



An Analysis of Assertive and Commissive Speech Acts in Simon Sinek's Speeches

Idham Kholid^{1*}, Agus Hidayat², Bela Triyani³

^{1,2,3} UIN Raden Intan Lampung

* idhamkholid@radenintan.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research discusses speech act analysis, focusing on assertive and commissive illocutionary speech acts in Simon Sinek's speech. The subject of this research is a video of Simon Sinek's speech. This research aims to identify the types and functions of assertive and commissive speech acts used in Simon Sinek's speeches based on Searle and Vanderveken's theory. The design of this research is qualitative descriptive, using documentation to obtain data. In analyzing the data, the researcher followed steps by Miles and Huberman, which include data collection, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the analysis of Simon Sinek's speech video revealed a total of 56 utterances categorized as assertive and commissive speech acts. Among the assertive acts, there were 1 instance of asserting, 3 of claiming, 6 of affirming, 5 of stating, 5 of reporting, 4 of informing, 5 of notifying, 4 of reminding, 3 of predicting, and 8 of suggesting. Notably, there were no utterances classified as admitting. Among the commissive acts, there were 3 instances of consenting, 4 of refusing, 4 of offering, and 1 of threatening. Based on the findings, assertive illocutionary speech acts were more dominant than commissive speech acts.

This is an open access article under [CC-BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license.



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

assertive;
commissive;
illocutionary act;
qualitative descriptive

Article History:

Received: 20 November 2024
Revised: 14 December 2024
Accepted: 18 December 2024
Published: 20 December 2024

How to Cite in APA Style:

Kholid, I., Hidayat, A. ., & Triyani, B. .
(2024). An Analysis of Assertive and
Commissive Speech Acts in Simon
Sinek's Speeches. *IJLHE: International
Journal of Language, Humanities, and
Education*, 7(2), 305–314.

<https://doi.org/10.52217/ijlhe.v7i2.1649>

INTRODUCTION

In social life, language is a crucial aspect of human interaction, facilitating both verbal and non-verbal communication. Through language, individuals can express thoughts, feelings, ideas, and messages while engaging in social interactions with people from various social backgrounds. Effective communication occurs when both the speaker and the listener understand the content of their exchange (Nainggolan et al., 2024). However, in some cases, miscommunication arises due to differences in language and cultural backgrounds.

In the context of education, communication plays a vital role in the teaching

and learning process. When communication is effective, meaningful interactions occur in the classroom, such as between teachers and students or among students themselves (Kemp, 2017). Speech acts between teachers and students can be used as indicators of effective communication during the learning process. According to Geurts (2019), "A speech act is pragmatic because it is created when the speaker utters an utterance to the listener in context and must be interpreted as an aspect of social interaction." Inactive learning activities often lack speech acts, whereas active use of speech acts by teachers can enhance classroom engagement.

Pragmatic studies emphasize that communication inherently involves speech acts. As Yule (1996) explains, the analysis of language expressions or the interpretation of communication should go beyond the literal meaning of utterances. It should also consider the effects of speech on the listener. Communication serves not only to exchange information but also to inspire, influence, or prompt actions from the listener (Putri et al., 2023). Recognizing the importance of this, the researcher aims to study speech acts in greater detail. The researcher acknowledges the significance of speech acts, as every utterance can impact the listener. Speech acts consist of three components: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to the act of saying something; the illocutionary act involves the speaker's intention in producing an utterance; and the perlocutionary act refers to the effect the speaker's words have on the listener. Among these, the illocutionary act is central to speech acts, as it reflects the speaker's intentions, such as making a statement, offer, or promise. Searle (1979) categorizes illocutionary acts into five types: assertive, directive, commissive, declaration, and expressive.

This research focuses on two types of illocutionary acts: commissive and assertive. Assertive speech acts involve conveying information and relate to the speaker's commitment to the truth of their statements (Tursunovich, 2022). Assertive acts include asserting, claiming, affirming, stating, admitting, reporting, informing, notifying, reminding, predicting, and suggesting. Commissive speech acts involve the speaker committing to a future action and include acts such as committing, promising, threatening, vowing, pledging, accepting, consenting, refusing, and offering.

Several previous studies are relevant to this research. For instance, Paramitha (2021) conducted a study titled *An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in Main Characters' Utterances in "Luca" Movie Script*, which examined illocutionary acts comprehensively in a movie script. Unlike prior research, this study aims to analyze assertive and commissive speech acts in a speech. The researcher chose Simon Sinek's speech as the subject of this study because Sinek is a renowned motivational speaker and accomplished author. He has written five best-selling books, including his first book, *Start With Why*. This study seeks to explore the assertive and commissive speech acts in Simon Sinek's speech, given his expertise in delivering

motivational and impactful messages.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative research design focusing on the statements in speeches (Levinson, 1983). The descriptive method is used to describe speech acts in Simon Sinek's speeches, as this research aims to analyze the function and explain the meaning of assertive and commissive illocutionary acts expressed in the speeches. The data source consists of statements from two of Simon Sinek's speeches. The first is "5 Rules to Follow as You Find Your Spark", published on the YouTube channel UsersNewLook, with a duration of 16 minutes and 50 seconds. The second is "How Great Leaders Inspire Action", published on the TED YouTube channel, with a duration of 18 minutes and 35 seconds. The data collection technique used in this research is documentation. The researcher takes note of key points from the speeches, including the exact timing of specific statements. These notes are used to sort necessary and unnecessary data, facilitating the analysis of assertive and commissive illocutionary speech acts based on Searle's theory.

The data is processed and analyzed using descriptive methods to explain the function of commissive and assertive speech acts and their meanings. In analyzing the data, the researcher followed the qualitative data analysis steps proposed by Miles and Huberman. These steps include: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The detailed steps for data analysis involve several processes. First, assertive and commissive speech acts in Simon Sinek's speeches are classified using Searle's theory to identify and categorize the specific types of illocutionary acts present. Next, the identified assertive and commissive speech acts are analyzed to understand their functions and contextual meanings within the speeches. Following the analysis, the findings are explained in detail to provide insights into how these speech acts contribute to the overall message and impact of the speeches. Finally, conclusions are drawn based on the analyzed data, summarizing the key results and their implications.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

1. Assertive speech acts

1) Asserting

Asserting is the act of stating something firmly and confidently without belittling or intimidating others. Speakers use these actions to express their point of view, which is considered to be the truth. In this case the speaker can subtly persuade the audience to accept the statement as true.

Table 1. Asserting Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
but Nelson Mandela across the world is universally regarded as a great leader	Asserting	Direct	10:38

2) Claiming

Claiming is a speech act of saying something that is true or a fact according to the speaker's beliefs, even though the truth cannot be proven.

Table 2. Claiming Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
We make great computers	Claiming	Direct	03:35

3) Affirming

Affirming means giving reinforcement to statements given based on facts, or sometimes, they add discourse markers to strengthen the truth to avoid misunderstandings through affirming and convincing speech acts.

Table 3. Affirming Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
no one got mad at me because the rule is "you can go after whatever you want, you just cannot deny anyone else to go after whatever they want"	Affirming	Direct	03:39

4) Stating

Stating is the speech act of expressing or stating something, be it information, opinion, fact, or feeling, using words in a clear and direct way. It is a way to communicate an idea to someone so that they can understand what the speaker is saying.

Table 4. Stating Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
He says the guys that show up with huge bulging muscles covered in tattoos who want to prove to the world how tough they are,	Stating	Indirect	07:45

5) Admitting

Admitting is a speech act of stating or admitting openly about oneself. The speaker expresses a confession based on his beliefs. In Simon Sinek's speech, the researcher did not find any speech that showed the function of the assertive admitting speech act.

6) Reporting

Reporting is a speech act that refers to reporting an event that has occurred or is currently occurring to the listener. Reporting can make listeners aware of information they did not know before.

Table 5. Reporting Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
In the eighteenth century, there was something that spread across Europe and eventually made its way to America called puerperal fever also known as The Black Death of childbed.	Reporting	Direct	04:22

7) Informing

Informing serves to provide understanding and provide new information or facts to other people about something that is being discussed. Where the speaker believes what he said is true.

Table 6. Informing Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
Samuel Pierpont Langley was given 50,000 dollars by the War Department to figure out this flying machine. Money was no problem. He held a seat at Harvard and worked at the Smithsonian and was extremely well-connected; he knew all the big minds of the day.	Informing	Direct	08:49

8) Notifying

Notifying is a speech act that has the meaning of reporting something or information for additional achievements so that it can be known by other people or known by the listener.

Table 7. Notifying Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
When they started sterilizing their instruments and washing their hands the black death of childbed disappeared.	Notifying	Indirect	06:13

9) Remind

Reminding is a speech act used by speakers to remind their interlocutors about a situation that they once knew about and perhaps have forgotten.

Table 8. Remind Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
Remember this as you gain fame, as you gain fortune, as you gain position and seniority people will treat you better,	Reminding	Direct	14:38

10) Predicting

Predicting means to say or estimate that a certain thing will happen in the future. The speaker projects something in the future to be convincing audience about how something will happen.

Table 9. Predict Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
I am confident that the future is bright despite the fact that America looks like an absolute mess right now	Predicting	Direct	16:2

11) Suggesting

Suggest is to state an idea, plan, or action for someone else to consider. The use of this speech act refers to the speaker's suggestion to his speech partner to do what is suggested.

Table 10. Suggesting Finding

Utterance	Function of Assertive	Direct and Indirect	Time
if you want to be an elite warrior you better get really really good at helping the person to the left of you and helping the person to the right	Suggesting	Direct	09:05

2. Commissive Speech Acts used by Simon Sinek Speech

1) Threaten

A threat is an intentional speech act performed by a speaker as a way to intimidate the listener and get the listener to do something, which can cause distress, danger, and fear.

Table 11. Threaten Finding

Utterance	Function of Commissive	Direct and Indirect	Time
We don't believe you. We don't need it. We don't like it. You're scaring us.	Threaten	Indirect	14:47

2) Consent

Consent is allowing someone to do something. Doing something with approval means receiving direction to do it with additional preparatory conditions if it is not permissible to do so or is not permitted, therefore a person may not do so if there is no opinion of approval.

Table 12. Consent Finding

Utterance	Function of Commissive	Direct and Indirect	Time
So let me give you a famous example, a famous failure and a famous success.	Consent	Direct	13:31

3) Refuse

Refuse means a speech act that says that you will not do or accept something. Rejection is the opposite of acceptance and agreement. When you are asked to do something and you indicate that you will not do it, you are refusing.

Table 13. Refuse Finding

Utterance	Function of Commissive	Direct and Indirect	Time
So I said to my friend, "let's get a bagel", and he looked at me and said, "that line too long"	Refuse	Indirect	02:51

4) Offer

Offer is a speech act in which the speaker tries to make an offer to the person he is talking to with the aim of presenting something that will later be accepted or rejected. This offer can bind the listener to take a certain action if accepted by the listener.

Table 14. Offer Finding

Utterance	Function of Commissive	Direct and Indirect	Time
They're beautifully designed, simple to use and user friendly, Want to buy one?	Offer	Direct	03:41

Table 15. The result of Assertive

No	Function of Assertive	Amount
1	Asserting	1
2	Claiming	3
3	Affirming	6
4	Stating	5
5	Admitting	-
6	Reporting	5
7	Informing	4
8	Notifying	5
9	Reminding	4
10	Predicting	3
11	Suggesting	8
	Total	44

Table 16. The result of Commissive

No	Function of Commissive	Amount
1	Threaten	1
2	Consent	3
3	Refuse	4
4	Offer	4
	Total	12

DISCUSSION

In analyzing Simon Sinek's speeches, a total of 56 illocutionary acts were identified, comprising 44 assertive and 12 commissive speech acts. This distribution aligns with Searle's classification, which defines assertives as statements that convey the speaker's belief about the truth of a proposition, and commissives as expressions committing the speaker to a future course of action (Taguchi, 2011).

Among the assertive speech acts, the most prevalent functions were suggesting (8 instances), affirming (6 instances), and stating (5 instances). This prevalence suggests that Sinek frequently employs language to propose ideas, reinforce statements, and present information, thereby guiding his audience toward specific viewpoints. Such use of assertives is characteristic of effective public speaking, where the speaker's goal is to inform and persuade listeners by presenting propositions as factual and credible (Sharma et al., 2018).

In the realm of commissive speech acts, refusing and offering were the most common, each occurring 4 times. This indicates that Sinek often commits himself to certain stances or actions, while also extending offers to his audience, perhaps in the form of invitations to adopt new perspectives or engage in specific behaviors. The use of commissives serves to build a rapport with the audience, as the speaker's commitments can enhance credibility and foster trust (Biesta, 2009).

The dominance of assertive speech acts in Sinek's speeches reflects his role as an inspirational speaker, aiming to convey truths and insights to his audience. By asserting information confidently, he positions himself as a knowledgeable authority, which can enhance the persuasive impact of his message. This strategic use of speech acts aligns with the principles of effective communication, where clarity and assertiveness are key to influencing audience perception and engagement (Kachru, 1981; Putri et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

After conducting an in-depth analysis of assertive and commissive speech acts in Simon Sinek's speeches, the researchers identified a total of 56 speech acts from two videos of his speeches. Of these, 44 utterances were categorized as assertive speech acts. Specifically, the study identified 1 utterance classified as asserting, 3 utterances as claiming, 6 utterances as affirming, 5 utterances as stating, 5 utterances as reporting, 4 utterances as informing, 5 utterances as notifying, 4

utterances as reminding, 3 utterances as predicting, and 8 utterances as suggesting. Notably, no utterances were classified as admitting in Simon Sinek's speeches.

In terms of commissive speech acts, the researchers found 12 utterances, representing four functions: consent, refuse, offer, and threaten. Specifically, 3 utterances were classified as consent, 4 as refuse, 4 as offer, and 1 as threaten. The findings indicate that assertive illocutionary speech acts are more dominant than commissive speech acts in Simon Sinek's speeches. Based on these results, it is concluded that assertive speech acts are employed more frequently, reflecting Sinek's intent to present ideas, share information, and motivate his audience effectively.

While this study provides valuable insights into the use of speech acts in Simon Sinek's speeches, there are some limitations. First, the analysis was limited to only two speeches, which may not fully represent the variety of speech acts used across his broader body of work. Second, the study focused exclusively on assertive and commissive speech acts, excluding other categories of illocutionary acts, such as directives, expressives, and declarations, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of his rhetorical strategies. Additionally, the qualitative approach used in this study, while effective for in-depth analysis, may introduce subjectivity in the interpretation of utterances.

Future research could address these limitations by analyzing a larger corpus of Simon Sinek's speeches to gain a broader perspective on his use of speech acts. Additionally, examining other categories of illocutionary acts, such as directives and expressives, could enrich the understanding of his communicative style. Researchers might also consider employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis with quantitative techniques, to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings. Finally, comparative studies could be conducted to explore how Simon Sinek's use of speech acts differs from other motivational speakers, providing a more nuanced view of effective communication in public speaking.

REFERENCES

- Biesta, G. (2009). Pragmatism's contribution to understanding learning-in-context. *Rethinking Contexts for Learning and Teaching: Communities, Activities and Networks*, 61-74. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203881750-12/pragmatism-contribution-understanding-learning-context-gert-biesta>
- Geurts, B. (2019). Communication as commitment sharing: Speech acts, implicatures, common ground. *Theoretical Linguistics*, 45(1-2), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.1515/TL-2019-0001/Machinereadablecitation/Ris>
- Kachru, B. B. (1981). The Pragmatics of Non-Native Varieties of English. *English for Cross-Cultural Communication*, 15-39. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16572-8_2

- Kemp, S. E. (2017). RAP: A Reading Comprehension Strategy for Students with Learning Disabilities and Concomitant Speech-Language Impairments or ADHD. *Journal of Education and Training*, 4(2), 58–72. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jet.v4i2.11614>
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nainggolan, B. A., Rezeki, I. S., Karlinda, B., Zulianti, H., & Hastomo, T. (2024). Analyzing Maxim Violations in the Batman Cartoon Movie. *Lexeme : Journal of Linguistics And Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 21–32. <https://openjournal.unpam.ac.id/index.php/LJLAL/article/view/41793>
- Paramitha, F. (2021). *An analysis of illocutionary acts in main characters' utterances in "Luca" movie script*. UIN Raden Intan Lampung.
- Putri, A. N., Hastomo, T., Farhan, M., & Yunaini, K. (2023). A Study of Interaction and Interactive Metadiscourse on Ukraine-Russia Conflict News Articles. *Journal of English Teaching, Applied Linguistics and Literatures (JETALL)*, 6(1), 89. <https://doi.org/10.20527/jetall.v6i1.15619>
- Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and Meaning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sharma, S., Devi, R., & Kumari, J. (2018). Pragmatism in Education. *International Journal of Engineering Technology Science and Research*, 5(1), 1549–1554.
- Taguchi, N. (2011). Teaching Pragmatics: Trends and Issues. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 289–310. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000018>
- Tursunovich, S. E. (2022). Noval Teaching Technologies of Pragmatic Speech Acts. *Eurasian Scientific Herald*, 4, 19–22. <https://geniusjournals.org/index.php/esh/article/view/392>
- Yule, George. (1996). Pragmatics. In *Open Journal of Applied Sciences* (Issue 10). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.4236/OJAPPS.2022.1210110>