

Illocutionary Acts of Environmental Persuasion in U.S. Online Newspaper Opinion Articles

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Abstract

Persuasion, especially in written form, has been acknowledged by scholars as difficult. Success in its attempt requires complex use of, among others, pragmatics. Persuasive texts have therefore been highly researched using the speech act theory. However, a research gap existed for a study of illocutionary acts in newspaper opinion articles. To fill the gap, the current study did a qualitative textual analysis on 10 U.S. online newspaper opinion articles that talk about climate change. The analysis was conducted to discover types of illocutionary acts and persuasive strategies the writers use to successfully persuade readers. It was then found that the writers predominantly performed assertives. The second most frequently used were directives. The most preferred subtypes under these categories were, among others, informing, urging, assuring, and demanding. These preferences further revealed the writers' persuasive strategies. The strategies were as follows: being highly implicit, being occasionally explicit, giving more information about the issue, conveying certainty and uncertainty, arousing fear, also creating a sense of urgency. These acts and strategies, according to existing theories, could increase the texts' persuasiveness. Hence, this study establishes that when used in persuasive texts, the previously mentioned illocutionary acts and strategies can help writers to attain persuasion.

Keywords: illocutionary act types, persuasive strategies, textual analysis

Introduction

Persuasive attempts can be found abundantly in both spoken and written forms. Through speeches or texts, persuaders try to convince their addressees to change their opinions, attitudes, or behavior. Some examples are political speeches, sermons, promotional leaflets, television advertisements, newspaper editorials, public health campaigns or even Facebook posts. In short, persuasion is inescapable in daily life. However, achieving persuasion is challenging or difficult. People are not easy to get persuaded by influence attempts, whether explicit or implicit. Such efforts, according to some scholars, could only result in minimal effect (Fransen, Smit, & Verlegh, 2015; Woodward & Denton, 2014).

Persuasion success is even harder to achieve when attempts to persuade are made in written forms. In written persuasion, an audience is absent. A writer therefore cannot make a real-time adjustment to the audience's verbal or non-verbal responses. Such constraint makes spoken or face-to-face persuasion to be considered more effective in changing people's minds or bringing about compliance than is written persuasion. Speech has been found to be able to produce stronger persuasive effects than writing. In view of that, Newell, Beach, Smith, and Va der Heide (2011) recognize the need for the use of complex language in writing persuasive texts (pp. 125-126). Due to this fact, Mills and Dooley (2014) discovered that

middle year (Year 6) students in Australia had difficulty when writing expositions. Newell, et al. further acknowledge that teaching persuasive writing poses difficulties for teachers.

As persuasion success entails the use of complex language, persuasive texts have been extensively studied using theories of pragmatics, particularly speech acts. Based on the theory, when a writer is uttering, for instance, a declarative sentence, s/he is performing a locutionary act. Then, as the writer intends such utterance to have a certain function or force (e.g. stating, inviting, requesting, warning, etc.), a second act, i.e. illocutionary act, is simultaneously carried out. Additionally, by committing these two acts, the writer is also performing a perlocutionary act, that is, the bringing about of consequences or effects on readers (e.g. persuading, inspiring, convincing, and so on). Since persuasion emphasizes free choice and works rather to encourage than to force an individual to share the persuader's viewpoint, perlocutionary act is less likely to be the subject of investigation in speech act studies.

In existing research, researchers tend to focus on illocutionary acts. Some attempted to identify types of illocutionary acts that prevail in written persuasion. Such purpose was achieved by studying airline slogans (Arrosid & Munandar, 2018) and by conducting a comparative study of British and Romanian advertisements (Guga-Cotea, 2014). Other studies aimed to identify the patterns of illocutionary acts found in online fast food commercials (Khalis, 2017) and newspaper/magazine adverts (Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015). To get more insight as to how advertisers use illocutionary acts to achieve persuasion, two other studies analyzed illocutionary act features of Nigerian advertisements. Peter and Duro-

Bello (2014) studied Pentecostal gospel program advertising, while Olamide and Segun (2014) examined editorial comments of TELL Magazine.

The above review of previous studies suggested that little attention has been accorded to the illocutionary acts present in newspaper opinion articles. These acts were performed in the opinion section of a newspaper with the purpose of convincing readers of certain viewpoints on current issues or moving them to action. They could have the potential to be persuasive and impactful as opinion articles are aimed at a wide audience and have been regarded as one of the most persuasive writing in the world (Reah, 1998). Besides, they are deemed worthy of further analysis because the language of opinion articles have been regarded as a good source to study persuasive language in newspapers (Breuer, Napthine, & O'Shea, 2008). Yet, to date, these illocutionary acts have been relatively underexplored.

Recently, many opinion articles contain persuasion on environmental issues, particularly on climate change. Climate change has become an urgent issue globally because some of its catastrophic impacts are happening much faster than was first predicted by the scientists. Extreme weather events like storms, heatwaves, droughts, floods and fires have become more frequent worldwide. Moreover, there have been some major and discernible impacts of climate change on health as well. As a result, according to *ABC News*, calls for climate action have been intensified (Willis, 2019). Globally, politicians, scientists, activists, journalists, authors, scholars, etc. try to shape public opinion on the issue and further motivate people to take action. They do so, among others, by writing opinion articles and getting them published in major daily

newspapers, printed or online. In the texts, they address the causes of climate change and persuade people to mitigate such problems through both personal and collective efforts.

However, persuading public to take actions to prevent or mitigate the impact of climate change seemed difficult. Despite the frequent publication of newspaper opinion articles that highlight the issue, global warming has been accelerating faster than predicted and global carbon-dioxide emissions have been on the rise. In fact, carbon dioxide levels have hit record high in May 2019 (NOAA Headquarters, 2019). Evidently, people are still reluctant to change their polluting lifestyles. The number of cars on the roads has increased and many countries continued to rely on fossil fuels to produce electricity. At the same time, the destruction rate of carbon-rich tropical forests in Indonesia, Brazil, and Argentina has increased rapidly (Picheta, 2018). Furthermore, according to a Gallup survey in 2015, a great number of Americans continued to have low levels of concern about climate change or global warming. Out of more than 1,000 adults surveyed, only 32% stated they were extremely worried about the phenomenon. A larger portion of the public (45%) said they only worried a little or were not concerned at all (GALLUP, 2016). Similarly, the European Social Survey (ESS), which did a survey to 44,387 people in 23 European countries, suggested that just over a quarter (28%) of the Europeans said that they were deeply worried about the changing climate (Grover, 2018).

Review of Related Literature

Identifying Illocutionary Acts

Speech act theorists have suggested some differentiations that need to be made in identifying illocutionary acts. According to

Interestingly, in the US, mass media seemed to be able to induce attitude change. In 2016, the Gallup survey showed that the Americans have become more concerned about climate change or global warming. A total of 37% of those polled stated they worried a great deal about the phenomenon. This was a five-percentage point increase from 2015. There was also a four percent increase in the number of the Americans who had a fair amount of concern. On the other hand, the number of people who did not worry or only worried a little had decreased nine percent to 36% (GALLUP, 2016). This rise in concern might be triggered by the mass media, including newspapers. In 2015 and beyond, many major newspapers in the US contained opinion articles and editorials that addressed the climate change issue. As a part of media content, these articles were deemed able to influence the Americans to have certain feelings towards the issue (Adams, 2015). They have also been acknowledged to have the significant potential to stimulate and call for public action on climate change (Martyniak, 2014).

In view of the above, to fill the gap in the literature, the present study would like to investigate illocutionary acts in U.S. newspaper opinion articles that talk about climate change or global warming. The articles were published in four online sites of U.S. major newspapers, which were ranked among the top 25 U.S. newspapers by digital traffic and top 10 daily newspapers in Florida by circulation (Barthel, 2015; Cision Media Research, 2016). The news sites were *USATodayco.*, *LATimes.com*, *SeattleTimes.com*, and *MiamiHerald.com*.

Searle, an illocutionary act should first and foremost be distinguished from an utterance's propositional or semantic content (Ifantidou, 2001). The propositional content

refers to what is conveyed by an utterance, while the illocutionary act signifies the action it performs. Next, Searle also distinguishes between illocutionary meaning and literal meaning. The illocutionary meaning of an utterance is not directly related to its literal meaning (Oishi, 2011).

Accordingly, Oishi equates understanding an illocutionary act with recognizing the writer's mind or inner psychological state. She explained that in producing an utterance, a writer usually has a certain intention in his/her mind. Instead of literal meaning or semantic content, an analysis of illocutionary act must capture such intention. In view of this, illocutionary acts can be defined as the type of functions that writers intend to fulfill or the actions they aim to accomplish when producing utterances. Examples of such functions are making a claim, a warning, a request etc.

Subsequently, readers are expected to make some interpretations to understand what types of illocutionary acts writers intend to perform in uttering certain sentences. This is because an utterance will potentially perform more than one illocutionary act, yet writers usually intend to convey only one message to the readers (Allan, 2010). Besides that, illocutionary acts have been regarded as "non-communicated acts" (Blakemore, 1992, p. 94). This definition suggests that readers must make interpretations to identify the writers' intention and the illocutionary act types.

In making such inferences or interpretations, syntactic, semantic, and morphological or lexical features of an utterance can provide essential information (Van Dijk, 1977). The syntactic references include sentence forms (declarative, interrogative, imperative), syntactic functions (subject, object, etc.), tense and/or aspect. The semantic features consist of

denotation of speech participants, states, events, actions, modalities, and so on. Further, explicit performatives and word choices fall into the category of morphological or lexical aspects (p. 225).

Contextual clues are also determinants of the actual illocutionary act performed in an utterance (Ifantidou, 2001). According to Fetzer (2004), these clues can be in the form of linguistic, cognitive and/or extra-linguistic materials. If the clues are language materials, e.g. preceding and/or following utterances, they are classified as linguistic context. If the contextual information is in the form of cognitive materials, e.g. general world knowledge, factual assumptions, propositions, and so on, it can be categorized as cognitive context. The other type of context, i.e. social context, includes extra-linguistic materials such as discourse participants, also physical surroundings including time and location.

Illocutionary Act Types

As a basis for an analysis of illocutionary acts, Searle (1979) developed a classification of different functions or actions that might be performed in utterances. He selected four features of illocutionary act as criteria of classification. The first feature is the act's illocutionary point, which corresponds to the characteristic aim or purpose of each illocutionary type. This point or purpose determines the second feature, that is, the direction of fit. The third feature is the propositional content, which refer to the content of the illocutionary act. The last is the expressed psychological states or sincerity conditions.

Based on the above-mentioned features, Searle divides illocutionary acts into five types, four of which are considered communicative. The first type is assertives, which include utterances that state what the writer believes to be the case. The second

category is directives, which consist of utterances that attempt to get readers to do certain actions. The other two categories are commissive and expressive. The former refers to utterances that commit one to doing something, while the latter are comprised of expressions that are used to express the writer's feelings.

Van der Beek (2009) aimed at a more detailed taxonomy of illocutionary acts. Similar to Searle, the taxonomy was created based on illocutionary point, direction of fit, propositional content and sincerity conditions of each illocutionary act type. To be more detailed, he added the mode of achievement, preparatory conditions and the degree of strength of the sincerity conditions. The mode of achievement describes the particular way, if any, in which the illocutionary point of an illocutionary act must be achieved. The preparatory conditions refer to a set of presuppositions or contextual conditions that must be met for the illocutionary act to be successfully performed. The degree of strength of the sincerity conditions is the dimension of strength of the expressed psychological states. Then, Vanderveken performed six types of operations. These operations consist in imposing a new special mode of achievement, increasing or decreasing the degree of strength, and adding new propositional content, preparatory or sincerity conditions.

As a result, under each category, Vanderveken could list all other illocutionary acts that are more complex than the four basic types. His list of assertives consists of illocutionary act verbs as follows: *assert*, *claim*, *affirm*, *declare*, *suggest*, and so on. He listed other verbs such as *direct*, *request*, *ask*, *urge*, *encourage*, etc. under the category of directive acts. His list of commissive acts include *commit*, *promise*, *guarantee*, *assure*,

and so on. Verbs that represent the writer's feelings or attitudes like *approve*, *praise*, *complain*, *blame*, etc. are put under the category of expressives. Later, each illocutionary act in this list is described in terms of its features. In the description, the act of demanding, for instance, is specified as to tell the reader to do it, while expressing a strong will (for a complete description, see Vanderveken, 2009, pp. 169-219).

Persuasion and Illocutionary Acts

Persuasion has always been characterized by its goal or purpose. The goal or purpose to affect the feelings, attitudes or viewpoints of an individual or group of individuals on an issue and to make them perform an action (Salmi-Tolonen, 2005). To achieve such goal or purpose, a writer employs a variety of efforts, commonly known as persuasive strategies. These strategies could be identified from, among others, the types of illocutionary acts present in the text. This is because persuasion, according to Virtanen and Halmari (2005), involves linguistic behavior or choices. In this case, to attain persuasion, the writer will choose the most appropriate and effective types of acts.

Features That Contribute to Persuasiveness

The choice of persuasive strategies or illocutionary act types can be made by considering features that contribute to persuasiveness. Some of those features are explicitness and implicitness, certainty and uncertainty, information giving, urgency stressing, and fear or guilt appeals.

Explicitness and implicitness.

According to Miller (2015), the strength or intensity of language, which can be conveyed with explicitness and implicitness, has an effect on persuasiveness. In his theory, Miller suggested that explicit or high-controlling language tends to stimulate high levels of

resistance to persuasion. This is because such language is strongly directive in nature and hence threatens autonomy. Moreover, it makes plain the source's intent. Implicit language, on the contrary, can generate low levels of resistance and thus increase persuasiveness. It is because, as stated by Miller, implicit persuasion can disguise the writer's intention to persuade. Besides, it is autonomy-supportive and less forceful. It does not pose a threat to readers' freedom. As a matter of fact, readers are encouraged to draw their own inferences and implications.

Different from Miller, Halmari and Virtanen (2005) introduced the idea of a "balancing act" (p. 230). In this concept, persuasion will likely to be successful if there is a balance between explicitness and implicitness. In particular, writers need to code their persuasive messages explicitly to alter or maintain certain behaviors, yet not so explicitly as to dispel readers. This balancing act is carried out to address the strengths and weaknesses of explicit and implicit persuasion. Explicit messages are prone to resistance, but they are easier to comprehend and can sometimes produce positive emotional reactions. The implicit ones can reduce the "levels of resistance", but are more ambiguous and thus more difficult to understand (Miller, 2015).

Certainty and uncertainty. Despite the intensity of language, Tormala (2016) found that expressing certainty and uncertainty can also affect persuasiveness. In Tormala's point of view, certainty can persuade people to "think differently, make different decisions, form different evaluations, and act in different ways..." (p. 6). On other hand, although it is certainty that can shape people's thoughts, attitudes and behaviors, expressing uncertainty is also deemed persuasive. Tormala found that if people feel uncertain, they are more engaged

or occupied with persuasive messages and have a greater desire for information. In this condition, utterances in a persuasive text can have greater persuasive effects. Accordingly, Tormala asserted that an optimal persuasive strategy should project both certainty and uncertainty (p. 9).

Information giving. In their study, Dotzour, Houston, Manuba, Schulz, and Smith (2002) found that information giving can increase persuasiveness (as cited in Neelima & Reddy, 2014). Particularly, they discovered that a lack of information can discourage most people to participate actively in public action. People are more likely to change their behavior or action if they have sufficient information about the issue at hand. In view of these, information is deemed vital for persuading people to take a certain stand on an issue and take action (p. 5).

Urgency stressing. In some cases, persuasive attempts may not be successful because the issue or problem discussed. In the case of climate change, such efforts may fail because people tend to see the problem as distant and occurring mostly in the future or to other people (Barasi, 2018). In view of this, following Rank (1984), Gambrell and Gibbs (2017) noted that stressing the urgency of an issue also contributes to persuasiveness. In this technique, a persuader emphasizes the urgency of the matter and encourages the addressee to take immediate action accordingly.

Fear or guilt appeals. According to Perloff (2017), fear or guilt appeals can also make a piece of text persuasive. Fear appeals are made by describing negative effects that will occur if one does not act in accordance with the message recommendations (p. 389). Alternatively, a persuader can create guilt appeals by telling people that they have failed to do what they should do. Citing

Mongeau (1998), Perloff noticed that persuasive messages containing such types of appeal can change attitudes significantly. He therefore stated that arousing fear or guilt is a necessary and useful persuasive strategy (p. 388).

Purposes of the Study

Following the line of research, the present study was undertaken to identify types of illocutionary acts that were used to achieve persuasion in the selected newspaper opinion articles. To shed more light on how persuasion occurs in the articles, the illocutionary acts were not only classified

based on Searle's (1979) Taxonomy, but also based on Van der Veken's (2009) list of illocutionary act verbs. Additionally, the study also aimed to discover the opinion article writers' persuasive strategies by analyzing the types or features of illocutionary acts found in each article. Accordingly, two research questions guided the study: What types of illocutionary acts did the writers intend to perform through the utterances to persuade readers? What strategies, related to the type of illocutionary acts, did the writers use to achieve persuasion?

Methods

Research Design

This study was a qualitative textual analysis intended to investigate media texts. It was qualitative in nature as it aimed at analyzing a smaller number of texts in depth and detail. Then, following McKee (2003), the qualitative textual analysis was carried out by making "an educated guess" at some of the texts' possible meanings (as cited in Bainbridge, 2008, p. 224). In line with the purposes of the study, the educated guess was made by applying pragmatic theories, i.e. theories on speech acts. The theories include the concepts and taxonomies of illocutionary acts. In addition, since this study was also conducted to identify persuasive strategies, theories on persuasion were also employed as theoretical framework.

Source of Data, Data and Units of Analysis

The source of data for this textual analysis study was 10 opinion articles gathered from four online sites of U.S. leading newspapers. In general, these articles talked about climate change or global warming (see Appendix). Three of them (text 1, 4 and 5) addressed air pollution that has been known to contribute to climate change. In the articles, the writers tried to persuade readers to support laws or policies that have

been drafted or enacted to tackle the problem. The other three (text 3, 9 and 10) proposed some actions that need to be taken to stop climate change, like supporting the global agreement at UN Conference or working in a bipartisan manner. In one article (text 7), an Arctic activist tried to mitigate the impacts of climate change by encouraging readers to protect the Arctic. The remaining texts (text 2, 6 and 8) focused on the efforts to slow global warming. These articles attempted to convince readers to take certain actions, for instance, cutting carbon emissions.

All the above-mentioned texts contained utterances, which are referred to as locutionary acts in speech act terms. In a certain context, those utterances could be used to perform illocutionary acts of various types. Accordingly, the data of this study was utterances in the above-mentioned opinion articles that could be counted as performing certain types of illocutionary acts.

The units of analysis in this research were utterances. Following Hurford, Heasley, and Smith (2007), these denoted a sentence and sequence of sentences that were written by the opinion article in a certain context and thus could be recognized as performing a certain type of illocutionary act.

In addition, since an illocutionary act might be performed in more than one utterance, the performance of a single illocutionary act type in a series of sentences was counted as one occurrence in the analysis.

Data Collection

The data for this research were collected from four newspaper online sites, namely *USAToday.com*, *LATimes.com*, *SeattleTimes.com*, and *MiamiHerald.com*. The articles were selected using two predetermined criteria. The first criterion dealt with the topic, while the second was related to the goal or purpose of persuasion. Based on the first criterion, the data for this study would include opinion articles that addressed the causes of climate change or global warming (e.g. pollution, deforestation, etc.) and proposed solutions to solve the problems (e.g. emission reduction, renewable energy use, recycling, etc.). Then, in accordance with the second criterion, the selected texts would be those that were written to influence readers' feelings, attitudes or viewpoints on the aforesaid issues or to make them perform certain actions to resolve the issues.

To get the most relevant articles, the data collection was carried out in two steps. First, in each newspaper online site's search engine, some environmental words and phrases such as climate change, global warming, pollution, and so on were used as the search terms. This was in line with the first criterion. Next, the articles resulted from the online searches were reviewed based on the second criteria, that is, whether the text has a persuasive purpose or not. After performing these steps, a total of 10 articles were chosen to be analyzed further.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research was conducted by adapting Creswell's (2014) qualitative data analysis steps and

Bainbridge's (2008) textual analysis model. It consisted of five stages, namely organizing and preparing the data, reading each text, dividing the texts into units of analysis, assigning illocutionary act types, and identifying the persuasive strategies. The first step involved retyping all articles resulting from data collection and labeling them as Text 1, Text 2, Text 3, etc. Each utterance was also numbered for easy referencing. In the second step, the main idea and specific purpose of each text was identified and restated or paraphrased. Then, the texts were divided into units of analysis or units of meaning.

After dividing the texts into units of analysis, two primary steps in the illocutionary act analysis were carried out. In the fourth step, the utterances were analyzed and categorized in terms of the illocutionary acts being performed. In this step, Searle's (1979) taxonomy and Van der Veken's (2009) list of illocutionary act verbs were applied. The taxonomy and list, which include description of each illocutionary act type, were used as criteria in the categorization. Besides, a checklist was also developed to find the predominant types of act. The results were used in the fifth step to identify the writers' persuasive strategies. As mentioned, the strategies could be identified from the types or features of illocutionary acts used in each text. In the same step, theories of persuasion were also used to discover the strategies. The findings from these steps were then triangulated. At the end, conclusions and suggestions were drawn based on those findings.

Triangulation

To increase the validity of the findings, investigator triangulation was employed. In this study, two native speakers of English became the triangulators. Both of them were Master's candidates and have been teaching

English for more than two years. In the triangulation process, due to a busy schedule, the first triangulator could only analyze four texts, namely text 3, 5, 6 and 8. The other six texts (i.e. text 1, 2, 4, 7, 9 and 10) were analyzed by the second triangulator. To confirm the findings, both triangulators were given the taxonomy and list, which contained

Finding

After analyzing the texts using the taxonomies, this study found that, to call for actions to stop or mitigate climate change, the writers performed more than one illocutionary act in each article. In total, there

descriptions of each type of illocutionary act. Then, they also received brief explanations about the theories and data analysis procedures. They further read the texts and assigned the illocutionary act type for each utterance. When differences were found, the triangulation results would be used to enrich the discussions of the findings.

were a total of 196 illocutionary acts. All four types of communicative illocutionary acts in Searle's taxonomy were present in the texts. Table 1 presents the number of occurrences and percentages for each type.

Table 1

Types of Illocutionary Acts Found in the Selected Articles

Illocutionary Act Type	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
Directives	67	34.18
Assertives	123	62.76
Commissives	3	1.53
Expressives	3	1.53
Total	196	100.00

The analysis results presented in

Table 1 shows the predominance of assertive illocutionary acts with 123 occurrences (62.76%). This finding suggests that the opinion article writers had preferred to spur climate action by stating what they believe to be the case. In this case, to move readers into action, the writers chose to make assertions which do not impose any obligations on themselves or their readers. An example can be found in Text 4. To get readers' support for the adoption of a clean-fuels standard, Kenworthy, Frumkin, and Klein (2015) made the following assertions: "The concept is proven. The problem is

urgent." In these utterances, the adjectives "proven" and "urgent" suggested the illocutionary act type. They signified what the writers believed to be the case concerning the standard and the problem of climate change.

The second most frequently performed type of illocutionary act was directives, which accounted for 34.18% (67 occurrences) of the total number of acts. Evidently, to achieve their persuasive goals, the writers not only made assertions about a state of affairs in the world. They at times also expressed their desire or wish for readers

to do something. In other words, they sometimes put readers under an obligation to perform certain actions. One writer who did so was John Kerry in Text 1. As a way to address climate change, the writer asked readers to support the clean energy policy and to speak out for its implementation. He did so by performing directives in the following utterances: “This Earth Day, I ask Americans and concerned citizens everywhere to crank up the volume... Take action and demand action on climate change” (Kerry, 2015). In these sentences, the verb “ask” and the imperative mood indicated the illocutionary act type.

Table 1 also reveals that commissives and expressives were the least preferred types of act in persuasive articles that promote action on climate change. In their efforts to persuade readers, the writers rarely produced utterances that commit themselves to future action or create an obligation on them. They also seldom expressed their feelings or psychological states to convince readers of their point of view. Thus, in the articles, both commissives and expressives only accounted for 3.06% of the total number of acts.

Further, as mentioned previously, Vanderveken (2009) had listed several illocutionary act verbs under each type of act proposed by Searle (1979) and described their features. The analysis based on this classification reveals that, under each category, the opinion article writers had preferences over some verbs with certain features. Table 2 indicates the writers’ preferences towards several illocutionary act verbs under the category of assertives.

As seen in Table 2, under the category of assertives, the act of informing accounted for the highest proportion with 24 occurrences (19.51%). This result suggests that, to attain their persuasive goals, the

writers preferred to make an assertion or a series of assertions with the preparatory condition that readers do not have any knowledge about the thing informed. In the context of climate change, the thing informed might include the effects of the changing climate on health, mitigation measures, new energy policies, etc. An example of this was found in Text 8. To convince readers to mitigate short lived climate pollutants or SLCPs, the writers performed the act of informing in the following utterance: “These pollutants are about 25 to 4,000 times more potent warmers than carbon dioxide, but they remain in the atmosphere from mere days in the case of carbon soot to 15 years in the case of HFCs” (Ramanathan & Press, 2015). In this utterance, the preparatory condition that readers did not already know about the pollutants was indicated by the social context. At the time of utterance, SLCPs were just discovered.

Besides the act of informing, to promote climate actions, the writers also considered that it is important to assert some propositions about such actions. These propositions were put forward with the intention of convincing readers who had doubts about their truths. An example of such propositions was found in Text 10. In the proposition, the writer, Carlos Curbelo, wanted to motivate readers, particularly the Floridians, to address climate change in a bipartisan manner by assuring them that South Florida was vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. He did so by uttering, “Rising sea levels and the erosion of our coastal communities have made it abundantly clear that South Florida is at the frontline of climate change” (Curbelo, 2015). His intention of convincing readers about the truth of the proposition was suggested by the use of the phrase “abundantly clear”. The same (perlocutionary) intention was also

present in the other six texts. Thus, under the category of assertives, the act of assuring was the second most frequently performed

illocutionary act, accounting for 11.38% (14 occurrences).

Table 2

Types of Assertive Illocutionary Acts Found in the Selected Articles

Illocutionary Act Verb	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
Inform	24	19.51
Assure	14	11.38
Warn	12	9.76
Describe	12	9.76
Claim	10	8.13
Report	10	8.13
Predict	8	6.50
Criticize	7	5.69
Praise	4	3.25
Negate	3	2.44
Affirm	3	2.44
Remind	3	2.44
Suggest	2	1.63
Alert	2	1.63
Reveal	2	1.63
Acknowledge	2	1.63
Declare	1	0.81
Postulate	1	0.81
Forewarn	1	0.81
Sustain	1	0.81
Complain	1	0.81
Total	123	100.00

Table 2 also indicated that the writers frequently made assertions with the propositional content that is future to the time of utterance. In these acts, they mentioned

what would happen if readers did not take actions to stop climate change or global warming. Moreover, they also suggested that it is still possible to avoid such disasters if

appropriate actions were carried out. One example of such acts was identified in Text 2. To call for real action on global warming, Lowenthal and Shank (2015) asserted what would happen in America's coastlines if no climate actions were taken. They used the first conditional with *unless* in the following utterance: "Floods will destroy America's coasts unless we fight climate change." This type of act was classified by Vanderveken (2009) as an act of warning. In the selected articles, it was the third most used illocutionary act under assertives, accounting for 9.76% (12 occurrences) of the total number of acts. The same number of occurrences was found for the act of describing. As shown in Table 2, there were 12 occurrences (9.76%) in which the writers provided more complete and relevant information on certain topics to add persuasiveness. That information could be in the form of adjectives (e.g. "dire", "disturbing", "dramatic", etc.), definitions (of a new policy or plan), etc. The following utterance taken from Text 7 is an example: "The icy top of our planet is suffering effects of climate change more severely than elsewhere, with dramatic ecological and cultural consequences" (Steiner, 2015). In this utterance, the verb "is suffering" and adverb "more severely" signified the act of describing. The verb and adverb gave more information to readers about the situation in the Arctic. Such information was considered relevant by the writer to get readers to protect the Arctic.

Similarly, under the category of directives, there were some illocutionary act verbs with certain features that were used more often than others. Table 3 specifies the

number of occurrences and percentages for each illocutionary act verb that belongs to the class of directives such as *encourage*, *forbid*, *warn*, and *advise*.

As seen in Table 3, among several verbs under directives, the act of urging accounted for the highest percentage with 32.83% (22 occurrences). Evidently, to get readers to do something, the writers preferred to advocate a certain course of action with some strength or sense of urgency. In the utterances, they used words like "time running out", "it is time", "crucial" or "imperative" and modal auxiliaries such as "must" or "have to" to convey the strength or urgency. One writer who did so was Cava (2015) in Text 9. To get readers to tackle climate change, she wrote, "Confront climate change now, not later." In this illocutionary act, the adverb "now" and phrase "not later" indicated the strength or urgency of the advocated action.

The results in Table 3 also show a significant preponderance of the act of demanding with 19.40% (13 occurrences). Similar to an act of urging, these acts have a high degree of strength. The writers expressed their strong desire for readers to take climate actions with no option of refusal. To express the high degree of strength, they used, among others, the modal verb "must", verb "need", and adjective "vital". An example of this can be found in Text 3. To get readers to protect the Earth, the writers showed their strong will by uttering, "With our faith at the forefront, we must do what is necessary to protect and care for creation" (Schori, Eaton, Hiltz, & Johnson, 2015). In this utterance, the modal verb "must" be employed to show the high degree of strength in the writers' act of demanding.

Table 3

Types of Directive Illocutionary Acts Found in the Selected Articles

Illocutionary Act Verb	Occurrences	Percentage (%)
Urge	22	32.83
Demand	13	19.40
Encourage	7	10.45
Suggest	7	10.45
Propose	6	8.95
Forbid	3	4.48
Ask	2	2.99
Require	2	2.99
Warn	2	2.99
Question	1	1.49
Tell	1	1.49
Advise	1	1.49
Total	67	100.00

In addition to telling readers to do something, the writers also requested readers to do something and, at the same time, intended to inspire them with courage. They presupposed that taking action against climate change often involves courage. As a result, in the texts, there were seven occurrences (10.45%) in which the writers performed the act of encouraging. One of those occurrences was found in Text 5. After being blocked on imposing a carbon cap setting in the Legislature, the writer, Gov. Jay Inslee, tried to get public support. To achieve that, he performed the act of encouraging in the headline of his article as follows: “‘Fear mongers’ will not stop us from setting carbon cap” (Inslee, 2015). In this headline, the

phrase “Fear mongers” showed that the advocated course of action required courage, while the pronoun “us” signified the writer’s perlocutionary intention of inspiring readers with courage.

Next, the act of suggesting was present in the texts with the same number of occurrences and percentage as the act of encouraging, accounting for 10.45% (7 occurrences) of the total number of directive acts. In opposite to the act of demanding, in these acts, the writers only made a weak attempt to get readers to take certain actions. One writer who made such attempt was A.J. Kitt in Text 6. To get readers to support a policy that would slow global warming, Kitt performed the act of suggesting by uttering,

“For the sake of our communities, our children and our livelihoods, let’s celebrate the Clean Power Plan as states implement it over the next two years” (Kitt, 2015). In this illocutionary act, the writer chose to use “let’s”, which is the short form of *let us*, to convey the weak degree of strength in an act of suggesting.

On the other hand, several illocutionary act verbs under the category of commissives were rarely performed by the writers. There were only two occurrences (66.67%) in which the writer performed the act of committing him/herself to doing something. Besides the act of committing (to doing something), there was one occurrence

(33.33%) in which the writer performed the act of guaranteeing (a proposition) or a conditional promise. All these occurrences were found in Text 1 and Text 5, which were written by government officials.

Similarly, some illocutionary act verbs under the category of expressives were only performed occasionally in the selected articles. Those illocutionary act verbs were approving and rejoicing. The act of approving or expressing approval toward a state of affairs or an action was only present in two utterances, accounting for 66.67% of the total number of expressives in the data. The act of rejoicing was only found in one utterance with a percentage of 33.33%.

Discussions

Types of Illocutionary Acts

Regarding the first research question, the findings firstly showed that the opinion article writers had mostly used assertives to persuade readers (see Table 1). This finding was consistent with the findings made by Olamide and Segun (2014), Simon and Dejica-Cartis (2015), also Arrosid and Munandar (2018). In these previous and current studies, assertives might be preferred because, as non-directive acts, these acts are more implicit and autonomy supportive. They could make the writers’ persuasive attempts or intention less obvious. Besides, they are less forceful and therefore do not pose a threat to readers’ freedom. According to Miller (2015), these features may reduce the levels of resistance in persuasion. This implied that the high use of assertive acts in the articles might help the writers to achieve persuasion success.

Secondly, under assertives, the results of the analysis had also revealed four illocutionary act types that were predominantly present in the articles (see Table 2). One of them was the act of informing, which got the highest percentage

(19.51%). This high percentage for the act of informing was consistent with what Simon and Dejica-Cartis (2015) found in their study on written advertisements. It was also in line with Neelima and Reddy’s (2014) theory that listed information as a behavior change variable. Further, the present study results extend those of previous studies by identifying other types of assertive acts that were preferred in environmental persuasion, i.e. describing, assuring, and warning. A possible reason for these preferences might be related to the features of those acts, which, according to some theories, can increase the texts’ persuasiveness. Similar to the act of informing, the act of describing contains information, which has been deemed important for promoting behavior change. The act of assuring conveys certainty that can shape readers’ views, attitudes, and behaviors. The act of warning contains a prediction of a misfortune that can arouse fear and motivates readers to take action.

Thirdly, the findings demonstrated that the writers sometimes employed directives to move readers to action (see Table 1). They sometimes told readers clearly and directly

what must be done and therefore made their persuasive intention clear. As a result, directives were the second most frequently used type of illocutionary act (see Table 1). This finding was in line with those of Simon and Dejica-Cartis (2015), also Arrosid and Munandar (2018). In these previous and present studies, the writers sometimes need to perform directives to overcome the weaknesses of assertive acts and to create positive emotional effects. Yet, the same finding did not emerge in Khalis' (2017) study on online fast food advertisements. In the study, directives were found as the most frequently used type of acts. This difference in result was possibly due to the fact that newspaper opinion articles are less intrinsically persuasive than advertisements or political speeches. Thus, it can be seen that the discourse features also dictated the choice of illocutionary act types.

Next, the findings extend those of earlier studies by identifying several illocutionary act verbs under directives that were frequently performed by the writers to add persuasiveness. Those verbs were urging, demanding, encouraging, and suggesting (see Table 3). This preference was in line with the existing theories on persuasive features. Based on Miller's (2015) theory about explicit language, the act of urging and demanding, which make use of modals such as *must* or *have to*, are easier to understand and can produce positive emotional effects. On the other hand, the use of weaker directives like the act of encouraging or suggesting, which provides self-determination and choice, can protect or restore readers' freedoms and thus reduce the resistance to persuasion.

Conversely, the results indicated that commissives were less preferred by the writers (see Table 1). This result was consistent with the results from previous

studies (Arrosid & Munandar, 2018; Khalis, 2017; Olamide & Segun, 2014). However, it contrasted with the findings of Peter and Duro-Bello (2014) who studied Pentecostal gospel program adverts. This was likely because the topic or issue being discussed influenced the choice of illocutionary act type. Peter and Duro-Bello discovered that commissives were favored when discussing religious issues. The performance of such illocutionary acts in religious program adverts could raise readers' expectations and then move them into action.

Finally, expressives were also found in a low percentage (1.53%). The relation between the topic or issue and the writers' preferences may also explain this result. Discussions on environmental issues, particularly on climate change, mostly require scientific or objective knowledge, while expressives has a subjective nature and thus cannot be verified (Capone, 2009). Due to this, this type of act might be less preferable in environmental persuasion. Further, the relation can also give reasons for the different result obtained by Olamide and Segun (2014). Olamide and Segun who studied editorial comments of a Nigerian magazine conversely discovered that the editorial board preferred to use expressives to change the readers' views on non-environmental issues like politics, economy, sports, etc.

Strategies to Achieve Persuasion

The writers' persuasive strategies could be identified from their illocutionary act performance. Thus, the second research question was addressed by reviewing the types of illocutionary acts present in the articles. The following were the writers' strategies to attain persuasion success.

Being highly implicit. In this strategy, the writers tried to disguise their persuasive intentions by employing less forceful or low-

controlling language. They encouraged readers to make their own interpretations by using language that promoted freedom of choice. In the texts, this strategy was evident from the proportion of assertives, commissives and expressives which outnumbered the proportion of directives (see Table 1). The use of this strategy was in line with Perloff (2017) and Miller (2015). In Perloff's view, forceful and controlling directives can produce resistance to persuasion. According to Miller, being highly implicit can reduce such resistance.

Being occasionally explicit. According to Miller, despite its helpfulness, being highly implicit can lead to ambiguity. This has also been confirmed by the triangulation of results, which yielded 18 differences for the analysis of assertives and only eight for directives. The call to action can therefore go unnoticed by readers. To avoid this, in the articles, the writers were occasionally being explicit in getting readers to do something. This strategy could be recognized from the number of directives, also strong directives in the texts. As seen in Table 1, directives were the second most frequently performed type of act. Moreover, of the 67 directives found in the data, 41 (61.19%) were strong directives (e.g. urging, demanding, requiring, etc.), which are more forceful and controlling than the weak ones. All these are in consonance with the idea of a "balancing act" (Halmari & Virtanen, 2005, p. 230). The idea suggests that, to achieve persuasion, writers should create a balance between explicitness and implicitness.

Giving more information about the issue. The writers indicated the use of this strategy when they predominantly performed illocutionary acts that give information to readers regarding the issue or subject of discussion. As seen in the results, of the 196 illocutionary acts found in the data, 65

(33.16%) contain such information. Examples of such acts were reporting, reminding, and revealing. Correspondingly, under assertives, the act of informing and describing, were found to be dominant (see Table 2). This information-giving strategy was consistent with the findings of Dotzour et al. (2002) as cited in Neelima and Reddy (2014). Dotzour et al. found information to be one of the behavior change variables in environmental persuasion.

Conveying certainty and uncertainty. Besides giving information, the writers also tried to achieve persuasion by conveying both certainty and uncertainty through their illocutionary acts. In the articles, there were 22 (11.22%) occurrences in which the writers performed the act of affirming, postulating, sustaining, assuring, committing (to something) and guaranteeing to express certainty. Similarly, there were 25 (12.76%) occurrences in which the acts of claiming, suggesting, and predicting were performed to show uncertainty. This persuasive tactic was in line with Tormala's (2016) concept of an "optimal persuasion strategy" (p. 9). According to Tormala, an optimal strategy would involve using uncertainty to make readers process information more deeply and certainty to promote actions.

Arousing fear. The other strategy that could be identified from the results was to arouse fear in the readers. The writers showed the use of this strategy when they performed illocutionary acts that contain threats or highlight possible dangers that would arise if readers do not implement the writers' recommendations. Those acts were the assertive act of predicting, warning, forewarning and alerting, also the directive act of warning. According to Perloff (2017), performing these fear-arousing acts might help the writers to attain persuasion. It is

because fear can trigger attitude change and motivate readers to take action.

Creating a sense of urgency. The last strategy was to create a sense of urgency. This strategy was evident from the proportion of the directive act of urging in the articles. Of the 67 directives found in the data, 22 (32.83%) used words such as “Now”, “urge”, “critical”, and so on to stress

Conclusions and Suggestions

As mentioned previously, due to the complexity of its language, persuasion has been extensively researched from a speech act perspective. A lot of research has been carried out to investigate illocutionary acts used for persuasion in both spoken and written texts. However, this study has been able to identify a research gap for the study of illocutionary acts in newspaper opinion articles. In the US, such articles seemed to be able to influence public views on one of the most challenging environmental issues, climate change. Thus, the present study sought to analyze the illocutionary acts that were present in 10 U.S. online newspaper opinion articles that discussed climate change or global warming. In particular, it aimed at exploring the types of illocutionary acts and persuasive strategies that were used by the writers to attain persuasion.

The results of the analysis revealed that, in the articles, some illocutionary act types were preferred more than others. Of Searle’s four main categories, the writers most frequently employed assertives to convince readers of their views and to spur them to action. In particular, they persuaded readers mostly by performing the act of informing, assuring, warning, and describing. Then, they also occasionally performed directives to reduce ambiguity. Among the subtypes of directives, the act of urging, demanding, suggesting, and encouraging were favored. On the contrary, the other two types of acts,

the urgency of the problem and spur readers into action. These illocutionary act performances can be considered an effective persuasive strategy as Barasi (2018) noted that the problem of climate change has been seen as distant by most people. Moreover, Rank (1984) has also mentioned urgency stressing as a factor that contributes to persuasiveness (Gambrill & Gibbs, 2017).

i.e. commissives and expressives, were rarely performed. These preferences were relevant to the nature of the topic or issue being discussed and also the discourse features. Moreover, they were also supported by previous research findings and theories about features that contribute to persuasiveness. This consistency suggested that when used in environmental persuasion or other persuasive texts, the prior mentioned illocutionary acts may increase the texts’ persuasiveness.

In terms of the strategy types, the study found that, to achieve persuasion, the writers employ at least six strategies. Those strategies were as follows: being highly implicit, being occasionally explicit, giving more information about the issue, conveying certainty and uncertainty, arousing fear, and creating a sense of urgency. These strategies were in line with the prevailing theories about features that affect persuasion. Hence, they can be considered as effective strategies for persuading readers on environmental issues or other difficult public issues.

The aforesaid findings could then have implications for other persuasive writers and teachers of writing. Other writers can perform the same types of illocutionary acts or implement the same strategies to persuade readers to, for example, reduce plastic waste or adopt a healthy lifestyle. Then, as newspaper opinion articles had been proved to contain effective persuasive strategies,

teachers can use them as models to teach students how to write persuasively.

Further, since the current study only focused on illocutionary acts, future study can examine perlocutionary acts or effects. These acts or effects can be observed from readers' comment section of an article, which

contain readers' opinions or views on the issue discussed in the article. The results from such study can be a great source of data to make stronger conclusions about types of illocutionary acts and strategies that are effective in enhancing persuasiveness.

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Appendix: The Data

Text	Title	Writer(s)	Publication	
			Date	Web Address
1	John Kerry: On Earth Day, time running out for climate change	John Kerry	April 22, 2015	USAToday.com
2	More record warmth means more flooding: Column	Alan Lowenthal, Michael Shank	January 16, 2015	USAToday.com
3	We must unite to safeguard God's creation: Column	Katharine J. Schori, Elizabeth Eaton, Fred Hiltz, Susan Johnson	September 8, 2015	USAToday.com
4	Guest: Adopting clean-fuels standard is a public-health imperative	Craig Kenworthy, Howard Frumkin, Renee Klein	January 8, 2015	SeattleTimes.com
5	Gov. Jay Inslee: 'Fear mongers' will not stop us from setting carbon cap	Jay Inslee	September 24, 2015	SeattleTimes.com
6	Olympic skier and dad: We have to address climate change	AJ Kitt	August 25, 2015	SeattleTimes.com
7	The Arctic's big year - save it now or be sorry later	Richard Steiner	March 17, 2015	LATimes.com
8	To help stop global warming, curb short-lived pollutants	Veerabhadran Ramanathan, Daniel Press	December 28, 2015	LATimes.com
9	Confront climate change now, not later	Daniella L. Cava	September 27, 2015	MiamiHerald.com
10	Climate change cannot be a partisan issue	Carlos Curbelo	October 24, 2015	MiamiHerald.com