

Commissive Speech Acts in Anwar Ibrahim's Interview

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the style of speech that political leaders use to communicate their ideas, convince audiences, and maintain relationships is critical for assessing the efficacy and relevance of how they communicate. This study aims to analyse the speech acts, specifically commissives, in an interview with the Malaysian Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim. This study used a qualitative research approach. This research analyses an interview video on YouTube, "A Conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim", published in 2023. The researchers transcribed the whole interview footage before selecting segments that included noteworthy interactions or statements by Anwar Ibrahim. The findings indicated that Anwar Ibrahim frequently used commissive speech acts in his speech, emphasising his commitment and dedication to honest governance, improving the nation's reputation, financial integrity, and equitable foreign relations. In addition, the findings were analysed through the lens of four felicity conditions. By focusing the analysis on commissive speech acts, this research is significant as it highlights the importance of commissive speech acts, particularly in political discourse. A more thorough knowledge of how these particular speech acts contribute to the efficacy of political communication. It provides a deeper examination of political discussions, highlighting the role of language in shaping political narratives.

Keywords: Commissives, Felicity Conditions, Speech acts, Political discourse, Interviews

INTRODUCTION

Politics is a crucial field that people encounter daily in a country. Political discourse has long been a significant area of language use that has drawn the attention of scholars [1]. Political discourse and the way politicians deliver their speeches significantly influence public opinion and the shaping of specific policies. Understanding the styles of speech that political leaders use to express their views, persuade audiences, and maintain relationships is essential when evaluating the effectiveness and relevance of their communication strategies. Language is a vital communication medium for politicians to effectively pitch their views to the public and win them over. Hence, politics cannot be carried out without it [2]. Politicians need to be able to use language to portray confidence and showcase their greatness, and most importantly, they must also be able to live up to the words they speak.

In any culture, political speech may be viewed as a tool for fostering and preserving social bonds, expressing emotions, and promoting notions, laws, and initiatives [3]. Moreover, the context of this research is only on a single political figure, the prime minister of Malaysia. Focusing only on one political figure makes the analysis more precise and in-depth. Anwar Ibrahim is Malaysia's 10th Prime Minister, and he has been appointed as the prime minister of Malaysia since 2022. The video, "A Conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim," was uploaded in February 2023, which was after he became the prime minister. This research attempts to examine and focus solely on the speech act of commissives to shed light on the dynamics of political communication as well as the intended language used in political discourse.

The interview video was uploaded by Bloomberg Television on YouTube. It was divided into fourteen chapters or sections, which reflect the main points of the interview, which are about Anwar Ibrahim's promises to expand foreign connections, advance social progress, implement transparent government, and implement

economic reforms [4]. Very few studies have discussed Anwar Ibrahim's speeches, particularly from the perspective of speech acts. Hence, this research could contribute to the existing literature on linguistics in a particular political conversation. Since the video was recently made available on YouTube after he was appointed Prime Minister, his speech consisted of guarantees and pledges to foster confidence and trust among Malaysian citizens and the global community. According to the speech act theory, commissive speech acts may be used to illustrate and strengthen promises [5]. This research is significant because it analyses commissive speech acts and emphasises their significance in political discourse. It also views the findings from the perspectives of the four felicity conditions, which makes the analysis more focused and in-depth. Furthermore, the research is pertinent since it features a contemporary political leader, which adds value to the continuing discussions on political communication strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech act theory was introduced by J.L. Austin, who, in the book "How to Do Things with Words" (1962), described speech acts as actions carried out by utterances. Austin contends that speaking involves more than just exchanging words; it also requires action. Following that, [6] the Idea of a speech act was broadened by [7], who also classified speech actions into five categories, which are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. However, the primary focus of this study is the commissive speech act. The commissive speech act is described by [7] As a particular type of illocutionary conduct in which the speaker is required to perform the acts specified in the speech. There are six types of commissive speech actions: offer, volunteer, threat, refusal, promise, and guarantee [7]. In his book, [8] Also mentioned that commissive speech is a type of speech act in which the speaker commits to future activities. The speaker's desired outcome and intentions are conveyed through these acts.

To make the analysis more in-depth, the study includes felicity conditions. References [7] introduced four conditions: the preparatory condition, the propositional condition, the sincerity condition, and the essential condition. Firstly, the preparatory condition is the existence of a conventional method with a conventional outcome. The speaker has the freedom to express himself in his way and the power to decide how things turn out. Meanwhile, propositional condition refers to the condition of the environment and the speaker that permits a process or action to be performed. For instance, the act of promising cannot be performed for something that has already passed. Next, the sincerity condition specifies that a method or activity must be performed accurately and entirely, while the essential condition is in general about the intention of the utterance. The speaker took part in the procedure or activity that has a similar purpose to what is described in the procedure, and if the speaker is required to do an action, the speaker is capable of doing so. An utterance must meet four characteristics to be considered felicitous or valid speech. Thus, this study believes including felicity conditions to strengthen the analysis is also interesting.

Numerous studies have explored the use and roles of speech acts in various discourses, including political discourse. References [9] reported that the former prime minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, mostly employed speech acts of commissive and directive. They mentioned that commissive words, such as 'pledge', 'commitment', and 'promise', were used to highlight Najib's future activities towards building a strong nation. Apart from that, the research by [9] examined speech acts in political discourse and adopted discursive strategies to analyse lexical choices in election tweets by political figures. Additionally, references [5] Presented an analysis of commissive speech acts used by the president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, in his inauguration address back in 2014. They mentioned that Joko Widodo intended the speech to convey his willingness to take action and perform better for the future of Indonesia.

A pretty recent study done by [2] examined political speeches by the former President of the United States of America (USA). Results are gathered from the 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, the 2008 election campaign, and statements made by Obama during the 2012 election campaign. References [2] concluded that the speaker's most common speech goals over the two election campaigns were to reassure, confirm, and reaffirm. Further analysis showed that Obama employed the performative word "promise" in seven examples. Hence, this study suggests that additional studies in various contexts are needed to provide more comprehensive data on the speech act of promising or commissive speech, particularly among political leaders.

METHOD

With particular attention placed on the investigation of commissive speech acts in political discourse, this study used a qualitative research approach. The primary data for this research are the interview videos available on YouTube, entitled “A Conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim”. The researchers initially reviewed the entire interview footage before selecting specific segments that included noteworthy interactions or statements. The researchers also took notes on essential parts that would help to achieve the research aim. However, Anwar Ibrahim's remarks and utterances would be the only source of data, and the interviewer's speech would not be used. This will help researchers highlight the political figure's use of speech acts.

The researchers transcribed the selected data using the Jefferson transcription system to present a detailed transcription. Firstly, another researcher transcribed the entire 23-minute video with the help of a YouTube transcription tool. After that, the researchers analysed the video and identified several parts that accentuated the commissive speech acts by Anwar Ibrahim. The researcher watched the video at least four times to have an overall understanding of the interview. After identifying the key segments, the researcher employed the Jefferson transcription system to conduct a detailed transcription of the selected segments of the interview. Doing that would increase the researcher's work efficiency. The Jefferson transcription enables the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the conversation. Unlike the usual transcription, this system records not only what is spoken, but also subtleties of speech, such as overlaps, intonation, pauses, and emphasis.

Following data transcription, analysis of the video's commissive speech acts was conducted using the speech act theory developed by [6] and [7]. The transcribed data was reviewed to comprehend the occurrences of commissive speech acts in political discourse. Every reported instance of commissive speech was examined within its specific context to understand the circumstances surrounding the act, the speaker's purpose, and the expected effect on the listeners. After that, felicity conditions were used to assess if the situation was appropriate for the speaker's utterance. As mentioned in the previous section, there are four prerequisites to produce a felicitous speech, which are propositional condition, preparatory condition, sincerity condition, and essential condition. Then, the findings were discussed, and the researcher would conclude.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the primary data, which was the interview video of Anwar Ibrahim. In general, it could be seen that the conversation between the prime minister and the interviewer has very little overlap. The interviewer rarely interrupted when Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim explained. There are several speech acts of commissive identified where Anwar Ibrahim uttered his promise and commitment. To comprehend the findings more efficiently, they were classified into four key points: commitment to honest governance, commitment to improving the nation's reputation, commitment to financial integrity, and commitment to equitable foreign relations. The following presents the findings. ‘I’ refers to the interviewer, while ‘A’ refers to the prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim.

Commitment to honest governance

The following is the first excerpt taken from the interview video. This dialogue can be found at the beginning of the interview, at the 2:03 timestamp. Meanwhile, Table 1 explains the conversation by including felicity conditions in the picture.

Excerpt 1

1	I	:	<i>What did you learn while you observed?</i>
2	A	:	<i>Well.. you learn.. how a.. country can um.. improve or excel or succeed.. and the..</i>
3			<i>flaws.. they can weaken the fabric and.. destroy the nation. So I think what we need to do is to.. regain that <u>trust</u> and be seen, and <u>honestly</u> attempt to do the right thing.</i>

Table 1 Felicity Condition For Excerpt 1

Statement		Felicity	
		Yes	No
<i>"...what we need to do is to regain that trust and be seen and honestly attempt to do the right thing"</i>		√	
Preparatory condition	Anwar Ibrahim believes that gaining the public's trust is crucial, especially because Malaysia is currently grappling with a financial crisis that occurred during the previous administration. He has the power to issue orders, make laws, or modify existing regulations to help himself and his government regain the people's trust.		
Propositional condition	The statement makes it apparent what he intends to do in the future. Anwar Ibrahim appears to be implying that the administration intends to restore confidence and conduct itself in a responsible manner.		
Sincerity condition	Anwar Ibrahim consistently expressed his genuine advocacy for reform and transparency, evident in his conduct before taking office. The steps the administration has taken to uphold these words might be further assessed.		
Essential condition	Anwar Ibrahim's utterance is a declaration of a duty that he must fulfil.		

Anwar Ibrahim was asked what he learned while in the corridors of power before becoming the Prime Minister, and he mentioned aspects that a country could improve and also aspects that could harm the nation. He then emphasised in Line 4 above that he is committed to regaining the trust and leading the country with honesty. This is a commissive speech act, demonstrating his commitment to making changes as the newly appointed Prime Minister. As elaborated in Table 1, the utterance in Excerpt 1 is considered felicitous as it satisfies all four felicity conditions.

Commitment to improve the nation's reputation

The transcription of a speech that Anwar Ibrahim made at timestamp 3:15 may be seen below. This conversation demonstrates Anwar Ibrahim's commitment to improving the country's image. The following table displays the utterance through the lens of felicity conditions.

Excerpt 2

1	A	:	↑ <i>Malaysia shouldn't be known uh.. for its uh.. financial scandals or my finance. It should be known for its <u>vibrant</u> multiracial, multireligious society. with capacity to move uh.. forward.</i>
2			
3			

Table 2 Felicity Condition For Excerpt 2

Statement		Felicity	
		Yes	No
<i>"...Malaysia shouldn't be known uh for its financial scandals. It should be known for its vibrant multiracial, multireligious society with the capacity to move forward"</i>		√	
Preparatory	In the conversation, both Anwar Ibrahim and the interviewer mentioned the financial		

condition	scandals that have affected Malaysia's image. Hence, with his power and influence, Anwar Ibrahim feels compelled to change the public's perception of Malaysia locally and worldwide.
Propositional condition	Anwar Ibrahim declares his commitment to take further steps to reposition Malaysia as a country known for its stunning, diversified culture rather than its economic issues.
Sincerity condition	He ought to be sincere about wanting to rebrand the nation. Throughout the conversation, he spoke about some of his upcoming and ongoing initiatives to do that.
Essential condition	By making this statement, the government takes the responsibility of promoting a favourable image of Malaysia.

In this part of the interview, Anwar Ibrahim responded to a question regarding how his government intends to gain back investor trust, given that a prolonged scandal has marred the nation. He emphasised at the outset of his statement that Malaysia ought to lead by example. He continued by saying Malaysia was not supposed to be known for financial issues. Its dynamic, multiracial, and multireligious society, with room to grow, should be well-known instead, and this implies his hope to change the country's image. Through the lens of the felicity condition, which is described in Table 2, the excerpt above meets all four conditions.

Commitment towards financial integrity

The following excerpt is from the interview tape, time stamp 5:35. It shows Anwar Ibrahim's commitment to financial integrity. Table 3 describes the felicity conditions of the excerpt chosen.

Excerpt 3

1	I	:	<i>What is Plan B? [What if that happened?]</i>
2	A	:	<i>[For now, why do you prejudge a case?]. I went through this process I don't think it is fair.. to prejudge the case. Let us <u>move on</u>. But, for <u>now</u>, I happen to be also Minister of Finance. All the procedures of the financial producers come under me. There's <u>not one</u> trace I can find from any of my team NOW trying to uh.. <u>squander</u> through contracts or projects..</i>
3			
4			
5			
6			

Table 3 Felicity Condition For Excerpt 3

Statement	Felicity	
	Yes	No
<i>"Let us move on, but for now I happen to be also Minister of Finance. All the procedures the financial procedures come under me. There's not one trace I can find from any of my team now trying to uh squander through contracts or projects..."</i>	√	
Preparatory condition	When Anwar Ibrahim declared that he was now the Minister of Finance, it became evident that he held immense power and was in charge of all financial operations. As a result, he could stop any financial abuse.	
Propositional condition	The statement suggests that he has committed himself to establishing plans and taking action in the future to preserve financial integrity.	

Sincerity condition	He must be truly sincere about maintaining financial integrity.
Essential condition	By making this statement, Anwar Ibrahim has assumed the obligation to guarantee that there will be no financial abuse.

In this specific section of the interview, Anwar Ibrahim was asked to explain his backup plan in the unfortunate circumstance that he lost his deputy prime minister, who is accused of several charges, including corruption, as was discussed in the previous conversation. Rather than outlining his backup plan, Anwar responded that prejudging the case was unfair. He mentioned that, as the minister of finance, he reassured that he would uphold financial integrity and prevent anyone from squandering the projects. Since he has complete control over everything, he is dedicated to maintaining financial purity. Analysing through the lens of felicity conditions as explained in Table 3, the excerpt above meets all four conditions.

Commitment to equitable international relations

The next speech act of commissive found in the interview is about the speaker's commitment to a balanced international relationship. This dialogue can be found at the 18:10 timestamp. Table 4 elaborates on the conversation by including felicity conditions in the picture.

Excerpt 4

1	A	:	<i>I think um.. what we need to do.. just be a great <u>friend</u> and and and engage with them uh.. if you have, we are asked.. then we of course give our views. But, as an <u>independent</u> country, we should exercise our right to express our views. But.. bottom line, be a friend to.. China as a great neighbour and America because of their.. huge potential to invest..</i>
2			
3			
4			
6			

Table 4 Felicity Condition For Excerpt 4

Statement		Felicity	
		Yes	No
<i>"As an independent country, we should exercise our right to express our views. But bottom line, be a friend to China as a great neighbour and America because of their huge potential to invest"</i>		√	
Preparatory condition	As prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim has the authority to determine Malaysia's foreign policy. He has stated that Malaysia should remain impartial between the United States of America (USA) and China.		
Propositional condition	The statement foreshadows Anwar Ibrahim's and his administration's future efforts to build equitable ties with China and the United States.		
Sincerity condition	He must be genuinely serious about seeking amicable ties with China and the USA. This was evident in his prior diplomatic strategy, as stated during the interview session.		
Essential condition	Anwar Ibrahim and his government must maintain equitable relations with the USA and China to secure Malaysia's advantages.		

As the conversation shifted to the topic of geopolitics, Anwar Ibrahim was asked by the interviewer where Malaysia stands in relation to the two powerful nations, China and the United States of America. Then he responded, saying that rather than taking a stand, Malaysia is a friend of both China and the USA. Anwar Ibrahim believes it is a wise move to cultivate close relationships with China as a great neighbour and with America due to their enormous investment potential, considering Malaysia's status as a small trading nation. This demonstrates his commitment to fostering equitable international relations between the two powerful countries, China and the United States of America. As detailed in the table above, the statement is felicitous because it satisfies all felicity conditions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from this research, a political figure typically uses speech acts of commissive while expressing their commitments and pledges. This is also mentioned in research by [9] That, aside from using directive speech acts, politicians also mostly used the speech act of commissive to highlight their upcoming actions aimed at forging a mighty nation. In addition, [5] reported that the president of Indonesia also employed commissive speech acts. It was claimed that Joko Widodo intended the speech acts to express his readiness to act and perform better for Indonesia's future. These previous studies reflected the findings of this research. In the context of this research, using the commissive speech acts, the politician Anwar Ibrahim demonstrated his commitment to four main points, which are financial integrity, honest governance, improving the nation's reputation, and equitable foreign relations.

Anwar Ibrahim acknowledged in the interview that he is still relatively new to the position, having been named prime minister only recently. In his speech, he alluded to his dedication to improving Malaysia and demonstrated his willingness to carry out his plans to fulfil all of the commitments and pledges he had made either before or during the interview. In summary, this research has provided an overview of the commissive speech acts employed by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, during an interview. This research revealed a deliberate use of speech acts, particularly commissive, by Anwar Ibrahim to project himself as a great politician and win over the audience's confidence and trust on both national and international levels. Given that every instance selected from the interview video adheres to the requirements for the felicity condition, his speeches, which include his commitment to his promises, are likely to be convincing and have a positive effect on the audience.

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