An Analysis of Speech Acts in Digital Communication: A Study of the Footy Meme posting Facebook Group

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Abstrak

This study explores how language is used in digital communication, particularly in meme-based interactions on social media. In recent years, platforms such as Facebook have become spaces where users express opinions, emotions, and reactions in a fast and informal way. However, the communicative functions behind these comments are not always clearly understood. Based on this issue, the study aims to identify the types of speech acts used in comments within the Footy Memeposting Facebook group and to determine which type appears most frequently. This research applies a quantitative descriptive method. The data were collected from selected posts and the comments were classified based on the speech act theory proposed by John Searle, including assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. The findings reveal that assertive speech acts were the most dominant because users frequently stated opinions, defended arguments, compared players, and provided claims supported by statistics or personal views. Expressive speech acts also appeared frequently through sarcasm, mockery, praise, laughter, and emotional reactions. Directive speech acts were found in the form of questions, challenges, and requests for clarification. Meanwhile, commissive and declarative speech acts appeared less frequently, suggesting that meme-based communication rarely involves commitments or institutional language use. Overall, this study highlights that digital meme interaction is largely opinion-driven and interactional in nature, reflecting authentic language practices in online communities.

Keywords: speech acts, pragmatics, Facebook, memes, digital communication

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role in human communication because it enables individuals to express ideas, emotions, and intentions (Yule, 1996). From a pragmatic perspective, language is not only used to convey information but also to perform actions (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). This idea is explained in speech act theory introduced by J. L. Austin (1962) and further developed by John Searle (1969). According to this theory, every utterance carries a communicative function, such as stating, requesting, or expressing feelings. In the digital era, communication has shifted significantly to online platforms. Social media such as Facebook allows users to interact quickly

and informally (Car et al., 2012). One common form of interaction is meme-based communication, where users respond to content using humor, sarcasm, and emotional expressions (Shifman, 2014).

This study focuses on the Footy Memeposting Facebook group, a community where football fans actively engage through meme comments. The comments in this group reflect spontaneous language use and provide a rich source for analyzing speech acts. Previous studies have shown that expressive and assertive speech acts dominate in social media communication (Carr et al.,2012; Nirmala et al.,2021). However, most studies focus on general platforms and use qualitative approaches. Although numerous studies have investigated speech acts on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube (Vosoughi & Roy, 2016; Nirmala et al., 2021) limited attention has been given to meme-based Facebook communities, particularly using quantitative approaches. Therefore, further investigation is needed to understand how speech acts are distributed within football meme communities. There is still limited research that applies a quantitative method to analyze speech acts in meme-based Facebook communities.

This gap highlights the need for a more systematic analysis of speech act distribution in digital meme communication. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of speech acts used and to determine the most dominant type. This study is important because it contributes to pragmatic studies and helps understand how language is used in real digital interaction.

Classification of Speech Acts

According to Searle (1979), speech acts can be classified into five categories.

Assertive speech acts are utterances used to convey information, opinions, beliefs, claims, or descriptions. Through assertive acts, speakers commit themselves to the truth of a proposition. Statements, arguments, and evaluations are common examples of assertive speech acts (Searle, 1979).

Directive speech acts are intended to make the listener perform an action. These acts include requests, commands, suggestions, questions, and challenges. In online discussions, directives frequently appear when users seek information or challenge the opinions of others (Searle, 1979).

Expressive speech acts reflect the speaker's feelings, emotions, or attitudes toward a situation. These acts may include praise, criticism, gratitude, surprise, disappointment, amusement, or sarcasm. Expressive acts are particularly common in social media interactions because users often respond emotionally to content (Carr et al., 2012; Searle, 1979).

Commissive speech acts indicate a commitment to future actions. Promises, offers, vows, and pledges belong to this category. Through commissive acts, speakers express their intention to carry out specific actions in the future (Searle, 1979).

Declarative speech acts are utterances that bring about a change in social or institutional status through language itself. Examples include declaring a meeting open, pronouncing a couple married, or announcing a formal decision. Such acts usually require institutional authority and specific social contexts (Searle, 1979).

Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. The purpose of this approach was to identify, classify, and quantify the occurrence of speech acts found in comments posted within the Footy Memeposting Facebook group. A quantitative descriptive design was considered appropriate because the study focused on measuring the frequency and distribution of speech act categories rather than exploring participants' personal experiences or perceptions (Creswell, 2014).

The data were obtained from comments posted in the Footy Memeposting Facebook group. This group was selected because it is an active online community where football fans frequently engage in discussions, debates, and meme-based interactions. The comments posted by group members provide authentic examples of spontaneous digital communication and therefore offer valuable data for pragmatic analysis (Carr et al., 2012). Five highly engaged posts were selected from the Footy Memeposting Facebook group. From these posts, fifty comments were purposively chosen because they clearly represented the categories of speech acts proposed by Searle (1979).

The data collection process was conducted through several stages. First, posts with high levels of engagement were selected from the group. Second, comments related to the selected posts were collected through observation and screen capture. Third, the comments were compiled into a data set for analysis. Finally, each comment was carefully reviewed to determine its communicative function based on speech act theory.

The collected data were analyzed using the following procedures. First, each comment was read thoroughly to identify its communicative intention. Second, the comments were classified according to Searle's categories of speech acts: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative. Third, the frequency of each category was calculated. Fourth, the percentage distribution of each speech act type was determined to identify the dominant category. Finally, the results were interpreted to explain patterns of language use within the Facebook group.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Selected Comment Data

No.	Comments Example	Type	Reasoning
1	“Also win the saudi league”	Assertive	Stating facts or opinions
2	“Ronaldo still better than pessi…”	Assertive	Opinion or claim
3	“And what was his contribution?”	Directive	Inquiry (Request for information)
4	“Jese Rodriguez > Ronaldinho”	Assertive	Comparison/opinion
5	“you're doing it brilliantly 😂”	Expressive	Sarcastic praise
6	“You sound just like them 😂”	Expressive	Evaluation+expression
7	“He didn't last at those clubs…”	Assertive	Provide information/facts
8	“which one is he didn't last…”	Directive	Inquiry
9	“you still argue with these mad guys?”	Directive	Criticism in the form of questions
10	“Al hilal as well	Assertive	Give opinion
11	“That’s exactly why ‘proven in different leagues’ sounds stupid with Messi. Now you got it	Assertive	Fact/statement
12	“what are u even talking about…”	Directive	Asking
13	“And he got a double digit of assist in the side, plus he missed a few games as well”	Assertive	Give opinion and statement

14	“It so shameful when someone is saying Messi flop at PSG”	Expressive	Criticism+emotion
15	“what kind of a f*cking logic is this?”	Directive	Rhetorical question
16	**“**Where is Ronaldo’s WC?”	Directive	Rhetorical question
17	“Canavaro is better…”	Assertive	Opinion
18	“he is better than Cristiano”	Assertive	Opinion
19	“Can't even lace Maldini's boots”	Assertive	Assessment or Opinion
20	“David Beckham?”	Directive	Asking for information
21	“There is a reason you are divorced…”	Assertive	Claim+trash talking
22	“lukaku is better than maradona…”	Assertive	Opininion
23	“Thats impressive. And he is a really good plaer too.”	Expressive	Praise
24	“Messi did it first.”	Assertive	Give statement/fact
25	“They just think Messi won they world cup.”	Assertive	Criticism
26	“HAHAHA 😂 😂”	Expressive	Expression
27	“I can show some insane UCL stats.”	Commissive	Offering or expression willingness
28	“Romero is better than Maldini because he won the World Cup.”	Assertive	Stating an opinion

29	“You’re truy deluded dude.”	Expressive	Criticism and Evaluation
30	“Did Romero also win WC golden ball?”	Directive	Asking for information
31	“Wow man. You are a genius.”	Expressive	Sarcastic praise
32	“Messi went outside of Barca and banged 6 goals in league.”	Assertive	Providing informatin
33	“Now show me Romero’s 8 Ballon d’Ors.”	Directive	Requesting evidence
34	“Cancelo proved himself in different places.”	Assertive	Giving an opinion
35	“Nice joke, next one pleae.”	Expressive	Sarcastic reaction
36	“I sense a logic.”	Expressive	Expressing sarcasm
37	“Tell me you’re dumb without telling me you’re dumb.”	Expressive	Criticism
38	“And what was his contribution?”	Directive	Requesting information
39	“He didn’t last at those clubs.”	Assertive	Stating information
40	“So WC’s don’t matter? Playmaking doesn’t matter?”	Directive	Rhetorical question
41	“Sergio Roberto better than Zidane because he won more CL than Zidane.”	Assertive	Comparison
42	“World Cup ain’t an individual trophy.”	Assertive	Claim
43	“Does assist get equal value as goals?”	Directive	Asking for clarification

44	"And you make it sound like Messi has 0 UCL haha, but Ronaldo has 0 WC	Assertive	Comparative argument
45	"He has never been the best player in any international tournament"	Assertive	Claim or evaluation
46	"Did Romero win the MVP?"	Directive	Asking for information
47	"How dumb are you dude?"	Expressive	Negative evaluation
48	"Quick to throw insults, quick to act blind when your logic is used againts you. Totally dumb indeed	Expressive	Strong criticism
49	"Did he won the world cup with 8 Ballon d'Ors?"	Directive	Rhetorical question
50	"If you've gotten an assist, it means your team has scored a goal. It doesn,t matter any way. Trophies are more important than goals and we know who has the most trophies."	Assertive	Give opinion

Table 2. Result Classification

Types of Speech acts.	Quantity
Assertive	23
Directive.	15
Expressive	11
Commissive	1
Declarative	0
Total	50

The analysis of 50 comments revealed that assertive speech acts were the most frequently used category, the dominance of assertive speech acts indicates that users tend to participate in football discussions by presenting opinions, evaluations, and factual claims. This finding suggests that football-related meme interactions are largely argumentative in nature. Users frequently

compare players, defend their preferred teams, and justify their viewpoints through statements rather than commitments or institutional declarations. accounting for 23 occurrences (46%). Directive speech acts appeared 15 times (30%), the high frequency of directive speech acts demonstrates that Facebook users actively engage in debate by asking questions, challenging arguments, and requesting evidence from other users. Such interactions reflect the competitive nature of football fandom within online communities (Ndzi, 2020). While expressive speech acts occurred 11 times (22%), the high frequency of directive speech acts demonstrates that Facebook users actively engage in debate by asking questions, challenging arguments, and requesting evidence from other users. Such interactions reflect the competitive nature of football fandom within online communities. Only one commissive speech act (2%) was identified, and no declarative speech acts were found. These findings indicate that users primarily participate in discussions by expressing opinions, making claims, defending arguments, and evaluating football players or teams. The high frequency of directive speech acts also suggests that interaction within the group is highly debate-oriented, as users frequently challenge one another through questions and requests for clarification. Furthermore, expressive speech acts demonstrate the role of humor, sarcasm, criticism, and emotional reactions in shaping meme-based communication (Carr et al.,2012; Nirmala et al.,2021).

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that assertive speech acts are the most dominant category in the Footy Memeposting Facebook group, representing 46% of the total data. Directive speech acts rank second, followed by expressive speech acts. These results suggest that communication within the group is primarily opinion-driven, argumentative, and interactive. Users frequently express evaluations, challenge opposing viewpoints, and display emotional reactions through humor and sarcasm. The absence of declarative speech acts and the minimal occurrence of commissive speech acts further indicate that meme-based communication is largely informal and discussion-oriented rather than institutional in nature. This study contributes to pragmatic studies by providing empirical evidence regarding speech act distribution in online meme communities. It also offers insights into how language functions within contemporary digital communication.

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