzing the type of expressive speech acts and their implied meaning as expressed on the comment box on *BBC World Service video entitled “Could AI chatbots replace human therapists”*. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. The qualitative descriptive method is grounded in postpositivist philosophy and is utilized to explore natural phenomena rather than experimental conditions (Sugiyono, 2016:9). The data were collected using a note-taking technique, focusing on 61 comments which found on the that video. Data are analyzed inductively or qualitatively, with the results focusing on the interpretation of meaning rather than on generalization.

3. RELATED RESEARCH/LITERATUR REVIEW

A. Related Research

This section outlines two previous studies relevant to the current research. First is from Faturrohman (2020) who conducted a qualitative analysis of expressive speech acts in the film *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs and Shaw*, drawing on Searle’s (1976) speech act theory. The study identified various types of expressive acts, including expressions of agreement, gratitude, apology, and attitude, demonstrating how characters convey emotions and interpersonal meanings through dialogue. While Faturrohman’s research shares methodological similarities with the present study in its use of a pragmatic framework, it diverges in its data source, the current research focuses on expressive acts in YouTube comments, whereas Faturrohman examined scripted film interactions within a cinematic context. Next is from Indriyana et al. (2021) who investigated expressive speech acts in Instagram comments posted on Joe Biden’s account during the U.S. presidential campaign. It employed a qualitative approach grounded in Searle’s (1976) speech act theory. Their study revealed that expressions of gratitude were the most frequently occurring form of expressive act, reflecting users’ emotional support and positive engagement. While their research aligns with the present study in its pragmatic focus and analytical framework, it differs primarily in its contextual medium, their data were drawn from Instagram interactions, whereas the current study examines YouTube comments as a site of expressive communication.

B. Literature Review

a. Pragmatics

Pragmatics focuses on the function of language in communication, emphasizing how meaning is interpreted based on the context and situation in which it is used. Leech (1983) stated that pragmatics can be usefully define as the study of how utterances have meaning in situation. Pragmatics goes further than merely examining grammatical structures, as it also takes into account the sociocultural context in which communication occurs (Lestari, 2017). Therefore,

pragmatic competence can be defined as the internalized knowledge of how to use language appropriately within social and cultural norms, considering both the participants and the situational context, as stated by Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000) in Lestari (2017). Pragmatics focuses on how meaning is conveyed through language, involving the interpretation of a speaker's intended meaning by the listener. To achieve this, contextual information must be considered so that the speaker's message can be properly organized and understood. In addition, listeners need to infer implied meanings in order to grasp what the speaker intends to communicate (Yule, 1996).

b. Speech Act

A speech act can be defined as a pragmatic unit of communication in which the speaker's intention interacts dynamically with social norms and contextual inferences to produce a meaningful communicative action (Kecskes, 2017). This view emphasizes that language use is not merely the transmission of information but an intentional act shaped by social and situational factors. Furthermore, speech acts are contextually grounded communicative acts whose meanings are co-constructed and negotiated between the speaker and the hearer, highlighting the interactive and interpretive nature of language in social interaction (Verschueren, 2019). Austin in Hutaļuju & Herman (2019, p.30) classified speech act into three. they are Locutionary, Illocutionary, Perlocutionary.

c. Types of Illocutionary

Searle (1976) classified illocutionary acts into five main categories, they are assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Each serving distinct communicative purposes beyond literal meaning. 1) Assertives commits the speaker to the truth of a proposition, reflecting beliefs or statements about reality, 2) Directives which aim to get the hearer to perform an action, such as requests or commands, 3) Commissives express the speaker's intention to carry out a future act, including promises or offers, 4) Expressives conveys the speaker's psychological state or emotions, such as gratitude, apology, or congratulations, and last Declarations bring about a change in the external world simply through their utterance, such as in pronouncing someone guilty or declaring a meeting open.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here are the data that has collected by the researcher. The data below shown there are 20 data which classified into expressive acts, 2 thanking, 4 praising, 1 boasting, 1 sorrowing, and 11 blaming.

Table 4.1 Types of Expressive Acts

NO	DATA	TYPES OF EXPRESSIVE ACTS
1	This was a really interesting topic that I did not know about until now! Thank you	Thanking
2	Jezz, my chatGPT is my mentor	Praising
3	Talking to AI is a good way to calm or stop the circle for instantly. It's easy to ask, no payment. But we have to care about it's just an application.	Praising
4	CONGRATULATIONS	Praising
5	It'll be funny to see it try to, the things we'll learn from that!	Boasting

6	This seems out of date. The CBT is the most basic kind of bot. Chat gpt and other LLMs are fantastic and there are also internal family systems bots which can really help people.	Blaming
7	its scary that people in comment are actually agreeing to have a therapist that is ai. i mean excuse me? are you really wiling to be vulnerable to something that humans created? hello? this thing doesnt have emotions. it cant really understand us. the closest a is another human not a machine. whats wrong with you?	Blaming
8	what!?! NO OF COURSE NOT!?! What kind of question is this ?!?!?!?!?	Blaming
9	Yes it help my mental state when talking to AI	Thanking
10	Yes, it's what modern society wants. Lord help us.	Sorrowing
11	Like there are are police support officers or nursing assistants , think that is their role at the mo. the ai has no expertise BUT they are good short term.. And cheap And anonymous And no judgement!	Praising
12	May be your guest right but it's really different from someone have mental problem I know ai may be good but it's has no feeling but it's hard to replace humans may be for code okay but ai not humans	Blaming
13	But there is the truth that many, if not most, therapists are less competent than a chatBox in terms of therapy.	Blaming
14	Good	Praising
15	The BBC should be ashamed of itself for even entertaining this. No wonder the UK is gutting healthcare, with such a horrible public broadcaster. Much concern, your friend from the Netherlands.	Blaming
16	The IA is becomig more stupid tho the people, is the true! look for therapy in a IA is actually stupid...	Blaming

17	Please... That is just a robot what the robot knows about the life... I don't remember robots to be hungry or cold or have any emotions to be able to be therapist...	Blaming
18	Women just need conflict and tough love don't they? This is NOT an accusation, I think it is a statistically proven fact at least with the people I have encountered....	Blaming
19	The guy is a real creep	Blaming
20	AI is crap make you become a freak.	Blaming

From the data above, it can be explain as follows:

1) Thanking

This expressive act can be shown from the data 1. which is "This was a really interesting topic that I did not know about until now! Thank you". The speaker acknowledges the informational value of the video, fulfilling the illocutionary goal of positive acknowledgment toward the content creator. Function convivial because it promotes social harmony and positive politeness by maximizing approval toward the hearer.

2) Praising

Utterances like "CONGRATULATIONS", illustrate praising acts. These express emphasizing positive evaluation of either the technology or its perceived benefits. Function Convivial, "Congratulations" expresses pleasure in another's success. The illocutionary force reflects goodwill and solidarity rather than self-interest. This act upholds politeness through the Approbation Maxim (maximizing praise), showing a shared emotional space of happiness and positivity. The speaker's social intention is to affirm and celebrate, not to impose or oppose.

3) Boasting

One comments reflect boasting acts which characterized by self-assured or humorous superiority, such as "*It'll be funny to see it try to; the things we'll learn from that!*" This comment uses humor and confidence to suggest human superiority over AI, which aligns with Searle & Vanderveken's (1985) description of boasting as expressing pride or self-confidence, often contrasting the speaker's human perspective with machine limitations. Function: Collaborative, the speaker does not intend to praise or blame the addressee directly but to participate intellectually in the discussion by using humor to express a shared observation about AI limitations.

4) Sorrowing

Expressions such as "*Yes, it's what modern society wants. Lord help us.*" and "*I don't even bother speaking to people anymore.*" These utterances reveal underlying emotional unease with technological and social changes, aligning with Searle & Vanderveken's (1985) characterization of "sorrowing" as expressing negative affective states such as grief, regret, or worry. Function: Collaborative, It shares an emotional reflection neutrally; no direct politeness or impoliteness intention involved.

5) Blaming

Some comments performed blaming acts, such as, "*This seems out of date.*", "*It's scary that people in comment are actually agreeing to have a therapist that is AI... this thing doesn't have emotions.*", "*What!?! NO OF COURSE NOT!?! What kind of question is this?!?*" These express anger, moral disapproval, or rejection. Its typical of the *blaming* expressive

act, which Searle & Vanderveken (1985) describe as expressing a negative emotional judgment toward an agent or situation. Function: Conflictive, This utterance expresses fear, disapproval, and criticism of people who support AI as a therapist. The speaker directly challenges others' opinions, implying a negative judgment.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of 20 viewer comments on BBC *World Service Video Entitled "Could AI Chatbots Replace Human Therapists?", the following conclusions were reached:*

1. *There are five types of expressive speech acts found in data based on Searle & Vanderveken (1985) theory, such as, Thanking, Praising, Boasting, Sorrowing and Blaming.*
2. *There are three types of functional categorization according to Leech (2014) found in this research such as, Convivial, Collaborative and Conflictive*

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