EXPRESSIVE SPEECH ACTS TO REFLECT SOCIAL SUPPORT ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IN @GEMMACORRELL'S INSTAGRAM COMMENTS

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Abstract

This research was initially prompted by the language used in Instagram to address mental issues in America. American society tends to express the psychological or mental states and experiences on social media, particularly Instagram. Hence, dealing with psychological expressions, this research deployed the analysis of expressive speech acts aimed at identifying the types of expressive speech acts and how they were delivered in communication -strategies. The data were taken from @gemmacorrell's selected comment section. The analysis resulted in the finding of 7 out of 12 types of expressive speech acts utilization with the most usage order was compliment (39), lament (11), thank (7), congratulate (1), deplore (1), protest (1), and welcome (1). Further, most utterances denoted explicit, direct, and literal strategies without covering implied meanings. Regarding social dimensions, this research found that American society tended to share their problems with unknown virtual relatives, as it can be a signal that 'real' humanity is declining to be replaced by 'virtual' humanity. It is such an irony because in real life, people seem not to care about each other but in digital reality, they support each other. Hence, the researchers motivate scholars worldwide to initiate advanced studies on the phenomenon of language, social media, digital society, and mental health issues.

Keywords: *language use; expressive speech acts; Instagram; digital society; mental issues*

Introduction

This research was motivated by the phenomenon of language use on Instagram to promote mental issues, particularly in American society. In this case, the expressive speech acts analysis was primarily employed to investigate how Instagram users reveal their feelings and emotions through their utterances in the comment section posted by the @gemmacorrell account. The expressive speech acts functioned to unveil people's mental, psychological, and emotional stances (Parker & Riley, 2009). Another idea about expressive speech acts is proposed by Searle (1976), emphasizing the psychological or mental state of a person expressed by utterances with the speaker's sincere intention to reveal feelings and emotions. Further, Wijana (1996) states that expressive speech acts are utterances that have a function to demonstrate the speakers' feelings and other psychological aspects. It can be inferred that expressive speech acts deal with the use of language -utterances- to express speakers' mental states or feelings upon something or

someone after passing personal appraisal. Hence, the expressive speech acts analysis was considered appropriate to investigate the utterances indicating mental issues in @gemmacorrell's comment section as the mental issues are more related to expressions of feelings. Expressive speech acts are beneficiary in pragmatic discourses and human communication in general. Studies related to expressive speech acts have been widely conducted to reveal various linguistic and social phenomena. Belonging to one of the functions of expressive speech acts, praise is considered less recognized by linguists and scholars, an investigation was conducted to analyze how praise is shown in English and Ugandan English (Meierkord, 2023). An investigation of the comments on @lambe_turah's Instagram account unveiled that they function as expressive speech acts to produce harmful emotion and hate speech against social groups and individuals (Mubarok et al., 2024). Within the context of communication, expressive speech acts normally result in action or behavior triggered by a particular state of mind (Deamer, 2023). Meanwhile, a study revealed that African American women characters living in Mississippi experienced educational, racial, economic, family, and political problems through expressive speech acts analysis in Tate Taylor's The Help (Mianawati, 2013). In the tourism field, a study unmasked that English expressive speech acts can be tools to state appraisals or reviews from hotel guests incorporating politeness strategies (Radovanović, 2023).

Further, in America, the use of Instagram to respond to mental issues is quite increasing. It indicates that American society is seriously facing mental issues in life. Studies reveal how American society is currently struggling with mental issues. A study revealed self-perceived burden to be deployed as a significant measurement in drawing decisions upon people with chronic psychological conditions (Kuharic et al., 2024). Piatkowska et al. (2024) conducted a study and inferred that crimes in America are significantly increasing as an effect of the increased mental illness in the country incorporating racial issues. After the COVID-19 stroke, there have been so many societal issues inherited from mental illness increasing in the US (James et al., 2023; Kapp et al., 2023; Oblath et al., 2024). From the studies, it can be inherited that American society is currently struggling with mental issues affecting major aspects of life. Thus, there should be serious attention to addressing mental issues faced by the country.

Social media particularly Instagram become a comfortable virtual place for its users to express their psychological conditions (Fajri et al., 2023). Several studies were conducted by Aarts et al., (2015) and Wiwatkunupakarn et al., 2022) and revealed that social network site was quite used to respond to depression and loneliness at lower levels. Griffith et al., (2021) through their research, it is found that Instagram artists were eager to promote mental health even wider through Instagram. It means that on the other hand, posts, comments, and captions suspected to reflect mental illness are commonly found on Instagram. Kim et al., (2021) found that social media can be used as tools for screening depressed and non-depressed people. Hence, social media are valid tools to identify depression. Potential psychological aspects involved in the relationship between Instagram use and indicators of mental health have also been investigated by Faelens et al., (2021). Picardo et al., (2020) found that on Instagram, there was a quite large number of contents concerning self-harm risk although was only one assessed to be related to an actual suicidal act. It means that Instagram is commonly used to express unpleasant feelings of its users. In other research, it was reported by Brown et al., (2019) that 80% of their research participants had seen instances of active suicidal ideation on Instagram

utilizing derogatory emotional terms. Further, Harvey (2012) conducted a study dealing with the adolescent's online mental health. It found that there are two kinds of utterances expressing depression: "I am depressed" and "I have depression". The research was a corpus-based study. Armstrong et al. (2023) reported through their research that they found 441 suicide news articles in Chhattisgarh during February and July of 2019. It indicates that depression is happening everywhere across the world caused by varied factors.

Based on the background of both linguistic aspects and the American society context, this research aims to investigate the types and strategies of expressive speech acts in @gemmacorrell's Instagram comment section. The account was selected because it explicitly states concerns about mental issues in the US. The account also has broad followers proved by the sign of a verified account. Further, the creator is affiliated with Mental Health America, a quite established organization dedication its existence to mental health, well-being, illness prevention, and other societal crises. Hence, the account @gemmacorrell represents the data core of this research.

This research is significant to conduct because it is expected to provide reflections and alternatives concerning mental illnesses through the utilization of language and digital platforms in a more global context worldwide. Instagram content creators can later replicate the pattern of the style of @gemmacorrell's content in reflecting mental issues using the frame of expressive speech acts. Further, this research is also significant because the unification of language use and digital platforms can generate social support, particularly among those experiencing mental issues as the issues tend to massively grow everywhere.

Conceptual Framework

Expressive Speech Acts

Speech act, according to Austin, (1962), indicates that in speaking, people mean to do something. This notion then became the basic core of a speech act theory formulated by Yule (1996). In his theory, activities performed through utterances are considered as speech acts. Further, Searle (1969) divided the speech act components into three; the elocutionary act (words meaning); the illocutionary act (speakers' intention); and the perlocutionary act (listeners' interpretation of the utterances). Regarding the illocutionary act, there are five basic categories: representative, directive, commissive, declarative, and expressive. In this study, the illocutionary act will be focused on the expressive speech act.

Going forward, the authors involve the theories of expressive speech act proposed by several scholars. Norrick (1978) offers a notion that expressive illocutionary acts are constructed by essential basic emotions behind and the illocutionary acts involve the psychological condition of the speakers. Norrick's notion is then followed up by Guiraud et al. (2011) that basic emotions cover joy, sadness, approval, and disapproval. He also claimed that sadness is a situation when speakers know that their desire is not about to come true. Ronan (2015) then draws a categorization of the expressive illocutionary acts one of which is expressing sorrow. As its name suggests, the category contains utterances expressing sorrow or sad feelings of the speakers. Regarding utterances, it has been previously claimed that utterances can be further analyzed to rethink and bring

another dimension of informational analysis (Borchmann, 2018). It means that beyond the utterances, there are deeper and varied alternative meanings that can be recovered.

Digital Discourse

Digital technology has successfully brought new spaces, realities, and ways of life, influencing the change of how people perceive and recognize the world surrounding them (Zhang et al., 2024). Digital discourse is defined as "a world of research that attends primarily to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discursive phenomena in new/social media" by Thurlow, (2017). In addition, Hafner, (2018) claims, "Digital discourses, that is, texts and interactions in digitally mediated contexts, provide an additional site for applied linguistics research, presenting opportunities and challenges." Further, as the notion of social media and Instagram, the discussion cannot be separated from digital society and its discourse. Digital discourse in terms of involving the most up-to-date technologies covers users' interaction in instant messengers, web blogs, photo or graphic content, handphones, social network websites, gaming platforms, and video content Thurlow & Mroczek, (2011). Hence, in short, it can be said that what can be read on Instagram in this case is seen as digital discourse. Digital discourse emphasizes the perspective of sociolinguistics in terms of language use in digital technologies.

Instagram and Mental Issues

According to Kaplan & Haenlein, (2010), the core of social media is related to digital, technologies, content, and interactions from users. Social media is also related to interaction through direct messengers or platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Howard & Parks, 2012; Kent, 2010). Hence, the notion of social media can be defined as a digital platform where users can put their content and interact with other users directly through messengers or the features of the content. Further, one of the most popular social media today is Instagram where users can create, share, like, and comment on photos that may have captions attached (https://instagram.com/). Instagram was built to provide users with a platform to share the happiness they experience with the world immediately. Even further, social and mass media play significant roles in people's lives. As proposed by Turska-Kawa (2011), media is utilized by society to build social identities. Radovic et al., (2017) have outlined the positive and negative social media uses caused by different moods. The positive use of social media covers positive content for entertainment, humor, content creation, tourism, and the like. On the contrary, the negative use of social media includes sharing risky behaviors, cyberbullying, and making self-denigrating comparisons with others. In short, both positive and negative uses of social media are significantly related to the language - utterances- used, in addition to the graphic display or illustration. Depression as one of the mental issues is closely related to emotion as both are also parts of psychology. Currently, psychological constructionists disclose that there is interconnectivity between language and emotion in the context of empiric experiences and scientific assessments (Lindquist et al., 2015).

Method

This research was approached qualitatively to describe and reflect the use of expressive speech acts in @gemmacorrell's comment section. The data was taken from

the Instagram comments section of @gemmacorrell's account in the form of utterances. The comment section referred to content in a series of pictures posted on Mey 15, 2024, consisting of 151 comments (see picture 1). The series of pictures was deployed as the context of the utterances in the comment section. In this case, it was contextualized that mental illness had varied metaphors. The utterances in the 151 comments were shortlisted to find which of those conformed to the frame of expressive speech acts. The shortlisted utterances were then analyzed using the list of twelve expressive speech acts proposed by Searle & Vanderveken (1985); apologize, thank, condole, congratulate, complain, lament, protest, deplore, boast, compliment, greet, and welcome. The analysis also complied with the concept of expressive speech acts offered by Guiraud et al., (2011), Norrick, (1978), and Ronan, (2015) to express a human's mind, psychological, and mental states upon something, someone, and situation after processing their appraisal. To strengthen the psychological aspects of the analysis, this research also incorporated the list of Words for Emotions by Barron, (2021) providing various emotional conditions both positive and negative.

Result and Discussion

Spotlighting the Types of Expressive Speech Acts

As mentioned in the method section, the context was the reflection of mental illness metaphor in society's real life. In other words, the creator intended to describe what mental illness looked like in reality. Hence, the utterances in the comment sections tended to respond to the context of mental illness reflections in real life based on their respective emotional states about the content. Picture 1 demonstrates the context of the discourse to see how IG users respond to the notion of the context.

Picture 1. A Series of Pictures in @gemmacorrell's IG Account Used as the Data Source

The initial stage of data analysis resulted in the statistics in Table 1. From 151 total comments, 50 out of them were only mentions to other IG accounts that did not provide any meaningful response. Hence, taken out of 50 comments, the data remained 101 comments consisting of meaningful responses among IG users. The 101 comments consisted of 83 verbal utterances and 18 emojis of 'nonverbal text'. The existence of emojis as nonverbal text to express emotional states was interesting to be further analyzed. However, this research only focused on the verbal expressions.

Table 1. Initial Data Analysis in @gemmacorrell's Comments

Total Comments	Mentions	Utterances	Verbal		Emojis
			Expressive	*Non-Expressive*	
151	50	101	61	22	18

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

Further, referring to the list of expressive speech acts types proposed by Searle & Vanderveken (1985) and list of emotion words by Barron (2021), it was confirmed that the data analysis performed 7 out of 12 types of expressive speech acts with the most usage in order as follows; compliment (39), lament (11), thank (7), congratulate (1), deplore (1), protest (1), and welcome (1). Table 2 shows the statistics of types. Among the seven involved types, more than half were in the form of compliments toward the content, which was positive emotions. It indicated that people saw the content of @gemmacorrell positively to address mental issues in America. The positive emotional states were reflected in the forms of compliment, thank, congratulate, and welcome with a total number of 48 utterances. Meanwhile, 13 utterances performed negative emotional states in the forms of lament, protest, and deplore. Table 2 shows how the types of expressive spread in number.

Table 2. Types of Expressive Speech Acts in @gemmacorrell's Comments

Types of Expressive Speech Acts (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985)											
apologize	thank	condole	congratulate	complain	lament	protest	deplore	boast	compliment	greet	Welcome
0	7	0	1	0	11	1	1	0	39	0	1

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

Further, each type of Expressive speech act found in @gemmacorrell's comments performed various kinds of linguistic features as expressive signifiers such as adjectives, verbs, adverbs, phrasal words, and even complete sentences. Table 3 shows a recap of the expressive signifiers.

Table 3. Verbal Expressions -Signifiers- in @gemmacorrell's Comments

Types of Expressive Speech Acts	Verbal Expressions (Linguistic Features)
compliment	***adjectives****: amazing, powerful, wonderful, fantastic, happy, perfect, accurate, cool, recognizable, excellent, very real, so good, awesome, brilliant, so true, clever, amazing, inspiring, never gets old* ***verbs****: love, amazed* ***adverbs****: so well, perfectly* ***phrasal nouns****: such an engaging way, a yes, all of this, a beauty* ***exclamation****: wow!*
lament	***adjectives:*** *aching, worst* ***verbs****: tired* ***phrasal nouns****: what I tell myself to do every day, every one of these*

	sentences: My motivation is running away. Get outta my brain!!, I faced mental health issues. I always have mental breakdowns.
thank	**verbs-sentence**: thank, thank you
congratulate	**noun-sentence**: congratulation!
deplore	**sentence**: Mental health challenges are so misunderstood as it's frankly upsetting.
protest	**sentences**: But I think it's unfortunate how you represent sinister and other bad feelings painted in Black. As a Black person, I feel really bad about this.
Welcome	**sentence**: Hope I will find out where to buy in Switzerland.

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

From the data shown in Table 3, it can be inferred that compliments mostly involved positive emotional words or expressions. It implied that users giving their comments in the IG post possessed positive psychological states towards @gemmacorrell's intended messages through the post. The users were generally happy with @gemmacorrell's works and the way they portrayed mental issues in America. Other positive emotional expressions were found in the types of congratulate, thank, and welcome. The user congratulated @gemmacorrell for creating such good illustrative work, welcomed @gemmacorrell's workbook- to be distributed to more countries, and thanked @gemmacorrell for concerning mental issues by creating such a relatable illustration. Meanwhile, negative emotional words or expressions were found in the types of laments, deplore, and protest. The type of lament tended to describe and emphasize how the IG users were struggling to face mental illnesses and issues they had. The deplore type showed how people were disappointed by their mental issues, and the protest type spotlighted the color choices in @gemmacorrell's content assumed by some people as disrespectful to a particular race -black people.

The Strategy of Expressive Speech Acts Delivery.

This section serves as some examples of the use of expressive speech acts in utterances and how they were delivered in @gemmacorrell's comments in terms of the strategy. In this case, the strategy of speech acts delivery referred to the strategy proposed by Wijana (1996).

1   Compliments

The examples of compliments demonstrated how IG users express their amazement and praise toward @gemmacorrell's content. Some of them were expressed in a complete syntactic structure while others were not, as simply as '*Wow*'.
That's an amazing reflection, I love your work, Gemma!
The comment denotes a compliment towards @gemmacorrell's illustrative work. It was explicitly, directly, and expressed by the word 'amazing', indicating that the IG user praised the gemma's work. There was no implied meaning or message behind the utterance.
Perfect, just perfect ♡!

The word '*perfect*' signified the compliment explicitly from the IG user to @gemmacorrell's work. In addition, the compliment was also delivered directly and literally as it had no other hidden meaning or intention. Through this comment, the IG user claimed that Gemma's work was totally flawless but ultimately good.

Amazed by your talent for story-drawing. 🎨🖤

This comment showed an IG user's admiration towards @gemmacorrell's work. The word 'amazed' denotes how the IG user was excited about Gemma's skill in story-drawing -comics. The speech act strategy was delivered explicitly regarding the word of expression, directly regarding the modus of the sentence, and literally regarding the meaning.

Wow.

This comment simply exposed the IG user's amazement at @gemmacorrell's post about mental illness in America. It was explicitly expressed in a direct way without ambiguous meaning -literally.

2 Laments

Lament refers to any expression of sorrow, sadness, and other unpleasant feelings. The three examples of lament would describe how IG users' sorrows were expressed in @gemmacorrell's IG comments.

I feel all of these 😵💫 *I am so tired of being tired and all…*

This comment revealed the IG user's exhaustion represented by Gemma's work about mental illness. The user explicitly agreed to what Gemma illustrated directly with no hidden intention but literal. In other words, the comment unveiled the user's exhausting life in any way.

Constant, Aching Fatigue is my personality.

The word 'aching fatigue' became the key term in this comment. The IG user intended to explicitly express that s/he had recurring fatigue in life repeatedly. The word 'personality' inferred that fatigue had been embodied in her/his life. The expression speech act was directly delivered in a literal manner.

I think motivation is running away from me 😊

This comment was hopeless. It showed the IG user's hopelessness as it said, 'Motivation is running away,' implying that the IG user has nothing to bargain with in life. The desperation in the comment was explicitly expressed and directly spelled out.

3 Thank

Thank you so much for being you and sharing these trials we go through every day that so many people (including me) have no words to express. THANK YOU.

All the messages in this comment were explicitly revealed. This comment denoted that the IG user was thankful for seeing Gemma's excellent work. The repeated 'Thank You' told everything about the user's gratefulness expressed explicitly and directly without hidden intentions.

Wow. My life in pictures. Thankyou 🖤

Before showing thankfulness, this comment gave praise toward @gemmacorrell's content for conformity with the IG user's life experiences. The phrase 'thank you' denoted everything about the IG user's gratitude exposed explicitly, directly, and literally.

4 Congratulate

Fantastic book, congratulations ☺

The word 'congratulations' in this comment said it all that the IG user wanted to congratulate @gemmacorrell for creating fantastic work. The intention was explicitly, directly, and expressed.

5 Welcome

Hope I will find out where to buy in Switzerland.

This comment indicated that the IG user would so much welcome Gemma's work distribution to Switzerland. The IG user expressed hope and welcome in explicit, literal, and direct strategies.

6 Deplore

Mental health challenges are so misunderstood that it's frankly upsetting.

This comment denoted the IG user's disappointment indicated by the word 'upsetting'. The speech act strategies involved were explicit, direct, and literal ways without implying hidden meaning.

7 Protest

But I think it's unfortunate how you represent sinister and other bad feelings painted in Black. As a Black person, I feel really bad about this...

The IG user in this comment intended to protest Gemma for her color selection in her illustrations. The IG user believed that the black color is strongly affiliated with black people's representation. This is what made the IG user against Gemma's work despite admiring it. The speech act strategy deployed explicit, direct, and literal manners. There was no implied meaning in this comment.

Conclusion

From the findings and discussion, the authors conclude that American society tended to share support for each other having mental issues by utilization of Instagram as it was revealed by the analysis of @gemmacorrell's IG comments. At least there were seven out of twelve types of expressive speech acts deployed by the utterances in particular @gemmacorrell's IG comments. They were compliment (39), lament (11), thank (7), congratulate (1), deplore (1), protest (1), and welcome (1). The compliment more dealt with Gemma's excellent works in campaigning against mental issues in America, in illustration. They also thanked Gemma for creating related content to their respective life experiences. Meanwhile, most of the expressive speech acts in particular @gemmacorrell's IG comments utilized explicit, direct, and literal strategies, indicating that the American people were quite clueless about their mental issues. They could just reveal their mental issues openly without any boundaries. It also implies that they need help for their mental issues. Moreover, this research implies that people tend to share their feelings on social media. It is an interesting phenomenon and ironic as well because people start avoiding each other to share their feelings. Is it a humanity decrease? More advanced investigations need to be conducted to dig deeper into the phenomenon of language, social media, digital society, and mental health issues.

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