A Corpus Study of Commissive Speech Acts Performed by USA Presidential Candidates

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the commissive acts produced by the two USA presidential candidates in 2020 campaign. Campaign is selected as the source of media to gather data since the utterances tend to be more complete and not cut by mediator as if in a debate. The researcher employs a corpus analysis to study the commissive acts produced by USA presidential candidates. The researcher built his own corpus by transcribing the data from the speech of the candidates. There are total 9246 words built as the corpora of this study. The data were then calculated by using Antconc 3.5.8 software to look at the occurrences and class of commissive acts appeared. Further, the researcher also provided an in-depth description of the analysis to support the findings of the study. The study found out that there were more commissive acts performed by Donald Trump compared to Joe Bidden with 87 and 77 respectively. The speech of Donald Trump in his campaign also contains more classes of commissive acts compared to Joe Bidden's campaign which are 4 classes and 3 classes respectively. It is expected that this study contributes to the board of knowledge in pragmatics area, corpus analysis, and specifically to commissive act production. Specifically, this study contributes to the tendency of politicians in performing commissive acts as a sign of commitment to their voters.

Keywords: Commissive acts; Presidential Campaign; Corpus Analysis.

United States of America holds their 47th presidential election in 2020. It was held for candidates who were willingly to be elected as a president during the period of 2020-2024. The procedure of presidential election in America allows two candidates from each party namely democrat and republicans to compete in this event. There were two leading figures who are then nominated to compete, they are Joseph Robinette Biden Jr as the candidate from Democrat party and Donald John Trump as the candidate from republican.

There was a certain amount of period when the two candidates were permitted to promote themselves through campaigns. Further, there are several methods that the candidate can possibly use to campaign, they are limited meetings, face-to-face meetings, dialogues, social media, mass media, radio, and other possible means. This campaign was

surely a moment for candidates to express their future plans, commitment, and trying persuade potential voters. Since the campaign from the candidates was mainly concerned with persuasion and attempt to make people believe in what the candidates were saying, Speech act as one discipline of pragmatics plays an important role (Dylgjeri, 2017).

Generally, speech acts are the actions intended to perform something (Austin, 1962). This theory has provided a change from constative notion which is truthfulness of signs to what an expression does when it is spoken. Even having similar definition as Austin, Searle (1969) elaborates Austin's speech act theory into five classes, namely assertive, declarative, commissive, directive, and expressive. Additionally, Tanjung (2019) states that these five categories of speech acts are thought-provoking due to its emergence in any occasion is possible depending on the context. Amongst all types, this study focuses on the use of commissive speech act produced by the two candidates. It is supported by Hussain, Hamamah, & Nurhayani (2020) who highlighted that this type is usually need to be uttered by a speaker of a special institutional role.

Commisive speech acts itself is defined as utterances that speakers produce to commit to some future actions (Kiuk & Ghozali, 2018). There are also the language functions or class of commissive speech acts involving promising, offering, refusing, threatening, vowing, and volunteering. When people perform this act, they often use performative verbs to indicate this act explicitly (Kohar, Bharati, & Rukmini, 2018). These verbs include a promise, guarantee, swear, vow, refusal, etc. The detail of the illocutionary force indicating devices (IFID) as proposed by Yule (1996) and Al-Bantany (2013) can be seen in Table 1.

On the other hand, speech acts can also be performed in implicit manner. According to Bayat (2013) implicitness is the expression performed in a speech act indirectly by another act. To convince the

potential voters, commissive acts are often uttered in campaigns. Campaign is generally done by candidates standing for elections to represent what is called as decentralizing personalization (Karlsen & Enjorals, 2016). In addition, Meifilina & Anjarwati (2019) stress that political campaign deals with series of planned communication actions to create certain effects on a large number of audiences.

Based on the aforementioned explanations, the researchers aim to investigate the use of commissive acts produced by the presidential candidates of United States of America in 2020 campaign. Thus, the research questions can be formulated as follows: (1) how is the occurrences of commisive acts performed by the two USA presidential candidates in 2020 campaign, (2) what is the language functions of the commisive acts produced by the USA presidential candidates.

Pragmatics is known as the study of how to link linguistic forms and the users of these forms. a number of experts have also described this study. Widdowson (1996) for example, he describes pragmatics as a study that concerns to the meaning of language used or how people actualize its meaning as communicative resources. Similarly, Rais and Triyono (2019) state pragmatics simply refer to the study of meaning that comes out from people's utterance. Yule (1996) state since pragmatics deals with the intended meaning, it enables researchers to put human into analysis. He further adds that speaker does not only play a role as the speaker of the utterance, but also act to support their utterances.

According to Thomas (2013), there are at least 4 main focus of pragmatics, they are speaker meaning, utterance interpretation, meaning and interaction, interrelationship of utterance meaning and force. Speaker meaning becomes the major of the focus since it is obvious that for the speaker ambiguities of sense, reference or structure rarely or even never exist. The ambiguity belongs to the reader or interpreter. That lead to the second focus which is utterance interpretation. This

comes with a sense from cognitive approach that pragmatics should focus exclusively on the process of interpretation from the point of view of the hearer. It is also hard to be done in a way since interpretation will not be maximum if the hearer is not interested in why the speaker is producing particular utterance. Even the hearer is interested in the utterance, the potential meaning is not limited. There must be an interaction between the two parties, the speaker and hearer. Here, both of them can clarify and support the production and response of the utterances.

In the actual situation of language use, people always have something in mind (Mey, 2001), and the way to convey them is through speech acts. It is the branch of pragmatics that concerns in the meaning of act performed by utterance that speaker produces. Yule (1996) labels the use of speech act in the specific manner such as promise, complaint, request, invitation, or apology. This speech acts are divided into three categories namely locutionary act, illocutionary act, an perlocutionary act (Austin, 1962).

Austin (1962) defines locutionary act as grammatical meaning of the utterance seen from its linguistic features. In other words, it is the actual sentence meaning. Illocutionary, on the other hand, refers to the intended communicative meaning by the speaker which bound to certain conventions. Lastly, perlocutionary refers to the effect that an utterance has on the thoughts, feelings, or action of the listeners. Searle (1969) then revisited the illocutionary acts proposed by Austin by classifying the intended meaning into some performative actions namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declaration.

This study focused on the use of commissive acts performed by two presidential candidates of United States of America in their campaign. Searle has defined the commissive speech acts as the commitment of the speaker to himself to a future course of actions. These actions involve promise, guarantee, refusal,

Table 1. Commissive speech acts and its function

No.	Commissive Speech Acts	IFID
1	Promise	Expressing an intention which gives benefits to the hearer
2	Guarantee	Affirming constative quality of something
3.	Refusal	There is a negotiation, rejection, or avoidance from the speakers
4.	Threat	There is an intention from the speaker to give harm or give no benefits to the hearer
5.	Volunteer	A condition where the speaker willingly offer his services without returning benefits
6	Offer	A condition where the speaker offer something to the hearer

threat, volunteer, and offer.

It is hardly found that there are studies which focuses on the giving in-depth detail description of the use of commissive acts. Yet several related studies found to support this study. The first study is conducted by Haucsa, Marzuki, Alek, & Hidayat (2020). They focus their study on investigating illocutionary act produced in an interview by tom cruise. They find that the use of illocutionary acts depend on the what speaker situation is. Their study reveals that representative act occurs the most with 48.7% of the total illocutionary acts found, yet commissive acts only happens 7.7%. Hussain, Hamamah, & Nurhayani (2020) investigate the commissive speech act produced in the Indonesian presidential debate. They find out that the act of promise is the most frequently uttered functions with 20 utterances. Lastly, Syafitri (2019) focuses her study on the use of commissive speech acts used by the shopping hosts of MNC shop. Her data are gathered from the advertisement of household appliances. She finds out that the commissive acts can be uttered in form

of declarative, interrogative, and exclamation. Looking at these previous studies, this study attempts to find out the class of commissive speech act used in a larger number of words analyzed and the data are gathered from campaign, not debate. The underlying reason to this act is that campaign has no rigid time limitation to the candidates to express their ideas. Thus, it is expected that the commissive acts found will be in larger amount of data and contribute positively to this study.

Method
Materials

This study employs a corpus study analysis where the corpus data are derived from USA presidential campaigns. The researchers purposefully selected one full duration of campaign video from both candidates who are Joe Bidden and Donald Trump. The video selected for Bidden's campaign is the acceptance speech at Democratic National Convention on August 20, 2020. Meanwhile, the selected video for Donald trump is the campaign video in Orlando, June 18, 2020. Each campaign is the first rally video from the candidates. From the transcription of the video, it is obtained that the Joe Bidden campaign video consists of 3337 words. On the other hand, the campaign video from Donald Trump consists of 5909 words. In other words, there are total of 9246 words built by the researchers as the corpora.

Procedure

As what has been stated by Mahendra & Dewi (2017), corpus analysis is feasible to deal with great number of data to be analyzed. Thus, several procedures need to be undertaken. First, the selected campaign video from each presidential candidate is transcribed into written format. The corpus data and the number of occurences of the commissive acts used by the candidates are then calculated by Ant. Conc 3.5.8 corpus software. The calculation is based on the performative verbs and words that indicate each class or language function

Table 2. Keywords indicating commissive acts

Indicating devices	Performative verbs
Promise	Promise, agree to, will, going to, affirm, commit
Guarantee	Guarantee, support, prove, maintain, ensure, assure
Refusal	Refuse, decline, ignore, turn down, withdraw, withhold, reject
Threat	Warn, alert, inform, advise, instruct, threaten, urge, remind
Volunteer	Enlist, volunteer, sign up
Offer	Afford, allow, extend, provide

of commissive acts. Moreover, the researchers also analyze the context of the speech since one performative verb is possible to be used in other indicating devices. Here are some keywords that indicate the commissive acts utterance based on its devices.

A deeper analysis of the context is also conducted in regards to answer the third research question. Both of the implicit and explicit manner of commisive speech acts can only be highlighted by taking a look more deeply on the context of the utterances.

The result of the calculation will indicate the occurrences of the commissive acts uttered by the candidates. The result is then compared to determine which of the candidates shows more commitment in their campaign, as well as the class or language function that contained in the utterances. Furthermore, the researcher will provide an in depth descriptive qualitative explanation towards the gathered data.

Results and Discussion
The Occurrences of Commissive Acts Uttered

The utterance of the commissive speech acts produced by the two candidates are calculated by AntConc 3.5.8 software. From the result of the calculation it is found that the speech from Donald Trump campaign contains more commissive speech act compared to Joe Bidden's speech. It is also revealed that the

distribution of the commissive act class is more various in Trump's speech. The occurrences of the commissive acts produced by the candidates is provided in the Table 3.

Table 3. Occurrences of the Commissive Speech Acts Contained in Presidential Campaign Speech

Speech	Commissive Acts Occurrences
Donald Trump	87
Joe Bidden	77

Commissive Acts Class Contained in Presidential Campaign Speech

After transcribing the speech into written form and calculate them with ant conc 3.5.8 software, the researchers focus on investigating and comparing the class of commissive acts uttered by the two presidential candidates of United states of America. The first indicating devices analyzed is the words indicating promises by the two candidates. The result can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Words indicating a promise by two presidential candidates

Indicating words	Donald Trump	Joe Bidden
promise	2	6
will	29	59
agree to	0	0
going to	39	9
affirm	0	0
commit	0	0

Table 4 shows the comparison of the occurrences of the two presidential candidates in committing to give benefits to the hearer in form of a promise. Based on the table above, Joe Bidden's act of promising is slightly higher than Donald Trump where the most frequently indicating words used is will. On the other hand, Donald trump, aside of uttering will as the indicating words in fairly amount of time, he is also using the words 'going to' to show his promise to the potential voters. The tendency of using 'will' produced by Joe Bidden is used

to express his promise and intimate intention toward the hearer. The use of 'will' in Bidden's speech is provided as the following:

> *"As a president I will make you a promise that I will protect America. I will defend us from every attack seen and unseen always without exception every time."*

Here, the occurrences of the use of will can be clearly seen. The first utterance shows that there is repetition of the use of 'will' to strengthen the intended meaning of the speaker. By repeating the word 'will', the speaker intends to make his words more convincing and touching the hearer more deeply. It is then followed by showing the practical intention of how the speaker will protect his country as stated previously. On the other hand, the speaker only use 'going to' for something that is very technical and it tends to be more assuring to be done. These findings are in line with Seog et al. (2019) who distinguish the concepts of 'be going to' and 'will' from various perspectives. They argue that be going to has an epistemic meaning which ensure the listener that something is going to happen based on present indication The example is provided as follows:

> *"We are going to do more than praise our essential workers. We are finally going to pay them."*

From this example, the candidate used the word 'pay' as the indication of technicality. The present indication can be seen from the first sentence which states "We are going to do more than praise essential workers". This indicates that at the moment the candidate speaks, there has been a praise to essential workers.

On the contrary, the speech from Donald trump contains more 'going to' rather than 'will' as the indication of promise. The researchers also analyze that there is

underlying context why Donald Trump tend to use 'be going to' instead of 'will'. The example of Trump's speech is provided as the following.

> *"It is the first time ever the number of working people is almost 160 million, and we are going to be breaking that number soon."*

From the example, the use of 'be going to' depends more on the present indication given by the speaker as the context of speech. The speaker provides convincing data as a starting point or elaboration to make acts indicating a promise. Look at the other example below:

> *"This time we are going to finish the job and this time should be a lot easier because we have done so much with our military"*

This different occurrences of future markers used are influenced by several possibilities. Studies have attempted to distinguishing 'be going to' with 'will' grammatically. According to Szmrecsanyi (2003) analysis, there is a positive correlation between the syntactic complexity and the occurrence of 'be going to' instead of will/shall. He proposes that economical reason can be the main factor of using 'be going to' more frequently instead of will/shall. This means a speaker initially wants to make their utterances shorter and more effective. Pragmatically, there is a tendency why people use 'be going to' instead of 'will'. According to Haegeman (1989) the use of 'be going to' indicates that a speaker has seen an indication in present condition that something is going to be a fact in a future, while the use of 'will' is more influenced by speaker's speculation, beliefs, and assumptions.

Even it is true that speakers do not necessarily produce explicit performative utterances (Austin, 1962), yet the constatives

Table 5. Words indicating a guarantee by two presidential candidates

Indicating words	Donald Trump	Joe Bidden
guarantee	0	0
support	2	1
prove	0	0
maintain	0	0
ensure	0	0
assure	0	0

with indicative sentences can be produced to express the same meaning. The results from the table 5 shows that both speakers do not perform explicit performative utterance as well as lack in performing the constatives. It is proven by the calculation that shows the concordance of indicative words are so minimum. Thus, it necessarily to mention that even though both candidates produce fairly large number of words that indicating promise, yet both of them do not perform the act to guarantee as many as their promise. The act of guarantee from the two candidate can be seen as follows:

> *DT : "We have bipartisan support because everybody want it to happen. It replaces one of the worst trade deals ever made, NAFTA".*
> *JB : "I will work hard for those who did not support me as far as for those boats for me".*

According to Al-Bantany (2013), the act of guarantee is viewed in three different perspective, they are capability, determination, and impediment. In the context of the first example, the speaker shows capability of negotiation in international trading activities, and this ability lead him to guarantee that there is a realization in the future from his act. A bit different from the first example, the second one is produced based on speaker's determination. It is necessary to be done in this context since the speaker cannot provide initial data that support his guarantee nor observing

any present indication that his words will be implemented. Thus, showing determination is the speaker's way to convince the hearers.

Commissive acts do not only refer to the act of promising and guaranteeing as the implementation of the promise, but it is also about the act of refusing to others' action. The result of the calculation on refusal acts is provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Words indicating refusal by two presidential candidates

Indicating words	Donald Trump	Joe Bidden
refuse	1	0
decline	0	0
ignore	0	0
turn down	0	0
withdraw	1	0
reject	0	0
withhold	0	0

From the table, it can be seen that the act of refusal is only done by Donald trump (2 occurrences). Generally, refusal is seen from several perspectives as well. The first one is by giving alternatives to the problems encountered. Secondly, it is done by stating contradictory statements where one of the statements acts as reason of the rejection. The first refusal by Donald Trump is provided as follows:

> "….This election is a verdict on whether we want to live in a country where the people who lose an election refuse to concede and spend the next two years trying to rip your country apart"

This utterance indirectly shows Trump's disagreement toward other party's objection to his victory of the presidential votes. By stating two contradictory statements, the speaker intends to show there will be either positive or negative consequences from his statements. The other refusal statement is provided as follows.

> "I withdrew the united states from the job-killing catastrophe that we know what that is, TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership) and the Paris environmental accord, not too good."

These utterances refer to the indirect manner of refusal since it does not explicitly express refusal performative verbs, instead the speaker uses the constative functions of words (Devitt & Hanley, 2006). In this respect, the speaker gives alternatives toward the problem he faces. The speaker argues that the partnership sated in the example is not the nation's best option. Thus, he refused it by withdrawing his nation from the partnership.

Another class of commissive acts is a form of threat. The result of the calculation on this class is provided on Table 7.

Table 7. Words indicating threat from the two presidential candidates

Indicating words	Donald Trump	Joe Bidden
warn	0	0
alert	0	0
inform	1	0
advise	0	0
instruct	0	0
if + will	12	2
urge	0	0
remind	0	0

From the results, it is revealed that the candidates show different occurrences of producing sentences that indicate threats where the speech from Donald Trump produces more threats compare to Joe Bidden's speech. It requires the researchers to analyze the data more deeply since syntactically the use of 'will' can also mean a promise to the hearer. However, unlike the promise which indicate the speaker wants to do future action, threats are intentional acts performed by speaker to make hearers do something, which may cause some troubles, danger, harm, and consequences by his speech (Brauch, 2011). According to Sami

(2015), distinguishing threat and promise can be done by analyzing word that indicate consequences (if), followed by word indicating future action (will). Moreover, the difference of promise and threat depends on the orientation of the act as well.

The followings are the commissive acts that indicating threats produced by the two speakers.

"What we know about this president is if he has given four more years, he will be what he has been for the last 4 years, no responsibility"

"Mass illegal migration reduces living standard and strains public resources. If democrat officials had to send their children to those overcrowded, overburdened school, They would not tolerate it for one minute"

In the first example, the speaker intentionally produces this utterance to invite the hearers do something. By giving the premise we know about this president indicate that there will be the same consequences if voters vote for the same person who has no responsibility. This act actually also invites potential voters to vote for him and enjoy different outcome as result from voting for him. Similarly, a threatening act is also highlighted in Donald Trump speech as shown in the second example. In this regard, the speaker emphasizes the possible outcome if illegal migrants are allowed to enter the border of the country. It can result in overcrowded community, reduce of living standard, and overburdened school.

On the other hand, the researchers did not find commissive acts that indicate volunteering and offering from the both candidates' speech. The data distribution on these two aspects can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Occurrences of volunteer and offer commissive acts by two presidential candidates

Class	Occurrences
Volunteer (Enlist, volunteer, sign up)	0
Offer (Afford, allow, extend, provide)	0

From the aforementioned findings, it can be concluded that Donald Trump's speech contain more commissive acts with more distributed commissive class acts. The most frequently produced commissive acts can be found in the act of promising with 80% and 93% respectively. The speech produced by trump also show more distribution compared to Joe Bidden's speech with the percentage of guarantee at 2.2%, refusal 2.2%, and threat at 15.6%. It is different from the speech produced by Joe Bidden where the distribution covers guarantee at 1% and threat at 2% respectively.

Looking at the distribution of the commissive acts produced, the speech from the two candidates are in the likely same manner. To make it clear of the its distribution, Figure 1 provides the metrics of the concordance of the commissive acts produced by the two candidates.

From Figure 1, It is necessarily to state that the speech from the two candidates are evenly distributed in the beginning of the
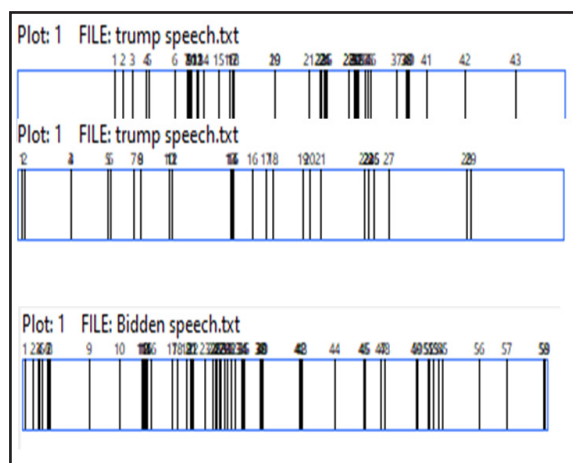

Figure 1. The distribution of the commissive speech acts found in Trump and Bidden's speech

speech, core of the speech, and the closing. The production of the commissive speech acts raising from the beginning of the speech until its core and begins to be rarely produced in the end of the speech.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study presents the occurrences of production as well as in depth description of the commissive acts produced by two presidential candidates of United States of America in their campaign. There are six classes of commissive speech acts investigated, and each candidate produces different amount of commissive speech acts due to their style of campaign. There are more commissive speech acts produced by Trump with 87 times covering four class of commissive speech act (promise, guarantee, refusal, threat). On the other hand, from Bidden's speech it is found that the commissive speech acts is produced 77 times covering three classes of commissive speech acts (promise, guarantee, threat). As for offer and volunteer types, they are not found in both candidates.

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