

A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS ON ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ'S 2018 POLITICAL CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENT

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Abstract

The study explores the role of language in the communication and interpretation of intentions by analyzing the narration of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's political advertisement in Congressional Campaign in 2018. Hence, the study focuses on the pragmatic functions of locution, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of the speeches. This study was conducted using the qualitative descriptive method. The findings show that the overall relative frequency percentages for the speech acts in Ocasio-Cortez's 2018 political advertisement are: assertive 68%, directive 23%, commissive 4.5%, and declarative 4.5%. The results reflect that Ocasio-Cortez relied more on sentences that performed assertive acts than other speech acts since she wanted to introduce to the public who she is as an individual and what she is capable of as a future representative, and she also offered some relatable facts and situations that can appeal to the working class public to show that she's on their sides. Using directive acts, she included herself as a part of the society and shows that she wants to make a change together with them, not on her own. This is a different approach to political advertisement since most of them rely more on the commissive acts by promising a better future for the society. This different strategy is something fresh that eventually played a part in her win in the 2018 Congressional District Election.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Pragmatics; Political Campaign

INTRODUCTION

Politicians directly communicate with the general public for the purpose of convincing them of their ideas or future agendas. Usually, the speakers would promote themselves and talk about their potential to be a good representative with all their aspirations to influence the hearer. This condition gave birth to the discourse on political language. Political language deals with the use of power to organize people's mind and opinion (Hashim, 2015). The use of language in politics, whether through speeches or advertisement video affect the success of the campaign because it can be the tool to establish and maintain social relationships, express feelings, and sell ideas, policies and programs (Ilić & Radulović, 2015).

The majority of politicians are oblivious to the fact that there is a connection between what is said, what is meant, and the action communicated by what is said. In the context of pragmatics, this is called as the Speech Act Theory. This theory asserts that speech act performed by particular word often depends on the speaker's intention and the context in which the word uttered. The Speech Acts Theory is the central to pragmatics as it is a tool for interpreting the meaning and function of words in different situations of speech utterance (Austin, 1962). It focuses with the symbolism of words, the difference between a meaningful string of words and the meaningless ones, the truth value or inaccuracy of utterances, and the function to which language can be placed (Hashim, 2015).

Speech Acts according to Austin (1962) are divided into three classes, which are: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is an act of uttering something; that is, the act of making an utterance. Meanwhile, the illocutionary acts are the foundation of any theory of speech acts. Illocutionary act is identified by the explicit performative, or the conventional power achieved in the saying of that utterance. This is understood, according to Austin (1962), as the successful fulfillment of the speaker's intention, which Searle (1969) describes as a product of the hearer's interpretation. Hence, Searle (1969) categorizes the illocutionary acts into five classes:

1. *Assertive act*. This type of speech acts perpetrates the speakers to the truth of the expressed proposition, such as stating, claiming, reporting, announcing, etc.
2. *Directive act*. This type of speech acts are utterances that induce or make another person's action fit the propositional notion. It is mostly used to give order, consequently instigating the listener to take a particular action, command, advice or request.
3. *Commissive act*. This speech act commits the speaker to a future action, such as promising, offering, swearing, etc. to do something.
4. *Expressive act*. This type of acts expresses a psychological state, such as thinking, apologizing, congratulating, etc.
5. *Declarative act*. This speech act is used to say something and make it so, such as pronouncing someone guilty, resigning, dismissing, accepting, declaring a war, etc.

Thus, we can conclude that a pragmatic analysis of various types of political discourse can pinpoint the preference for particular speech acts in politics. Hence, this paper aims to use pragmatic analysis on political advertisement video. As in this digital age of media, video shown through television ads and on internet plays an important role in political campaign. This is because the accessibility of both media makes the campaign more visible to the general public.

One of the recently viral political advertisement videos is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Congressional Campaign in 2018, entitled "The Courage to Change". The video is accessible on various platforms on internet, mainly on Ocasio-Cortez's YouTube channel (Ocasio-Cortez, 2018). The political advertisement video has also received a lot of compliments from a plenty of media outlets for its fresh approach to political advertisement. Doug Zanger from Adweek, a weekly American news media in advertising, media, and technology, asserts that the advertisement is "*a master class in compacting passion, honesty and, yes, empathy and authenticity into a compelling package*" (Zanger, 2018). He adds more that, "Ocasio-Cortez isn't merely telling her story; she's telling everyone's story in the district" (Zanger, 2018). It's not a stretch to say that the advertisement has play a part in Ocasio-Cortez's win in 2018 Congressional Election. Beside the visualizations that the video offers, the language through the narration made by Ocasio-Cortez herself plays an important role in the advertisement.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify the speech acts used in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 2018 political campaign advertisement to find which type of speech acts are most frequently used, and also analyze why certain type of speech acts are used more than the others in the political advertisement. The Speech Acts Theory by Austin (1962) and the five classes of illocutionary acts categorized by Searle (1969), as explained above, are adopted as the theoretical frameworks for the purpose of analysis of the data.

METHOD

The study presents encounters of speech acts in Alexandria Ocassio-Cortez’s 2018 political campaign advertisement video from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rq3QXIVR0bs>. The data were collected by specific purpose, namely, to see the characteristics of personal speech in the context of political campaign. Cortez’s was taken as the sampling in that the popularity of her social campaign advertisement in social media (youtube) is high and represents women in politics. Therefore, the study tends to be qualitative since the exploration of the data employs text analysis grounded to the theories in pragmatics, particularly, Searle’s (1969) concerning speech acts. His theories become the bases to identify and to categorize every units of Cortez’s speech in her political campaign advertisement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the overall narration of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s 2018 political campaign advertisement video taken from her YouTube Channel, a result is obtained as shown in a table below:

Table 1. The percentage of types of speech acts in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's 2018 Congressional Campaign video

TYPES OF SPEECH ACT	NUMBER (F)	PERCENTAGE % (X)
Assertive	15	68%
Directive	5	23%
Commissive	1	4.5%
Expressive	0	0
Declarative	1	4.5%
Total	22	100%

Discussion

The data in the table shows that out of five types of speech acts, there are four types found in the narration of the campaign video. Those 4 types of speech acts are assertive, directive, commissive, and declarative acts. As we can see, the most frequent speech act is assertive with a percentage of 68%, followed by directive with 23%, and then each of commissive and declarative acts has 4.5%. There is no expressive act discovered in the video. From this, we can conclude that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez dominantly uses assertive acts for the majority of her campaign video’s narration. Below each of the types is discussed one by one according to its frequency.

1. Assertive Acts

As previously stated, this type of speech acts commits the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. Examples of assertive acts are stating, claiming, reporting, announcing, etc. The majority Ocasio-Cortez’s 2018 campaign video uses assertive acts, however for

different purposes. It is found that there are X purposes of using assertive acts in the campaign video, which are to introduce herself as an individual, to report the condition of society, and to state what society needs. Below is an example of assertive acts to introduce herself and her background.

Table 2. An example of assertive acts used by Ocasio-Cortez to introduce herself and her background.

TIME STAMP	LOCUTION	ILLOCUTIONARY ACT	PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECT
0:19 – 0:28	My name is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. I’m an educator, an organizer, a working-class New Yorker.	Assertive	Understanding

This kind of assertive act is very important in political campaign video. After all, the politician who delivers the speech should be the person who becomes the center of attention in campaign or political speeches. The politicians promote themselves and talk about their potential to be a good leader or representative in order to convince the public. This promotion is achieved by using assertive acts, such as shown in the Table 2 above.

Table 3. An example of assertive acts used by Ocasio-Cortez to report the condition of society

TIME STAMP	LOCUTION	ILLOCUTIONARY ACT	PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECT
0:49 – 0:58	Every day gets harder for working families like mine to get by. The rent gets higher, health care covers less, and our income stays the same.	Assertive	A relatable feeling, hopelessness

Meanwhile, another purpose of assertive acts is to report facts. In political campaign, it is especially significant to report the unsatisfying condition of the society in order to show what needs to be changed. This kind of facts is also called as the status quo. Ocasio-Cortez uses many assertive acts for this exact purpose. She elaborates which conditions are worrying and should be improved in society through assertive acts, as is shown in Table 3.

Table 4. An example of assertive acts used by Ocasio-Cortez to state what the society needs.

TIME STAMP	LOCUTION	ILLOCUTIONARY ACT	PERLOCUTIONARY EFFECT
1:37 – 1:45	What the Bronx and Queens needs is Medicare for all, tuition free public college, a federal jobs guarantee, and criminal justice reform.	Assertive	Encouragement, hopefulness, agreement, disagreement

The last purpose of using assertive acts in Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign video is to state what the society needs, as show in *Table 4*. This is a distinctive approach of Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign. Other politicians usually use commissive acts in their campaign in order to promise future actions that can appeal to the public (Ilić & Radulović, 2015). Instead of using commissive acts through promising future actions that she would do like any other political campaign, she uses assertive acts to state what needs to be done. However, even though she doesn’t promise anything through the utterance, we can immediately understand that her future actions will resolve what she states the society needs.

2. Directive Acts

As previously discussed, this type of speech acts are utterances that encourage or make another person’s action fit the propositional notion. It is mostly employed to give order, consequently instigating the listener to take a particular action, command, advice or request. In Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign video, directive acts are the second most frequent speech acts.

Table 5. An example of directive acts used by Ocasio-Cortez.

TIME STAMP	LOCUTION	ILLOCUTIO NARY ACT	PERLOCUTIO NARY EFFECT
1:03 – 1:08	It’s time to fight for a New York that working families can afford	Directive	Inspiring

As we can see in *Table 5* above, the directive acts are used to mostly to give an inspiring effect to the public, especially the working-class group. This is another strategy of Ocasio-Cortez, in which she includes herself as a part of society. Instead of exclusively saying that she would be the one to change the society through commissive acts, Ocasio-Cortez instead asks the people to change the society together with her through directive acts. This choice of acts creates a more appealing utterance to the public for they are included as a part of the change.

3. Commissive Act

There is only one commissive act found in the narration of Ocasio-Cortez’s campaign video. It is when she promises that “*a New York for the many is possible*” (1:54 – 1:57). In this sentence, she assures the people that an affordable living for working class New Yorker as the majority of the population is possible and she would play a part in order to make it happen. This is a perfect example of a commissive act, in which the speaker commits to a future action or possibility.

4. Declarative Act

Like the commissive act, there is only one declarative act found in the campaign video. On the time stamp of 1:09 - 1:12, Ocasio-Cortez declares that she’s running for congress. This is included as a declarative act because she’s announcing something and planning to do what is announced. This declarative act is used in order to make her objective in campaigning clear.

CONCLUSION

According to the results of this study, we can conclude that the assertive act is the most frequently employed speech act in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s 2018 Congressional Campaign

video, then followed by directive acts. This is a rather different strategy than what is usually used by other politicians. Most politicians often use commissive acts more in order to promise some future actions for a better society. However, this does not make Ocasio-Cortez's campaign less than the others. In fact, this fresh approach to political campaign offers an alternative for the public who are fed up with promises that they consider as empty. Thus, we can say that this refreshing approach of campaign video which majorly employs assertive acts play an important role in Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's win in 2018 Congressional District Election. For the future, it is advisable for other politicians to use similar approach for political campaign.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the family who have given us support both morally and materially, so that we can complete and publish our article.

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