

SPEECH ACTS IN PUBLIC FIGURES' TWEETS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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This paper presents the detailed analysis and interpretation of the main speech acts used in the tweets of public figures. Our findings discover the major types of the speech acts found in the utterances of public figures related to the environment. Based on the studies of numerous scholars and rich theoretical background on speech acts theory, the study touches the aspect of global problems depicted in media discourse with regard to the pragmatic reference to the audience reaction. The methodology of this article starts with the task to collect the data in the English Twitter Corpus from the utterances of renown environmental activists. The highlight of the publication is the classification of these utterances supported by the numerical data. In addition to the illocutionary aspect, perlocutionary effect was identified proceeding from the reaction count. Along with a single and complex speech act, the authors identified the meaning of a complex speech act within the Twitter social networking service. Another major feature of the publication is identifying reversed speech acts used by the public figures for highlighting the importance of the topic raised on their microblogs. The present research explores the perlocutionary effect of the tweets by counting replies on tweets, quote tweets and likes. Having applied quantitative methods, the leading environmental topics are identified judging by the response of the audience. Calculated data is extensively used in the research to show the considerable impact of specific topics on the audience. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of pragmatic study of social media for more profound arrangement of public figures' speeches which can be translated to a schema for creating targeted social media discourse.

Key words: social media discourse, environmental discourse, public figures' utterances, speech acts, tweet, illocutionary act, perlocutionary effect.

Степаненко К. В., Карпенко Ю. В.

Мовленнєві акти у твітах публічних осіб на тему навколишнього середовища

У цій статті представлено детальний аналіз та інтерпретацію основних мовленнєвих актів, які використовуються у твітах публічних осіб. Наші знахідки відображають найпоширеніші типи мовленнєвих актів, виявлені у висловлюваннях публічних осіб на тему навколишнього середовища. Беручи за основу дослідження численних науковців та багате теоретичне підґрунтя теорії мовленнєвих актів, розвідка торкається глобальних проблем, висвітлених у медіадискурсі, з посиланням на прагматичний аспект відгуку аудиторії. Методологія цього дослідження початково збирає дані корпусу англomовного твітера у рамках висловлювань відомих екоактивістів за допомогою методу суцільної вибірки. Одним із найважливіших компонентів публікації є класифікація зазначених висловлювань, підкріплена кількісними даними. Додатково до іллокутивного аспекту було досліджено перлокутивний ефект на основі підрахунку реакцій аудиторії; окрім виявлених простих та складних мовленнєвих актів авторки встановили значення комплексних мовленнєвих актів у рамках соціальної мережі «Твітер». Ще однією особливістю публікації є визначення зворотних мовленнєвих актів, що використовуються публічними особами на позначення важливості тем, порушених у їхніх мікроблогах. Це дослідження також сфокусовано на перлокутивному ефекті висловлювань шляхом сумування ретвітів, твітів з цитатами та вподобань. Застосувавши кількісні методи до підрахунку відгуків аудиторії, було визначено основні екологічні теми. Статистичні дані широко використовуються у дослідженні з метою виявлення значного впливу окремих тематик на аудиторію. Сподіваємось, що це дослідження сприятиме глибшому розумінню прагматичного вивчення соціальних медіа для більш ґрунтовного уявлення про висловлення публічних осіб, які можна схематизувати з метою створення медіадискурсу цільового призначення.

Ключові слова: мас-медійний дискурс, екодискурс, висловлювання публічних осіб, мовленнєві акти, твіт, іллокутивний акт, перлокутивний ефект.

Introduction

Today, communication in social media has become an inseparable part of daily communication. It is used to express opinions, share news, create personal brands, influence communities, and shape public opinion. Social media allows sharing not only private events, but also social, political, legislative, economic issues. Moreover, the pages of public figures become platforms for expressing the ideas and calling for action. The study is focused on public figures' utterances on Twitter, particularly the nature of the posts on ecology topics and reaction from the audience, while public figures' utterances on social media are fast becoming a key instrument for the readers to learn about global events.

This paper **aims** to examine public figures' utterances occurring in media discourse, particularly on Twitter, due to the increase of the role of social media in peoples' lives. The object of the research is public figures' utterances in Twitter posts as speech acts, while the subject is illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect that Twitter posts have on the readers.

Theoretical Background

Speech act theory has been an object of research since Austin (1962) developed his study. Central to the entire theory is the idea that all utterances are performative, since the speaker can be performing a locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts at the same time. Some of the types of the speech acts he developed (verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and explosives) were modified by Searle into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations and named 'utterance acts' (Searle, 1969). Later, several theories on the speech acts taxonomy have been proposed by esteemed scholars, such as Fraser (1974), and Ohmann (1972). While each new theory complements the previous ones, the classification proposed by Searle is best applied to our research material.

Not less important for our paper are studies on social media, particularly on Twitter, published over the last years. There are publications focusing on Twitter speech acts classification (Vosoughi & Roy, 2016) (assertion, recommendation, expression, question, request, miscellaneous), Twitter posts being a tool for highlighting major life events (Li et al, 2014), and Searle's classification being applied to researching digital culture along with digital institutions (Hodgkin, 2016).

A systematic growth of social media platforms caused critical analytic research of the media discourse, intertextuality (Fairclough, 1995) as well as "internet linguistics" become better studied through the corpus linguistics and functional linguistics (Zappavigna, 2012). Thurlow & Mroczek (2011) researched communication in the digital world from the perspective

of sociolinguistics ("new media sociolinguistics"). Media discourse analysis from the multimodal perspective and discourse analysis applied to popular culture and media are investigated by Berger (2016).

There are findings that offer about the practical study of media discourse analysis, focusing on methodology of chat shows and celebrities interviews in particular (O'Keeffe, 2006). Additionally, Machin & Leeuwen (2007) contributed to the study of communicative practices in the media by showing how to practically analyse media discourse.

A global interest in media discourse caused research of media language in national and global contexts, language ideologies in media discourse due to public engagement in the news, where such platforms as Twitter provide a new type of relationships between various media genres (Thornborrow, 2015).

Most recently, scholars started to pay attention to pragmatic specifics of public figure's utterances on Twitter (Sidiq & Simatupang, 2019). Since posts on this platform depict major life events (Li et al, 2014) and are often a source of news for the audience, they are also analysed from the perlocutionary perspective of their effect on the readers and, therefore, from the perspective of different speech acts depending on the audience they appeal to (Nemer, 2016).

Even though there are numerous publications on speech acts and public figures' utterances in media discourse on various topics, the ones based on environmental issues are missing from these studies. Additionally, illocutionary and perlocutionary perspectives of the speech acts are still to be studied as well. Therefore, this paper is aimed to make a major contribution to the research of pragmatic aspects of public figures' tweets on social media.

Methods

This research has several stages, each reflecting the sequential analysis of the collected data. First, the English Twitter corpus of public figures' utterances on environmental topics is compiled. After that, the parameters of linguistic and extralinguistic data analysis are prioritised via the methods of analysis and synthesis. Finally, the material is classified and described in the main terms of speech acts theory. Here a number of linguistic methods and approaches were used: descriptive, quantitative and qualitative, interpretative as well as contrastive ones to present the key findings of this research.

Twitter messages (tweets) are the main data of this research. They were chosen from the official Twitter accounts of five American public figures (*4 actors*: Leonardo DiCaprio, Mark Ruffalo, Jane Fonda, Adrian Grenier, and *1 politician*: Al Gore) who are also known for being active environmentalists. As far as the object of this research is utterances on environmental issues, we focused on this topic being mentioned and discussed in public figures' tweets

from June till August of 2021. Generally, 109 tweets were analyzed according to the following parameters:

1. Types of tweets: *own tweets* (including mentions), *quote tweets* (or retweets with comment) and *retweets* (without any comment). Tweets with comments are very important for the linguistic analysis of public figures' utterances, because they fairly represent the locution of these utterances.
2. Communicative aim of utterances: informative, social, educational, legislative or combined.
3. Structural types of speech acts used in tweets: single (as classified by Searle (1969)), combined, and complex.
4. Perlocutionary effect of messages on the readers: the count of replies on tweets, their quote tweets and likes as the most representative aspects of the possible effect on the addressee. Quantitative method is used to define the leading topics raised by the public figures in the social media discourse related to environmental topics.

Having analysed the main stages of the obtained data processing and interpretation, we will discuss the detailed results of our findings below.

Results and Discussion

Having compiled the corpus of utterances on environmental topics from the Twitter pages of public figures, we defined the main *single* speech acts, which were divided according to Searle's classification (1969) as shown in *Table 1.1*. Thus, *declaratives* in our publication are posts without comments (i.e. retweets), since such posts mean agreement by default with the information shared and require no further explanation from the author of the page, and according to Searle (1969), saying something intends to create particular effect on the hearer, to make the hearer aware of something.

The group of *representatives* includes assertives, informatives, and dissentives. For example, a tweet by Mark Ruffalo is an example of a representative

(informative) speech act: “*BREAKING: @EPA approved highly toxic, cancer-causing forever chemicals, PFAS, to drill and frack at least 1200 wells across the US despite recognizing the serious health risks and recommending the need for studies, says a new @PSREnvironment report.*” Mentions, figures and the last reporting phrase prove that this statement is an informative speech act aimed at providing facts and useful information for all eco-conscious people.

Expressives are represented by congratulations, thanks, commemorates, disappointments, satisfactions and condolences, which can be illustrated by the expressive (disappointment) tweet of Jane Fonda: “*I'm sickened and deeply disappointed that President Biden has given the go-ahead to Enbridge Line 3 in Minnesota. This belies his promises on the campaign trail to follow science and stop new fossil fuel development and cut our carbon emission in half by 3030.*”

The fourth group of *directives* includes urges, requirements and requests found in their single form only in the utterances of Mark Ruffalo, for example: “*Send a message to @CarlHeastie and @SteveEngles telling them that they must do better for NY State's environment. @SierraClub <https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/Atlantic?actionId=AR0330852>.*” This is a good illustration of an urge introduced by the phrase calling the audience for action and followed by the text strongly suggesting that they should make the New York Assembly members work harder on environmental and climate protection programmes. This passage is also finished with the link to the form which might facilitate the quicker reaction of an addressee.

The final group of speech acts is represented by *commissives* which include predictives, offers, invitations, promises, and threats as in the following tweet of Al Gore: “*This new report, commissioned by @GenerationFndt, @PRI_News and @UNEP_FI, will help empower investors to build a truly sustainable economy. #ImpactLegalFramework.*” The predictive speech act exemplified in this utterance is introduced with the phrase that commits the mentioned referents to some future action.

Table 1.1

Single speech act types defined

SINGLE SPEECH ACTS				
Declarations	Representatives	Expressives	Directives	Commissives
declaratives	assertives informatives dissentives	congratulations thanks commemorations condolences disappointment satisfaction	urges requirements requests	predictives offers invitations promises threats

Since the speech act in our research is a Twitter post, which can consist of more than one sentence, along with the single speech acts we identified *combined* speech

acts which are 2-componental and 3-componental ones (*Table 1.2*). For example, a 2-componental speech act is a representative+commissive utterance

of Leonardo DiCaprio: “A new lizard species discovered in #Ecuador has been named after Nemonte Nenquimo, the indigenous activist, founder of @alianzaceibo @TIME 100 Most Influential People and @goldmanprize winner: https://www.tropicalherping.com/science/books/reptiles/anolis_nemonteae.html”, where the information about the new species in an informative speech act with some tags, hashtags, and a link attached is translated into an offer to learn more about this new species.

The example of a 3-componental speech act can be illustrated by Al Gore’s utterance combining an expressive (satisfaction), representative (informative), and commissive (offer) illocutionary acts in one tweet respectively (mind the underlined fragments): “I am inspired by each of the @ClimateReality Climate Justice for All Grant recipients! These 10 BIPOC-led organizations are doing incredible work in their communities. Learn more about these recipients and the grant program: <https://climateralityproject.org/climatejusticegrants...>”

Additionally, numerous cases of reversed combined speech acts were found, where speech acts do not follow the order shown in the table, however may be varied to create stronger effect on the audience or deliver a more impressive message. Leonardo DiCaprio’s tweet demonstrates an example of a reversed 2-componental speech act: “Coral is a critical habitat & resource to fellow species. Unfortunately, half of the world’s coral reefs have been devastated by the industry. @rewild shares 2 ways to help them

recover: Establish Marine Protected Areas, Grow coral in nurseries and return them to damaged reefs”, where the first sentence is representative (informative), the word “*unfortunately*” is an expressive (condolence) utterance followed by a representative (informative) phrase “*shares 2 ways to help them recover...*”.

Table 1.2

Combined speech act types defined

COMBINED SPEECH ACTS	
2-componental	3-componental
Rep+Dir	Rep+Dir+Com
Rep+Com	Rep+Exp+Com
Rep+Exp	Rep+Dir+Dec
Exp+Dir	Rep+Exp+Rep
Exp+Rep	Com+Rep+Com
Dir+Rep	Com+Dir+Com
Com+Dir	Dir+Rep+Com
	Exp+Rep+Com
	Dec+Rep+Dir

At the next stage of our research, which was a quantitative analysis, we aimed to study the *proportion* of the single and combined speech acts of the public figures (Table 2). Thus, among 109 analysed utterances, 71 speech acts represented by 65,1% of the total number were single speech acts. As we can see in the table, this communication strategy is mostly favoured by Mark Ruffalo (82,9 % of his tweets) and Adrian Grenier (83,3 % respectively), while combined speech acts are favoured by Al Gore (61,5 % of his tweets) and Leonardo DiCaprio (54,0 % of tweets on environmental topics on his Twitter page).

Table 2

Single speech act types defined

	Single speech act types		Combined speech act types		TOTAL of speech act types	
	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%
Leonardo DiCaprio	16	45,7%	19	54,3%	35	100,0%
Jane Fonda	11	78,6%	3	21,4%	14	100,0%
Mark Ruffalo	34	82,9%	7	17,1%	41	100,0%
Al Gore	5	38,5%	8	61,5%	13	100,0%
Adrian Grenier	5	83,3%	1	16,7%	6	100,0%
TOTAL	71	65,1%	38	34,9%	109	100,0%

Furthermore, Twitter settings and interface allowed to define complex speech acts within the studied social media platform. Thus, the complex speech act is an uninterrupted chain of messages aimed to highlight a particular topic, creating a flow of single speech acts for digital storytelling effect.

Fig. 1 shows this example. It stands out from the rest of our data and is found only in Al Gore’s style of communication. His interaction with the followers slightly differs from the rest of the researched public figures’ modes in at least two major respects: he is the only one to use the thread of messages on Twitter, and not

to retweet without a comment. It might result from the nature of his profession.

The following stage of the research is aimed to identify the quantity of single speech acts used by each of the analysed public figures in their tweets. The calculation presented in Table 3 shows that the percentage of declarations dominates in the single speech acts of Adrian Grenier, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Jane Fonda and take 100 %, 93,8 % and 90,9 % respectively, while Al Gore uses no declarations within the studied period of June-August 2021. The table shows that representatives are used to shape the tweets by Al Gore (40,0 %) and Mark Ruffalo (14,7 %). Expressive

single speech acts are identified in the utterances of Al Gore (40,0 %) and Mark Ruffalo (8,8 %) only. Directives are represented by 4 posts of Mark Ruffalo which makes 11,8 % of his total tweets within the selected period. The examples of commissives are seen in Mark Ruffalo's post (2,9 %) and Al Gore's post (20,0 %). Thus, declarations make 71,8% of the posts on environmental topics uttered in the tweets of selected public figures.



Figure 1. Al Gore's thread of tweets (complex speech act)

The next step in our research was to define the combined speech acts of various types. As was mentioned above, any tweet could be a single speech act or consist of a combination of different speech acts, so we have also defined the latter ones, traced their nature, and analysed the most frequent of them to see the dynamics of the utterances' change.

The results obtained from the qualitative and quantitative analysis of combined speech acts in public figures' Twitter utterances are summarised in Table 4. The most frequent 2-componental combined speech act is a representative+directive one used in utterances of Mark Ruffalo (71,4 %), Al Gore (50,0 %), and Adrian Grenier (100,0 %), and taking up 26,3 % of all combined speech acts. What stands out in the table is that the second leading type is a representative + commissive one, used only in Leonardo DiCaprio's tweets that also accounts for 42,1 % of his combined speech acts totally as well as constitutes 21,1% of all chosen public figures' speech acts of this type.

The following 2-componental combination is a representative+expressive speech act which is not as frequent as the previous ones and is only used twice in general: by Leonardo DiCaprio (5,3 % of his combined speech acts) and by Al Gore (12,5 % of his combined speech acts). Al Gore's tweet on one of the pipeline's cancellation is a good illustration of this case: "*Byhalia Pipeline canceled! Congrats to @MemphisCAP_org & the community of SW Memphis who made their voices heard to stop this reckless, racist ripoff!*". The first part contains a representative speech act introduced by an assertive statement '*Byhalia Pipeline canceled!*' in combination with an expressive speech act of congratulation in its second part with the initial word '*congrats*' showing it.

Table 3

Distribution of single speech act types in detail

	Dec		Rep		Exp		Dir		Com		Total	
	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%
LeonardoDiCaprio	15	93,8%	1	6,3%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	16	100,0%
Jane Fonda	10	90,9%	1	9,1%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	11	100,0%
Mark Ruffalo	21	61,8%	5	14,7%	3	8,8%	4	11,8%	1	2,9%	34	100,0%
Al Gore	0	0,0%	2	40,0%	2	40,0%	0	0,0%	1	20,0%	5	100,0%
Adrian Grenier	5	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	5	100,0%
TOTAL	51	71,8%	9	12,7%	5	7,0%	4	5,6%	2	2,8%	71	100,0%

One more example of combined speech acts represented in the table is a 3-componental representative+directive+commissive speech act used by two public figures: Jane Fonda (33,3 % of her combined speech acts) and Leonardo DiCaprio (5,3 % of his combined speech acts). The remaining variations of 3-componental speech acts were mainly rare cases

and only used once by some of public figures under analysis (the same result is represented by the rest of combined speech acts, with the percentage shown in column 'Others' of Table 4). As can be seen from Table 1.2 (above), there were found 9 examples of combined speech acts with three components in the analyzed data.

Distribution of combined speech act types in detail

	Rep+Dir		Rep+Com		Rep+Exp		Rep+Dir+Com		Others		Total	
	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%
Leonardo DiCaprio	0	0,0%	8	42,1%	1	5,3%	1	5,3%	9	47,4%	19	100,0%
Jane Fonda	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	1	33,3%	2	66,7%	3	100,0%
Mark Ruffalo	5	71,4%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	2	28,6%	7	100,0%
Al Gore	4	50,0%	0	0,0%	1	12,5%	0	0,0%	3	37,5%	8	100,0%
Adrian Grenier	1	100,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	1	100,0%
TOTAL	10	26,3%	8	21,1%	2	5,3%	2	5,3%	16	42,1%	38	100,0%

In this research we also analyzed the reactions to public figures' tweets to see what *perlocutionary effect* they might have had on the audience. Three types of reactions existing on Twitter were considered: *replies*, *quote tweets*, and *likes*. They are supposed to be representative of the addressees' reactions, with *likes* being the most illustrative in this case, because replies and quote tweets may contain both support and criticism, while likes are created "to show the appreciation for a Tweet" (Twitter Help Center, 2021). Beside that, *like* is the fastest response and the least 'energy-consuming' action of a social network user.

The current study found that there were almost the same environmental topics leading in all three types of responses (*replies*, *quote tweets*, and *likes*) thus being supported by the readers of each public figure's Twitter the most. As Fig. 2 demonstrates, the significant perlocutionary effect was produced by the following most *liked* topics:

- 'Climate Funding' (by Mark Ruffalo);
- 'Endangered/Rare Species' (by Leonardo DiCaprio);
- 'Line 3 Pipeline' (by Jane Fonda);
- 'Drought in America' (by Al Gore);
- '52Hz Whale' (by Adrian Grenier).

A possible explanation for this choice of topics might be that they all are close to the potential readers of the discussed public figures' tweets. Although not all of them are local (American), they still raise awareness of the issue and elicit response from conscious citizens of their country and the planet.

While studying this parameter, we have found that the single most striking observation to emerge from the data comparison was Al Gore's tweet on 'Climate change crisis' which superseded the 'Drought in America' topic from undisputed leaders of reader's responses in the category of quote tweets.

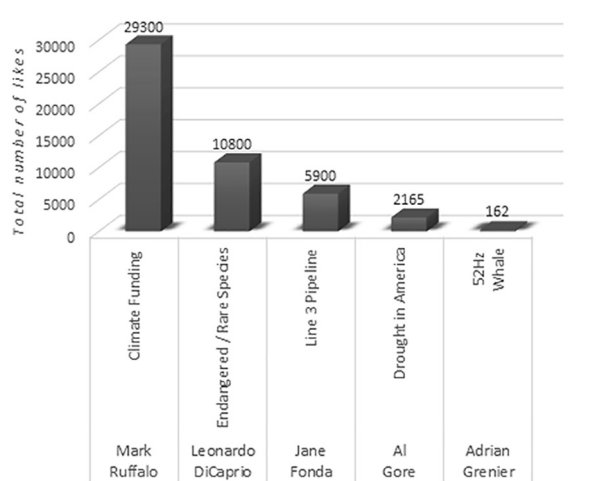


Figure 2. Audience likes count

Conclusions and Perspectives

The main goal of the current study was to research public figures utterances occurring in media discourse, particularly on Twitter, visualise their illocutionary force, and estimate perlocutionary effect. Thus, it was proven that public figures we studied prefer declarations among the single speech

acts. Nevertheless, representatives+directives as well as representatives+commissives are the most used two-component speech acts preferred by the public figures for delivering messages on environmental issues. Additionally, this study identified the meaning of a complex speech act within the framework of Twitter discourse.

The following limitations were found in the process of data analysis: noisiness of data (the corpus has to be compiled from the environmental topics exclusively, which may be ingrained into tweets covering some other issues), lack of environmental topics in media discourse studies.

This research does not cover all of the aspects of speech acts. It only focuses on the types

of the speech acts on environmental topics viewed from a pragmatic perspective. The question raised by this study can be examined from the multimodality approach. Since the perlocutionary effect was counted by the number of likes only, further work needs to be done to interpret the perlocutionary effect of retweets and quote tweets, and define how to estimate quote tweets with negative comments.

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