

## A Comparison Between Trump's and Clinton's Commissive Speech Act in America's Presidential Campaign Speech

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### Abstract

This study aims to compare Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act which include its types and functions. Descriptive qualitative method is applied in this study. The data were analyzed by using commissive speech act instrument adapted from Searle and Vandervecken. The result shows that there are six types of commissive speech act used by Trump. They are promising, threatening, pledging, offering, refusing, and assuring, the functions of which are to give solution, to insult, to show care, to threaten, to encourage, and to convince. Meanwhile Clinton only used two types of commissives; promise and assure. These types have the functions to give solution, to show care, and to convince. Regarding their similarities, it is found that both of them used two similar commissives; promising and assuring. In addition, promising becomes the most dominant type found. They also use these speech acts to give solution, show care, and convince the audience. Meanwhile as for the differences, it is found that Trump used more types of commissive speech act rather than Clinton did. They are threatening, pledging, offering, and refusing. Trump also used more functions of his commissive speech act that are as threatening, insulting, and encouraging.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language is very important for human. It is used to interact and communicate with other people. Language is a common facility when two persons do an act of communication (Mujiyanto, 2011). They may express their feelings, ideas, and desires through language, either spoken or written (Mutmainnah and Sutopo, 2016).

One example of spoken language in communication is political speech. Political speech can be seen as a means of establishing and maintaining social relationships, expressing feelings, and selling ideas, policies and programs in any society. It is used by the politicians to communicate directly with the general public in order to convince them (Priyatmojo, 2012). Its period is usually held before the election happens. During this period, the candidates attract the voters by delivering issues happening in the country. They explain the problems that the country is facing and what they will do as solution to solve these problems.

Political speech becomes more vital for the election of the presidential seat since the issues that are delivered by the presidential candidates will be the main issues that are discussed in media. In case of Super Power country such as America, the speech will catch the attention not just America's society but also the whole world (Arisetiyani and Yuliasry, 2017). It is because the policy that will be undertaken by the candidates in the future is reflected through their speech. As the result, it will affect other countries politically and economically.

The language of political speech has certain characteristics. It usually uses rhetoric, which involves promises (Omozuwa and Ezejideaku, 2007). In analyzing promises, there are some theories that we can use to analyze them. In pragmatics, it can be analyzed by using speech act theory that is commissive speech act.

The term speech acts is used to mean the same as illocutionary acts (Thomas, 1995). They are classified into five categories; assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and

declaratives (Searle in Septiningsih and Warsono, 2017). In addition, commissives is illocutionary act whose point is to commit the speaker to some future course of action (Searle, 1976). The examples are promise, threaten, refuse, warrant, etc. By analyzing the commissive speech act of the candidates, we can see the policies and future actions of the candidates when they are elected to be the president.

There are some previous studies conducted by researchers regarding commissive speech act in political speeches. Al-bantany (2013) studied the use of commissive speech act in gubernatorial candidate debate. The result shows that the commissive speech act used are mostly realized by guarantee, promise, and refusal. The study from Suwandi (2013) investigated promising utterance in Barack Obama's speeches. He analyzed the promise and categorized it whether it is performative or constative. The result shows that most of promising utterances used by Obama are constative. Meanwhile Hashim (2015) investigated speech acts in political speeches. The results show that the speech act found are mostly commissive, then followed by assertive, directive, and expressive. In addition, Taufik's *et al.* study (2014) shows that persuasive utterances in election campaign of Pasuruan are mostly realized through assertive-directive and commissive-directive. Ilić and Radulović (2015) analyzed commissive and expressive speech act in political speeches. They are used as indicators of the politicians' personal involvement, notorious vagueness, and avoiding commitment. The result shows that a specific use or lack of commissives be the politicians' strategy to add the credibility of their speech. This way the politicians can control the opinion of public to serve their interest.

Some studies are also conducted by researchers related to commissive speech act with different context. Puspitasari (2009), Prastuti (2015) analyzed the realization of commissive speech act, the speakers' strategy, and its function considering the context of situation happens. The result shows that various

types of commissive speech act are found by the researchers. They are promise, guarantee, refusals, threats, volunteers, and offers while in the second study, they are promise, threat, offer, and refusal. Regarding the speakers' strategy, it is found that the speakers tend to use indirect strategy in employing commissive speech act. Since in the movie different context of situation happened, the speakers adjust the way they uttered commissive speech act related to the context of situation happened. Regarding the function, they employed commissive speech act for various purposes such as to maintain relationship, show like/dislike, avoid conflicts, etc. Syukri and Humaerah (2016) investigated the realization of speech act in advertising language of provider mobile phone product. The study aimed to know how speech act contribute in successfulness of advertisement in persuading the consumers. The result indicates that illocutionary act used such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and surprising or misleading are used as persuasive and informative device. Meanwhile from the perlocutionary act analysis, it is hope that the consumers will buy the products being advertised. The study from Altikriti (2011) which investigated speech act in short stories in three novels entitled "Acme", "Post Haste", and "The Happy Prince showed that various types of speech act are found in the novels. All those five categories of Searle's speech act are found in the novels although they have different proportion number in each novel. The analysis also showed that direct speech act dominates the findings of the speech act. From the previous studies above, it can be concluded that speech act can be found in any activity in our daily life. In case of political speeches, commissive speech act has a very important role in helping the speakers achieving their purpose in communication. Further, the researcher cannot find any study tries to compare commissive speech act in political speeches before. Therefore, the researcher thinks that by conducting this study, the researcher thinks it will fill the gap in the study of commissive speech act. Thus, this study aims to: 1) explain commissive speech act used

by Trump, 2) explain commissive speech act used by Clinton, 3) explain the similarities between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act, 4) explain the difference between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act.

## METHODS

This study employed descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive research is research which gives description about problem, fact, event, and real situation deeply and widely so that it can get a new understanding (Raco, 2010). Further, as research procedure, qualitative methodology produces descriptive data in form of people's written or spoken words and their behaviour which can be observed (Bagdan and Taylor in Moleong, 1990). In qualitative research, the collected data are in form of words, sentences or pictures. In this study, the data are taken from eight speeches of Trump and Clinton campaign speeches. The data are taken from their first, final, and campaign speeches in grey areas.

The data then were analyzed by using commissive speech act instrument adapted from Searle and Vandervecken (1985). There are five steps in analyzing the data. 1) identifying the commissive speech act, 2) classifying the commissive speech act, 3) comparing the commissive speech act, 4) interpreting the commissive speech act, 5) drawing conclusion

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

There are four aims of this study. They are 1) to explain commissive speech act used by Trump, 2) to explain commissive speech act used by Clinton, 3) to explain the similarities between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act, 4) to explain the difference between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act.

### Commissive speech acts used by Trump

From the data analysis, it is found that there are 199 commissive speech acts found. They can be classified into six types. They are promise (77.9%), threaten (4.5%), pledge (2%),

offer (0.5%), refuse (0.5%), and assure speech act (14.6%). Regarding the functions of the utterance, they have five different functions. They are as giving solutions (69.9%), insulting (1%), threatening (4.5%), showing care (5%), convincing (15.1%), and encouraging (4.5%). The function of commissives as giving solution is employed by Trump through promise (69.4%) and offer speech act (0.5%). Meanwhile insulting is employed through promise (0.5%) and refuse speech act (0.5%). Threatening is employed via threaten speech act (4.5%). Showing care is employed through promise (5%), and convincing through promise (3%) and assure (12.1%). The last function, encouraging, is employed via pledge (2%) and assure speech act (2.5%).

#### **Commissive speech acts used by Clinton**

In her campaign speeches, Clinton produced smaller number of commissive speech act rather than Trump did. It is found that she produced 46 commissive speech act which can be classified into two types. They are promise (97.8%) and assure (2.2%). These two types of commissives, having three different functions related to the context happened. They are as giving solution (84.4%), showing care (6.7%), and convincing (8.9%). As giving solution, showing care, and convincing are employed by Clinton by exploiting promise speech act. Meanwhile assure speech act is employed by Clinton as convincing.

#### **The similarities between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act**

From the findings of Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act above, it can be drawn some similarities. First, it is found that both Trump and Clinton used two similar types of commissive speech act. They are promise and assure speech act. Promise speech act is type of commissive speech act which is used to telling someone that the speaker is going to do something in the future. By using promise speech act, Trump and Clinton try to tell the audience what they are going and able to do as the future president of the United States of America. Here the example is:

*Our country has tremendous potential. We have tremendous people. We have people that aren't working. We have people that have no incentive to work. But they're going to have incentive to work because the greatest social program is a job. And they will be proud, and they will love it, and they will make much more money than they would have ever made. And they will be doing so well, and we're going to be thriving as a country, thriving! It can happen [CHEERS and APPLAUSE]. I'll bring back our jobs from China, from Mexico, from Japan, from so many places.*

From the excerpt above, Trump mentioned one of the problems faced by American at that moment that is difficulties in finding jobs. But Trump told the audience not to worry about it anymore since if he is elected to be the president; he is going to bring back the jobs from other countries such as from China, Mexico, and Japan. Trump's promise to bring back the jobs can be solution for the job problems mentioned before.

Meanwhile, assure speech act is to commit oneself to a future course of action with the perlocutionary intention of convincing the hearer that one will do it while presupposing that the hearer has doubts. By using assuring speech act, they tell the audience their sincerity in doing the promise. The example is below:

*If you believe that America thrives when the Middle Class thrives, then you have to vote. We're gonna make the biggest investment in good-paying jobs since World War II; jobs in infrastructure, small business, clean energy, advanced manufacturing. We're gonna actually deliver on that, unlike my opponent, who makes his products mostly overseas, buys cheap Chinese steel and aluminum instead of what's made by American steel workers right here in Pennsylvania.*

The excerpt above is the example of Assure speech act. In the excerpt above, Clinton asked the audience to vote if they believed that America progress depends on Middle Class. If America's Middle Class thrives, then the America also thrives. Therefore, Clinton promised to make the biggest investment in good-paying jobs that are jobs in infrastructure, small business, clean energy, and advanced

manufacturing. Clinton then convinced the audience that she will really carry out the promise by saying “**We're gonna actually deliver on that**”. In the utterance above, Clinton assure the audience that she really would deliver good-paying jobs that she promised before that are jobs in infrastructure, small business, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing.

In addition, promise also becomes the most dominant type of commissives used by both of them. It is proved with the data findings which show Trump's findings (77.9%) and Clinton's findings (97.8%). Promise becomes the most dominant type of commissive speech act because promise is a main feature of the language of political campaign (Omozuwa and Ezejideaku, 2007); and it becomes vital since it is used to telling the future actions of the candidates. It is also in line with Hisyam's study (2015) which has the similar result.

Regarding their utterance functions, they are found that there are similar functions of commissive speech act uttered by them. Both of them use promise speech acts to give solution for the issues that they mentioned before. In addition, they also employed promise speech act to show their care to the audience. Another similarity is located on the function of assure speech act employed by them that is to convince the audience that they will really carry out the promise they stated before.

#### **The differences between Trump's and Clinton's commissive speech act**

From the findings above, there are some differences concluded. First, it is about the number of occurrences of commissive speech act employed by Trump and Clinton. From the data findings, it is known that Trump employed 199 commissives while Clinton 46 commissives. It means that Trump employed more commissive speech act rather than Clinton did and their number gap is significant. This significant number gap resulted the difference of the type of commissive speech act employed where Trump employed more types of commissive rather than Clinton did. They are threaten, pledge, offer, assure, and refuse speech act. Threaten is the

opposite of promise speech act. Threaten means doing something in the future that is harmful for the hearer. Here the example is:

*If a company wants to fire their workers, leave Florida and move to another country like Mexico as an example, and then ship their products back into the United States through what will become an unbelievably strong border, I will tell you (APPLAUSE). **We will make them pay a 35 percent tax on those products (APPLAUSE).***

The excerpt above shows the example of threaten speech acts. It is done by Trump by saying “**We will make them pay a 35 percent tax on those products**”. This threatening act is used by Trump in order to threaten any company not to leave America especially Florida where Trump delivered his speech since if they do so and bring their products back to America, they would be charged 35% tax. The high tax that will be charged on the product is going to be a serious threat for the companies because it will affect on the product price and the competitiveness with other products.

Meanwhile, a pledge is a strong commitment to a future course of action. Pledge is a serious or formal promise to give or do something. Here the example of pledge used by Trump during the campaign speeches is:

*To all Americans tonight, and all of our cities and all of our towns, **I pledge to you one more time, together, we will make America wealthy again. We will make America strong again. We will make America safe again. And we will make America great again.** Thank you everybody. Thank you. God bless you, everybody. Go to bed, go to bed right now, get up and vote. Thank you, everybody, thank you Michigan, we love you. We will be back. Let's win. Thank you.*

The excerpt above is taken from the ending of Trump's speech in Florida. Trump ended his speech by pledging to the audience that together, they will make America wealthy, strong, safe, and great again.

Another difference is the use of refuse speech act by Trump. Refuse means to say that you will not do or accept something. In this campaign speeches, refuse speech act is employed by Trump in order to refuse to the

audience about his conversation with the Top Generals and Admirals on Clinton. He said so because he wants to insult Clinton as his opponent for the presidential seat and damage her image in front of the audience. Here the example is:

*I saw these great men, these great Admirals last night, these great Generals; these are great people, strong, smart. I saw these unbelievably brave recipients of the Medal of Honor, and I said to them, "How would you feel to have Hillary Clinton as your leader?" And they're -- they're wonderful Americans... (CROWD REACTS)... and I refuse to tell you what they said, but it wasn't good, believe me.*

The excerpt above shows that Trump met with Admirals and Generals in the night before the speech happen. In their meeting, Trump asked to Admirals and Generals about their opinion on Clinton as their leader. But their answer is not good that makes Trump did not want to tell it to the audience. By saying refuse speech act, Trump wants to insult Clinton with Top Admirals and Generals' opinion about her which is so bad that even Trump think it is not good to tell in front of the audience.

Offer speech act is also being the difference between Trump's and Clinton's commissives. Offer means to ask someone if they would like to have something or if they would like you to do something. Offer becomes binding only if it is accepted and has not been withdrawn. In this campaign speech, offer speech act which is uttered by Trump is used to giving solution on certain problem that is the terrible of America's military and defense.

Some differences are also found in the way Trump and Clinton exploited commissive speech act in order to achieve their goal of communication. While Clinton only exploited promise speech act to give solution, to show care, and to convince the audience; Trump exploited it more by using it to insult his rival in the election. In addition, Commissive speech act is also used by Trump as encouraging. It is used by Trump in order to boost up the audience spirit and give them hope that they will win the election. Further, Trump also used commissive speech act to threaten anybody who want to do

something disadvantageous. The example is Trump will give a high tax of the products of any company who wants to leave America. This function as threatening is achieved by employing threaten speech act.

## CONCLUSION

Various types of commissive speech act are employed by candidates in the presidential campaign speech of the United States of America. Both candidates, Trump and Clinton, have their own characteristics in exploiting commissive speech act. In their campaign speech, Trump employed more commissives rather than Clinton did. It is proved with the data findings which show that Trump employed commissives 199 times while Clinton 46 times. Those 199 of Trump's commissive speech act can be categorized into six types; promise (77.9%), threaten (4.5%), pledge (4%), offer (1%), refuse (1%), and assure (14.6%). While 46 of Clinton's commissive speech acts are categorized into promise (97.8%) and assure (2.2%). Promise speech act becomes the most dominant type of commissives employed by both candidates. It is because promise is a main feature of the language of political campaign. It is mainly used to telling the audience the future actions and policies of the candidates if they become the president as the solution of problems the faced at that moment. Promise speech act is also used by the candidates to show that they care about the problems that the audience faced. Meanwhile, assure speech act is also employed by both candidates. It is used by the candidates to convince the audience that they are not a liar and really going to carry out the promise that they uttered before. Beside the similarities, there are also differences as the findings show that Trump employed more types of commissives rather than Clinton did. Trump employed not just promise and assure but also threaten, pledge, offer, and refuse speech act. The way Trump and Clinton exploit the speech act is also different. Trump exploited more functions of commissives rather than Clinton did such as promise speech act not only used by Trump to

give solution and show care but also to encourage the audience and insult people. In insulting people, Trump also used refuse speech act. To sum up, commissive speech act is one of the most important type of speech act in political speeches. Therefore the speakers need to understand it since it is able to help them exploit commissives more and use it efficiently. In addition, the speakers also need to consider the context of situation happens since it may affect the functions of commissive speech act uttered. In one way communication such as in political campaign speeches, commissive speech act can be a powerful tool for the speakers in a communication. If the speakers are able to exploit and use them effectively, it can help them achieving their goals in communication.

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