



The Commissive Acts in **Joe Biden's** Inauguration Speech

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ABSTRACT

The commissive acts in the inauguration speech by Joe Biden were identified in this descriptive qualitative research. The data used Cruse (2006) theory to analyze the types of commissive act. The data for this research was collected by using an observational method and a non-participation technique. Then, the data was analyzed using the pragmatic identity method and pragmatic competence in equalizing. The researchers identified in 15 utterances that uttered by Joe Biden in the presidential inauguration speech. The utterances consisted of 5 types of commissive acts. Those were 5 acts of promising, 1 act of offering, 3 acts of vowing, 2 acts of contracting, and 4 acts of pledging. Furthermore, from all those types, the acts of promising became the most dominant among the other types of commissive act from the 15 utterances that had been identified.

Keywords: commissive act, illocutionary act, pragmatics, speech, speech act

1. Introduction

The quote that stated "I promise you I will fight for those who did not support me as for those who did." (BBC.com, 2021) was taken from Joe Biden's inauguration speech. The utterance clearly shows the commissive act of promising, where the speaker promised that speaker would not favoritism to those who did not support him and would treat them as well as who have supported him. Then, Martínez (2013) stated that promising act can use a conditional promise in order to persuade the addressee to do something beneficial to the speaker, such as "If you give me your scarf, I've got to let you be in our gang".

From the utterance, the speaker used the act of promising as a negotiating tactic by relying on the addressee's trust in his ability to follow politeness conventions.

Similar to promise, pledge is also classified as the commissive act. When someone means to do something that definitely will happen in the future, it can be defined as a promise while pledge can be defined as a symbol of someone else's belief in or desire to follow through with a promise (Webster, 1984). From the definition, the difference between promise and a pledge is from the context where the pledge mostly uses in a formal or serious event, such as in a president's speech. For



the example, Donald Trump's Inaugural Address on Friday, January 20, 2017 Washington D.C, that stated "America will start winning again, winning like never before" (Mufiah & Rahman, 2018). The utterance mentioned that the president said that America would rise again and would become even more advanced under his presidency. On the other hand, commissive act is not only consists about an expression of future action. The utterance "Could I give you a ride?" is classified as the commissive act of offering where the utterance expressed the temporal offer. This statement offering is a part of commissive act is supported by Cruse (2000), that claimed the commissive acts committed the communicator to a specific action in the future such as offer, contract, threaten, promise, and vow.

Kristina & Ambalegin (2019) examined at the different types and functions of illocutionary acts in President Obama's election night speech. The paper used the Searle's theory for the types and function of illocutionary acts. Then, they used the descriptive qualitative approach as method in collecting the data. According to the analysis of the report, there were 24 records of illocutionary acts, including: 3 examples of directive: 3 data points that demonstrated request, the type of commissive which accounted for 7 of the data points: 7 data points that demonstrated promising, 7 data points that demonstrated the types of representatives: 7 examples of assertive that were shown, 7 data points that revealed the different types of expressive: 6 data points for thanking and 1 data point for apologizing.

Ulum et al. (2018) analyzed the sorts of commissive speech acts reported in presidential campaign speeches in the

United States. The paper used the Searle and Vanderveken's theory for the types of commissive speech acts. Then, they used the descriptive qualitative approach as method in collecting the data. According to the analysis of the report, Trump and Clinton were using various forms of commissive speech acts. Those are 77.9% of promising, 4.5% of threatening, 4% pledging, 1% of offering, 1% of refusing, and 14.6% of assuring from Trump's utterances. Then, 97.8% of promising and assure 2.2% of assuring from Clinton's utterances.

As mentioned previously, this research used the same data source which is taken from the speech. Then, the theory that used in this research was different from both of the research above. In this research, the researchers used the theory from Cruse (2000), that discussed speech act classification which consist of commissive acts in English. However, the future action is not the only way to stating a commissive act. The offering act "Can I help you find anything?" is also indicates a commissive act. Thus, this research found out the types of commissive acts.

2. Literature Review

According to Vanderveken and Kubo (2001), stated that the various directions of fit that might exist between words and objects are represented by the five illocutionary points. Those points are assertive utterances, commissive utterances, directive utterances, declaratory utterances, and expressive utterances. From one of those points, the commissive act is being the main discussion in this research. Then, according to Cruse (2000) commissive act bound the speaker to a certain action in the future



such as promise, offer, vow, contract, threaten, and pledge.

1. Promise

According to Cruse (2000), promising is one of the types of commissive act. This explanation is supported by Levinson (1983) that stated, the promising act is classified as a commissive speech act that expresses a psychological condition. The promising act also binds us to a future course of action that benefits the addressee or a third party in some way (Martínez, 2013). Example: "I'll have the respect" (Siregar, 2021).

2. Offer

According to Cruse (2000), offering is classified into the commissive act. This statement is supported by Martínez (2013) that stated, offering is attached into a compound types of commissive and directive speech act. However, offering is more towards the commissive act, because the speaker is expected to carry out the action that predicted in the statement (Martínez, 2013). Example: "Have some more wine, please." (Lap, 2019).

3. Vow

According to Cruse (2000), vowing is a part of the commissive act. Vowing has seriousness with the promises or threats don't always have. As a result, the seriousness of a vow is greater than the seriousness of a commitment (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Example: "I promise this, as the Bible says, 'Weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning'" (BBC.com, 2021).

4. Contract

According to Cruse (2000), contracting is classified into the commissive act. This statement is supported by Searle & Vanderveken (1985) that stated, contract is a group of commissive that express commitments by both of speaker

and a hearer. A contract is a set of mutual promises established by two parties who are contracting. Example: "If the Giants win I promise to pay you \$5.00 and in return if the Giants lose you promise to pay me \$5.00." (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985).

5. Threat

According to Cruse (2000), contracting is classified into the commissive act. This statement is supported by Martínez (2013) that categorized the threats as commissive because treats denote a future set of circumstances that the speaker is supposed to create. Threatening is a sort of coercion in which a course of action is recommended in order to avoid a bad reaction. Example: "What I do in the next scene is that I threaten to shoot you when you get back from party." (Sami, 2015).

6. Pledge

According to Cruse (2000), pledge is a part of the commissive act. Pledging is similar with promise. Pledge can be defined as a symbol of someone else's belief in or desire to follow through with a promise (Webster, 1984). On the other hand, Searle & Vanderveken (1985) stated that pledging is similar to vowing, though it may not always carry the same solemnity. From the explanation, the pledging act is the setting in which a vow-based statement is most often used in a formal or serious event. Example: "America will start winning again, winning like never before." (Mufiah & Rahman, 2018).

3. Research Method

This research was descriptive qualitative research that looks into and understands the meanings that individuals or groups place on a human problem. called qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). Next, the data sources were the utterances from Joe Biden's inaugural

speech which has been transcribed. Then, the data source contained commissive acts. This research used an observational method, in which the data was gathered through the detailed analysis or observation (Sudaryanto, 2015). Then, the used non-participatory as the technique. The researchers are not engaged in dialogue, discussion, or exchanges; thus, they are not a part of the discourse between individuals. Furthermore, This research used Sudaryanto (2015) methods of pragmatic identity and pragmatic competence in equalizing by using theory from Cruse (2000) to analyze the data.

4. Result and Discussion

Result

There were 15 data in the Joe Biden's inauguration speech that used to demonstrate the commissive acts. The first, there were 5 data that represented the expression of promising act. The second, there only 1 data that represented the expression of offering act. Next, there were 3 data that represented the expression of vowing act and 2 data that represented the contracting act. The last, there were 4 data represented the expression of pledging act. Thus, there were 5 types of commissive acts that existed in Joe Biden's inauguration speech.

**Table 4.1 Frequency of
Commissive Acts Found in Joe Biden's
Inauguration Speech.**

NO	Types of Commissive Acts	Frequency
1	Promising	5
2	Offering	1
3	Vowing	3
4	Contract	2
5	Pledge	4
TOTAL		15

Discussion

A. Promising Act

Data 1

"I promise you I will fight for those who did not support me as for those who did."

The word 'promise' from the utterance above clearly showed the expression of commissive act of promising. The word 'promise' has function as performative verb. Thus, the role of 'promise' was as a verb, it classified as promising rather than pledging. Furthermore, the meaning from the utterance above was to promised that the speaker would not favoritism to those who did not support him and would treat them as well as who have supported him.

Data 2

"I will always level with you."

The verb 'will' from the utterance above, express the expression of commissive act of promising. The phrase '*always level with you*' after the auxiliary verb 'will' was showing the function of promising as an affirmation or oath. Thus, the meaning from the utterance above was the speaker promised to always be on the side of the people.

Data 3

"I will defend the Constitution, I'll defend our democracy."

From the utterance above, the statement was made the utterance to be classified as commissive speech act of promising. The speaker made an oath or affirmation to defend the constitution and the democracy. Thus, it classified as promising because it was not aim to a community or group of people. The aim from the utterance above was a



constitution and the democracy of America.

Data 4

"We will rise to the occasion."

From the utterance above, it was classified as commissive speech act of promising. The speaker made an affirmation or oath to raise the occasion. Thus, it classified as promising because it was not aim to a community or group of people. The aim from the utterance above was an opportunity.

Data 5

"We will get through this together."

The statement from the utterance above was expressed the expression of commissive act of promising. The speaker committed to be together with the citizens to get some problem through. Thus, the statement was made it to be classified as promising because it committed something.

B. Offering Act

Data 1

"Bringing America together, uniting our people, uniting our nation. And I ask every American to join me in this cause."

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as the commissive act of offering. The speaker gave an offering to the citizens in United States of America for join his offer to uniting the nation.

C. Vowing Act

Data 1

"And I promise this, as the Bible says, 'Weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning'."

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of vowing. The speaker made a serious promise when uttered the statement using the name of the 'Bible' where it used the aspect of religion while making the promise.

Data 2

"Before God and all of you, I give you my word"

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of vowing. The speaker made a serious promise when uttered the statement above, where it means as a strong way to say promise after uttered the statement with conjunction 'before'.

Data 3

"Let me know in my heart when my days are through, America, America, I gave my best to you."

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of vowing. The speaker made a serious promise when uttered the statement above, where it means as a strong way to say promise that the speaker will give the best for the country.

D. Contracting

Data 1

"If we do that, I guarantee we will not failed"

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of contracting. The speaker made a contract that will guarantee the audiences for not to be failed if they follow what the speaker's said.



Data 2

"I believe we will, and when we do, ***we'll write the next great chapter in the history of the United States of America.***"

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of contracting. The speaker made a contract that they will make something great in the nation history if they do what the speaker's suggestion.

E. Pledging act

Data 1

"And I pledge this to you. I will be a President for all Americans, all Americans."

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of pledging. The word 'pledge' has function as a verb. Thus, the role of 'pledge' was classified as pledging rather than promising, where it made a solemn promise. Thus, from the utterance above, the speaker was pledging that all Americans will be regulated by the speaker as the president.

Data 2

"The dream of ***justice for all will be deferred no longer.***"

From the utterance above the statement was classified as commissive speech act of pledging. The speaker made a solemn promise of doing something for all citizens in America. Thus, because the aim of the utterance above was to citizens, it classified as pledging rather than promising.

Data 3

"We will repair our alliances, and engage with the world once again. "

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of pledging. The aim of the utterance above was to the alliances. Thus, it classified as pledging rather than promising because the solemn promising was aimed to the community or group that consist more than one person and uttered in a serious event.

Data 4

"We will honor them by becoming the people and the nation we can and should be. "

From the utterance above, the statement was classified as commissive speech act of pledging. The speaker was made a solemn promise to some people in a serious event. The word 'honor' was the aspect that made the utterance above became formal and be a serious event.

5. Conclusion

On the transcription of Joe Biden's inaugural address, the Cruses hypothesis affected the effectiveness of speaking that bound the speaker to a certain action in the future. Based on Cruse's theory, there are six different types of commissive acts. Those are *promise, offer, vow, contract, threat,* and *pledge*. The most dominant type of commissive act was the act of promising and the smallest types of commissive act was the act of offering. All of the frequent were made in order to bind the speaker to a certain action in the speech event in the future. Moreover, there were several types of the commissive acts had been identified in 15 utterances. Those types are 5 acts of promising, 1 act of offering, 3 acts of vowing, 2 acts of contracting, and 4 acts of pledging. From all those types, the acts of promising become the most dominant from the 15 utterances.



It is important to understand the commissive acts after reviewing the research findings and conclusions. Thus, it is beneficial for speakers and listeners to have this knowledge in order to offer precise information, especially when it comes to growth, so that people do not misunderstand and conflict may be avoided.

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