

The Speech of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, Delivered at the UN Assembly in 2024: An Analysis through the Lens of Speech Act Theory

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze the use of speech acts by Dr Muhammed Yunus while delivering his first speech in the capacity of the Chief Advisor of Bangladesh's interim government at the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Also, through a content analysis, the researchers have attempted to determine the extent to which the speaker covered the global and local contexts. Searl's (1969) proposition of the illocutionary act is used as the theoretical framework to find out the different illocutionary acts- assertive, directive, commissives, expressive, and declarative- in the discourse of the concerned speech. In this study, a mixed-method approach has been followed. A qualitative approach has been used for data collection and content analysis of the discourse of the speech. Then, following quantitative approaches, the use of different speech acts is quantified and categorized into their subtypes following both Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) illocutionary taxonomies. The study's findings reflect that the concerned speech covered all the points of the illocutionary acts, and both global and local issues have room in the speech at different proportions.

Keywords: Discourse, Global issues, Illocutionary act, Local issues, Speech, Speech Act Theory

1. Introduction

Dr Yunus's idea of the microcredit system and its significance in eradicating poverty from the world, as well as his recently proposed vision of 3 Zero, are well-known. He is famous worldwide for delivering speeches in different internationally recognized institutions. As a speaker of social business, he has already proved his acceptability. However, recently he has been entrusted with the responsibilities of the Chief Advisor of Bangladesh and has given his first speech in that capacity at the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). In this speech, he addressed different issues. So far, his speeches' qualities have been a matter of his credit. He shared knowledge, promoted his ideas, and was honored and financially benefited. But now his speech is represented as the speech of the nation. Hence, it is important to focus on the concerned speech at different levels. Any speech can be analyzed on many different grounds, for example, CDA

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analysis, political analysis, thematic analysis, speech act force analysis, and so on. To narrow down the topic, the present study has chosen the concerned speech for content analysis, focusing on Speech Act Theory (SAT), which was first proposed by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969). The study is confined to the query of finding out the ratio of the global and local issues and the use of illocutionary speech acts of the concerned speech to keep the data to a manageable state without taking into account the external factors like political ambience of the context in which the lecture was delivered or Dr Yunus' rhetoric strategies or his social business background.

2. Purpose of the Study

The present study is an attempt to analyze Dr Yunus's first speech at the 79th session of UNGA to find out different illocutionary acts following Searle's (1969) taxonomies. Another aim of the study is to bring to light, through a content analysis, to what extent Dr Yunus covered both global and local issues in the study.

3. Conceptual Framework Based on Theories

Speech Act and Speech Act Theory

Mabaquiao (2018) mentions that the function of language is explained by Speech Act Theory (SAT), whereas Yule (1996) says that Speech Act (SA) refers to the phenomenon of doing while saying. On the other hand, Study.com (n.d.) defines SA as the different functions performed by languages. In the following discourse, Dictionary.com (n.d.) mentions SA as

any of the acts that may be performed by the speaker in making an utterance as stating, asking, requesting, advising, warning, or persuading, considered in terms of the content of the message, the intention of the speaker, and the effect on the listener. (para 1)

In a communicative situation, it is important for the speakers and listeners to know the purpose of communication for a meaningful and effective understanding. Studies based on the SAT are important for many different reasons. It can help people develop a sense of the functions of language. In this regard, Brown (2000) says, "illocutionary competence consists of the ability to manipulate the functions of the language" (p. 223). On the other hand, by having command over the speech acts, communicative competence can be developed, and Second Language (L2) learners can contribute linguistically in communicative situations where functional language is mostly required (Brown, 2000). SAT can help the L2 learners learn the different illocutionary forces inductively, which ultimately can help develop their

competence, and in communicative situations, this skill may help them produce functional language. Emphasizing SAT, Hanna and Richard (2019) mention that SAT aids in grasping the meaning of any utterances and the sequential behavior of the listeners. Referring to Austin (1975), Hanna and Richard (2019) mention,

SAT proposes that any form of expression, either verbal or textual, represents acts to be performed, and there are some actions that need to be performed by the receiver. In other words, SAT tries to understand how an utterance can be used to achieve actions. (p. 1)

Bayat (2013) says that the SAT is commonly used in foreign language-based teaching research, and it is also used to identify problems listeners face in construing meaning from a speech. He further says that equally, it is crucial to find out the use of the different speech acts in communicative situations. To sum up, SAT is a very common and effective theoretical base for many research, which has a connection with real-life experience and as a result, it has proved its feasibility and practicability in applied contexts.

Concept Formation

Austin's (1962) idea is that a person can perform three speech acts while speaking: locutionary act which indicates the expressive linguistic spoken production, illocutionary act which means the speech that reflects the purpose of the orator, and perlocutionary act which refers to the reaction of the listeners elicited as a result of the utterance of the speaker (p. 223).

Based on the ideologies of the illocutionary act of Austin (1962), Searle (1969) recognizes the following elementary categories of illocutionary speech acts: Assertive, Directive, Commissive, Declarative, and Expressive. In their studies, Nordquist (2024), Mukhroji et al. (2019), and Mabaquiao (2018) discuss Searle's (1969) taxonomies of illocutionary forces. Assertives involve statements, descriptions, classifications, explanations, and so on. This speech act is used to narrate or describe any phenomenon, and this can be true or false. Directives include orders, commands, requests, hopes, questions, suggestions, invitations, and so on. Expressives are used by a speaker to greet, to thank, to congratulate, to welcome, and so on. Speakers' psychological or emotional or on-the-spot reaction can be expressed using this act. On the other hand, Commissives are used for promising, vowing, pledging, contracting, giving guarantees, and so on. Declaratives are used by a speaker to bring changes in the practical situation through utterances. This act involves thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating, and similar functions. Thus, there are some overlapping issues in the subtypes of both declarative and expressive.

Speech or any sort of communication can be analyzed using the SAT. Mabaquiao (2018) explores the SAT as propounded by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), who are the innovators of this theory, and opines that although Austin introduced the theory first, it is Searle who gave it a further stronger shape, which is more organized and more systematic. Chan and Zhang (2019) show through their writing that both the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are important to understand and grasp the pragmatic function of the discourse.

However, researchers mostly focus on the ideology or message involved in the discourse of communication. In this regard, Mukhroji et al. (2019) opine that locutionary and perlocutionary acts are mainly used for the analysis of speech since the former deals with the intention of the speakers, the latter encourages eliciting feedback or reaction from the hearer. In any communication, linguistic expression is not likely to be of use unless and until it conveys some purposeful meaning and ensures the understanding of the communicators.

Since its inception, SAT has been used as the theoretical framework to conduct many areas for exploration of different discourses and even it is used nowadays for scrutinizing everyday language (Chan & Zhang, 2019). It has proved its increasing significance by being addressed in linguistic research (Bayat, 2013). Researchers like, Qinqin (2011) used SAT in the analysis of the discourse of advertisement, Adiniu and Uchenna (2023) used it for scrutinizing the slogans of advertisements, Lin (2024) applied it in finding out the compliment speech act styles in 'A Dream of Red Mansions', Chattopadhyay (2024) utilized it for visual narratives Hadha Bodha and Doraemon, Chan and Zhang (2019) showed the use of this theory in analyzing the titles of WeChat and likewise, some other researchers used SAT to conduct their exploration. In all these research works and many other studies like them, the illocutionary forces are the basis of the conceptual framework in analyzing the discourse of different forms of communication.

To keep the exploration to a manageable state the present study has adopted the illocutionary act's taxonomies that is, assertive, declarative, directive, expressive and commissive as the theoretical framework. After finding the contents of the selected speech, the discourses are scrutinized to show the use of illocutionary forces at varying degrees in conveying different messages by the speaker.

4. Literature Review

Analyzing visual narratives, Chattopadhyay (2024) has shown that being aware of speech acts can help form a complete picture of the visual images and ultimately can facilitate a better understanding of the narratives. She says, "[I]t

allowed a more holistic understanding of the language and meaning-making processes of visual narratives under the light of linguistics" (p. 131). On the other hand, Adiniu and Uchenna (2023) through their study focus on the discourse of the slogans of advertisements and show that the slogans have the potential to perform speech acts and having the knowledge of speech acts, it becomes easier for the consumers to understand the message of the slogans and thus they can take proper decision regarding the purchase of the product.

Through their study, Hanna and Richard (2019) have proved the effectiveness of the SAT in evaluating and understanding agents' verbal communication. Hanna and Richard (2019) say, "Speech Act Theory (SAT) aims to understand how utterances can be used to achieve actions" (p. 1). However, Mukhroji et al. (2019) find 7 subtypes for Directives: question, request, suggest, hope, instruct, invite, and order; for Assertive, 5 subtypes: Inform, conclude, assume, confirm, and accept; for Expressive 3 subtypes: greet, thank, and compliment; for Commissives 3 subtypes: promise, suggest, and agree and for Declarative 4 subtypes: thank, apologize, welcome. Using the five illocutionary forces, the researchers investigate the communication of students with higher levels of expertise in the English language in both formal and informal settings. The learners are found to have less understanding of pragmatics.

Azhari et al. (2018) bring out that without the declarative speech act, the rest of the other illocutionary forces are famous among the learners in classroom communicative situations. On the other hand, using illocutionary acts, Ali et al. (2017) scrutinize scholarly dialogues and find out assertive speech acts about politeness principles which include confessing, promising, advising, informing, arguing, and confirming.

Bayat (2013) explores selected teachers' styles in the use of speech acts while making an apology, complaining, declining and acknowledging. Based on the situation of communication, the teachers perform different speech acts. Apologizing and reasoning are the most common types of strategies used by the participants. Iqbal et al. (2022) analyze the speech of Barack Obama to find out different illocutionary speech acts in his speech, "A More Perfect Union". They discover that the speaker mostly used representative acts whereas, in the same year, Rakaj (2022) analyzes Barack Obama's two speeches (delivered during the presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012) to find out the directive force in the form of promises. This quantitative study discovered the frequency of uttering promises in the concerned speeches. The study also showed the use of performative verbs along with the use of the 'promise' in seven samples.

SAT has already proved its significance and feasibility for being an important base for a conceptual framework for analysing different types of communication in everyday life. The present study has referred to some research works where SAT has been effectively used, but its scope is not confined or limited to the proven extent only. To the best of the knowledge of the researchers, no research has ever been conducted on Dr Muhammed Yunus's first speech delivered at the UNGA using the taxonomies of Searl (1969). The findings of the study can also be used as a teaching-learning tool in communicative pedagogical situations.

5. Methodology

This is a mixed-method research since for data collection and analysis at different levels, both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been followed.

Data Collection

Dr Yunus's first speech delivered at the 79th session of the UNGA is the source of data. The entire speech was delivered in Bangla, and it was translated into 6 languages for the understanding of the other world leaders present there in the assembly. However, the English version of the speech was collected from Rtv News Online on 27 September 2024 under the headline, 'Dr. Yunus's Full Speech at the 79th UNGA' (Yunus, 2024). From two YouTube channels, TBN 24 (2024) and EKHON TV (2024), the English and Bangla recordings were collected.

Data Analysis

The speech was read several times for a better understanding and forming ideas regarding the different subject matters of the speech. The video recordings in both Bangla and English were heard by the researchers several times to give the entire writing a holistic approach with a detailed analysis by clear understanding. At first, the subject areas of the speech were sorted out and then taking into account the different illocutionary speech acts, the entire speech was examined and categorized according to different subtypes of each illocutionary act. The findings were quantified and converted to percentages. The findings have been tabulated which is followed by a findings and discussion session. In the discussion section, each illocutionary type with subtypes' proportions was documented.

6. Findings

Dr Yunus started his speech at 11. 24 am New York time on 27 September 2024 at the Headquarters of the United Nations (UN). The duration of speech delivery is around 35 minutes and 54 seconds (TBN 24, 2024 and EKHON TV, 2024).

Discussion on the Findings from Content Analysis

The speech covered both local and global issues. To be more specific, broadly, he addressed a total of 8 local and 20 global issues. Some of the issues are overlapping as they reflect both global and local realities, connecting one with another. There are also some repetitions, and therefore, the researchers have tried to avoid the recurrent agendas. So, his addressing global issues is greater in number than the local issues. In his capacity as the Chief of the Interim government of Bangladesh, Dr Yunus, with great eloquence, contextualized the global issue with the local one. For example, he talked about the global climate issues and their consequences. While doing it, at first he introduced the problem, depicted its severe consequences, then portrayed the flood situation of that time in Bangladesh, and at last, appealed to the world leaders to support Bangladesh and get ready to be always supportive of countries like Bangladesh. He did the same thing in the cases of urging for the upliftment of the socio-economic condition of the Bangladeshis and the importance of technological support for the global citizen to face the challenge of even environmental calamities. At first, he Figure 1 The ratio of global and local issues in Bangladesh placed the problems, then talked about the global crisis, and at last created a context to seek support for Bangladesh.



Figure 1. The Ratio of Global and Local Issues

A significant proportion of the speech is dedicated to the representation of the Anti-Discrimination-Student Movement (ADSM), the sacrifice and struggle of the Bangladeshi during the July-August movement in 2024, and especially of the students, eulogy for the young generation addressing them 'Generation Z', and then other areas like the sequential birth of new Bangladesh, Dr Yunus's being entrusted with the responsibilities of the Chief advisor of Bangladesh, the brutal roles of the previous government in taking the control of the movement, the previous government's corruption and other wrong deeds, and in the present situation the speaker's commitment to the global and local spheres maintaining friendly relation,

so far their performance after his acceptance of the responsibilities of the Chief Advisor, his appeal for international cooperation in the development of the country and supplication for support for the young generation of Bangladesh for their social, economic and intellectual development also occupy space in the speech.

Global issues get significant room in the speech like war in Philistine, war in Ukraine and its consequence, climate change and its challenges, Rohingya issues in Bangladesh (Bangladesh’s humanitarian roles in treating them, appeal for sustainable repatriation and appeal for ensuring justice for them), worldwide political and socio-economic freedom, responsibilities toward the migrated people, the importance of technological development, global business and knowledge-holders’ association with it and the importance of investment in public health, Bangladeshi army’s roles in the peace mission of UN and assurance for working in the same mission again, celebration of the golden jubilee of Bangladesh and UN’s partnership, ‘Agenda 2030’ and the sequential SDG financial gap, unlawful financial flow and tapping of resources, AI and its importance and probable threat, “South-South and Triangular cooperation” for socio-economic development, appeal for contributing in public health and declaring vaccines a ‘global public good’. He also recalled the Year of Microcredit. He ended his speech with a suggestion for the promotion of peace and the possibilities of human beings, and at last, again through the acclamation of Bangladeshi youth, he promised that Bangladesh would always be trying to be the promoter of peace, development, and justice locally, nationally, and globally.

The Use of the Illocutionary Speech Act

The use of assertive, declarative, directives, expressives, and commissives is explicitly noticeable in the speech at different levels. The speaker delivered the speech focusing on both local and global issues and using different illocutionary forces, he placed his intentions and messages before the world leaders. To be specific, in his speech delivery, he used a total of 240 illocutionary acts of various functions.

Table 1 Sign of illocutionary speech acts and their subtypes with frequency

Directives 23 % (55)	Assertive 48% (116)	Expressive 6 % (14)	Commissive 19 % (46)	Declarative 4 % (9)
1. Request: 8 2. Suggestion: 30 3. Hope:13 4. Invitation: 4	1. To inform: 102 2. To conclude:5 3. To confirm: 7 4. To accept/ agree: 2	1. Greet:1 2. Congrats: 1 3. Appreciation/ thanks: 4 4.Complement: 5 5.Expressing excitement :3	1.Promise:12 (Assurance 2) 2.Suggestion:30 3. To agree: 2 4. Alert:2	1.Thanks:4 2. Trust:1 3. Recall:1 4.Expressing excitement: 3

Based on the five illocutionary acts, the researchers categorized all the discourse

into respective illocutionary speech acts' subtypes. In the findings and discussion section, at first, a

A very brief idea is presented regarding the use of the particular illocutionary act by the speaker, and then under each category, the total number of subtypes (their percentage are displayed in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) with examples are presented for a better understanding of the function of the particular illocutionary speech act.

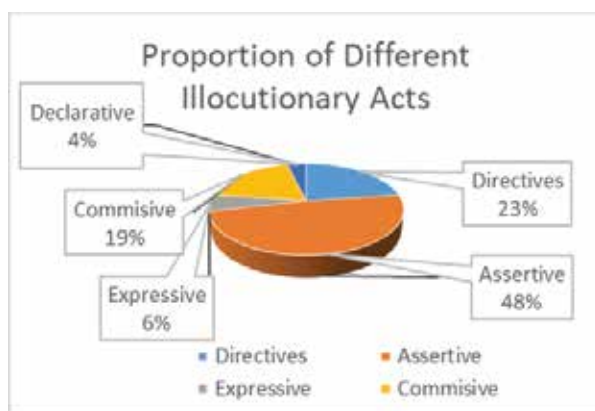


Figure 2. Proportion of different illocutionary acts

Use of Assertive Act

The assertive act was used by the speaker for informing, drawing a conclusion, confirming a point and agreeing with a proposition. A total of 116 (48%) times illocutionary assertive force is identified in the entire speech of 35 minutes 54 seconds. This particular speech act is used to inform (102), to conclude (5), to confirm (7), and to accept or agree (2). So, five subtypes of assertive force are used to represent assertive expression. For example: To inform:

- a. The uprising led by the students and youth was initially aimed at ending discrimination.
- b. Our youth and people together entrusted me and my colleagues in the Council with enormous responsibilities to reconstruct a decaying State apparatus.

To Conclude:

- a. What we need is climate justice – so that the irresponsible choices or, indifferent actions or, harms caused are accounted for.
- b. We need continued support of the international community towards the Rohingyas in carrying out the humanitarian operations and their sustainable repatriation.

To Confirm:

- a. Bangladesh is open to nurture friendly relations with all countries based on mutual respect, upholding our dignity and pride and shared interests.
- b. We affirm not to let any foreign business interest to be affected.

To accept or agree:

- a. We have acceded to the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, within two weeks in office.
- b. Looking at the evolving ground situation in Myanmar, Bangladesh is ready to work with the international community to create an environment for dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland.

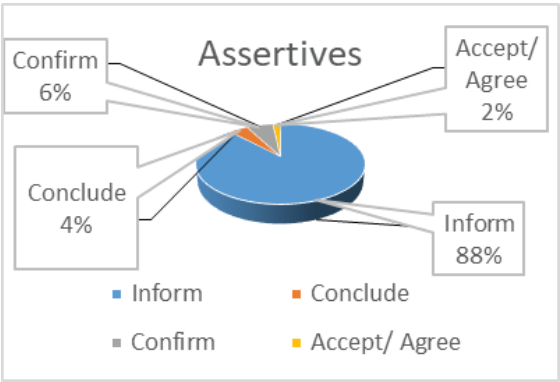


Figure 3. Use of the assertive act

Use of the Directive Act

Through the use of directive acts, Dr. Yunus wanted the listeners to act according to his utterance. Here, he used this act to request, to suggest, to express hope, and to invite. A total of 55 (23%) directives were used in the forms request (8), suggestion (30), hopes (13), and invitation (4). For example:

To request:

- a. I would, therefore, call on the international community to continue and deepen engagements with Bangladesh in meeting our people’s quest for democracy, rule of law, equality, prosperity, so that we can emerge as a just and inclusive democratic society.
- b. I would hence urge for channeling robust resources for climate adaptation in the climate-vulnerable countries like Bangladesh.

To suggest

- a. In our ‘shared’ world, many of the global priorities need to be set right.

- b. Time demands new attitudes, new values, new compact(s), across communities and countries, across developed and developing countries alike, across all actors and stakeholders.

To hope:

- a. We look forward to promoting and enhancing Bangladesh's value-driven contributions to the UN peace-keeping operations.
- b. If we can realistically position social business, we can stem much of the climate-insensitive distortions within the existing market economy.

In invitation:

- a. I would like to invite the attention of Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, on that score.
- b. Let us redeem all the pledges we made, nationally or internationally.

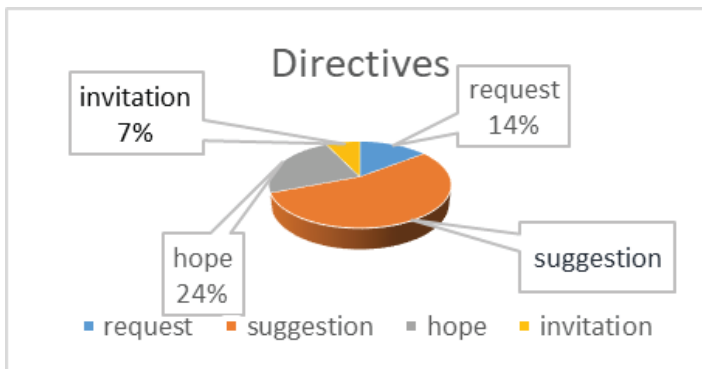


Figure 4. Use of the directive act

Use of the Expressive Act

By the use of this act, the speaker represented his affective and psychological state of affairs. This illocutionary act was used to express gratefulness, to greet, to congratulate, and to express excitement. In the form of greeting (1), a way of congratulating (1), appreciating or thanking (4), making compliments (5), and expressing excitement (3) this act was used. To be more specific, a total of 14 times (6 %), this act was used by Dr Yunus. For example:

To greet: Good morning!

To congratulate:

Let me congratulate you on your election as the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

To make a complement:

- a. The youth in Bangladesh have showed that upholding freedom, dignity and rights of people regardless of distinction and status cannot just remain aspirational.
- b. Decades later, our 'Generation Z' is making us re-visit and re-imagine the very values that our people Bangladesh stood for back in 1971.

To express excitement:

- a. We were moved by the wisdom, courage and conviction our youth showed.
- b. We are particularly enthused with emergence of the Artificial Intelligence tools and applications.

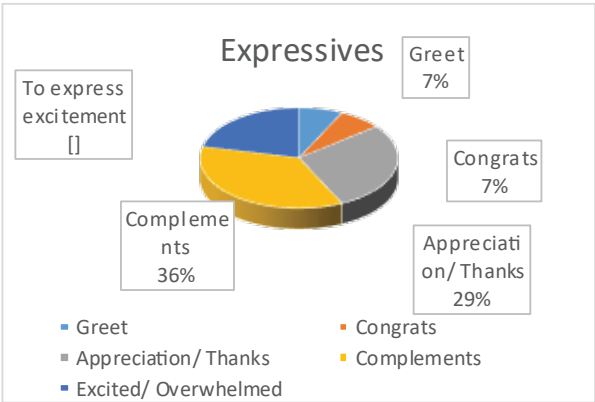


Figure 5. Use of the expressive Act

Use of the Declarative Act

Declaratives were utilized by Dr. Yunus to do something while uttering the words. Through declaratives force instantaneous alteration in the communicative situation was referred. Through the use of this act the speaker, Dr. Yunus thanked, recalled, reposed trust and expressed excitement. So, to thank (4), to trust (1), to recall (1) and to express excitement (3) the act was used. The use of declaratives is not that prevalent in the speech. A total of 9 expressive styles (4%) are noticeable here. For example: To express excitement:

- a. We were moved by the wisdom, courage and conviction our youth showed.
- b. Mr. President, we are particularly enthused with emergence of the Artificial Intelligence tools and applications.

To thank:

- a. I stand in this parliament of nations thanks to an epochal transformation that Bangladesh witnessed this July and August.

b. I wish to register my deep appreciation to High Commissioner Volker Turk.

To recall:

For instance, I recall the Microcredit Resolution and the Friends of Microcredit that was formed in the UN General Assembly back in 1999, with exceeding spontaneity.

To congratulate:

Let me congratulate you on your election as the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

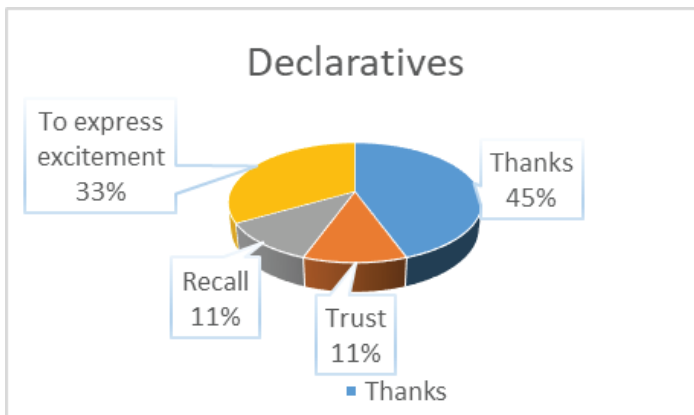


Figure 6. Use of the declarative act

Use of the Commissive Act

Using this act, the speaker expressed his future attempts or plans. To be more specific, for expressions like promising, alerting, agreeing and giving suggestions this particular illocutionary act was used by Dr Yunus. In the speech under consideration, the speaker used this act for different functional usages of language in varying proportions, for example, for promising 12 times, for suggesting 30, for agreeing 2 and for alerting 2. A total of 46 commissives (14%) are noticeable in the concerned speech. For example,

To promise or assure:

I wish to assure that our government shall adhere to all international, regional and bilateral instruments that Bangladesh is party to.

a. Bangladesh will continue to remain an active proponent of multilateralism, with the UN at the core.

To suggest:

a. Let us redeem all the pledges we made, nationally or internationally.

b. Let us work together to end all forms of inequality and discrimination, within

and among nations, especially in advancing the proposition of social business in our economic interactions.

To Agree:

- a. We have acceded to the International Convention for Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, within two weeks in office.
- b. Looking at the evolving ground situation in Myanmar, Bangladesh is ready to work with the international community to create an environment for dignified and sustainable return of the Rohingyas to their homeland.

To alert:

- a. As the scientific community and the world of technology keep moving on developing ‘autonomous intelligence’ – artificial intelligence that propagates on its own without any human intervention – we all need to be cautious of possible impact on every human or our societies, today and beyond.
- b. Many have reasons to believe that unless autonomous intelligence develops in a responsible manner, it can pose existential threats to human existence.

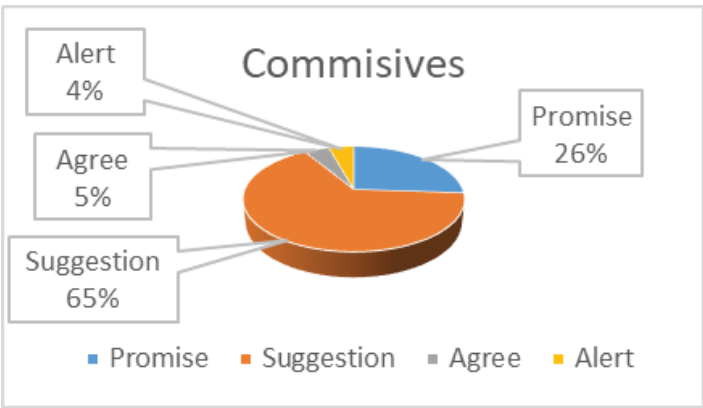


Figure 7. Use of the commissive act

7. Conclusion

The study has discovered the different functional categories of communication under each taxonomy of illocutionary acts in the concerned speech. Dr Yunus explicitly expressed his capacity of linguistic virtuosity of functional languages in handling the communication through his speech in the 79th session of UNGA. He utilized all the illocutionary acts for the expressions of different functions of a language. He mostly used the illocutionary act to inform and doubtlessly he had many things to narrate before the world leaders as the Chief

Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh. Depicting the local issues, he placed various global agendas and in more or less all the global concerns, he said something about the standpoints of Bangladesh. The number of suggestions in his speech was also significant. In addition, his use of illocutionary acts to thank, congratulate, express the overwhelming state of mind, request, make positive comments and so on is noteworthy.

8. Recommendation

Presumably, there is hardly any work on the first speech of Dr Yunus delivered at the 79th session of the UNGA. This research has just taken the initiative to explore the concerned speech, concentrating on the SAT through content analysis. Further research works may be encouraged using different theoretical frameworks. Also, even using SAT a researcher can further critically analyze the discourse of this speech from different angles to explore some other significant sides like, comparing his speech as the Chief Advisor of the Interim Government of Bangladesh with that of as a motivational speaker or promoter of social entrepreneurship and any other concept like or unlike these.

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