

Exploring Expressive Illocutionary Acts in YouTube Comments on Olivia Rodrigo's Music Video

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ABSTRACT: This research examines expressive illocutionary acts found in the comment section of Olivia Rodrigo's "Drivers License" music video on YouTube. It aims to identify the types and functions of expressive acts using Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) classification and Leech's (1983) framework. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, with data consisting of 60 selected comments obtained through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed through coding, categorization, and interpretation. The findings reveal six types of expressive illocutionary acts: thanking, congratulating, praising, sorrowing, blaming, and boasting. In terms of function, three categories were identified: convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. Convivial functions were dominant, indicating that users tend to express positive emotions and maintain social interaction in digital communication.

KEYWORDS: Expressive illocutionary acts, YouTube Comments, Pragmatics, Digital Communication

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics that studies meaning in context, particularly how speakers convey meaning and how listeners interpret it (Yule, 1996). Unlike semantics, which focuses on literal meaning, pragmatics emphasizes the role of context, intention, and interaction in communication. One of the central concepts in pragmatics is speech act theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1976), which explains how utterances can function as actions. According to Searle (1976), speech acts are classified into several categories, one of which is expressive illocutionary acts. Expressive acts are used to convey the speaker's psychological state, such as feelings of happiness, sadness, gratitude, or disappointment. These expressions play a crucial role in interpersonal communication because they reflect emotions and attitudes toward particular situations.

In the digital era, communication has shifted significantly from face-to-face interaction to online platforms. Social media platforms such as YouTube provide spaces where users can express their thoughts and emotions freely through comment sections. These comments represent authentic and spontaneous language use, making them valuable data for pragmatic analysis. YouTube, as one of the most popular digital platforms, allows users to engage in interactive communication through comments. In music videos, comments often contain strong emotional expressions, reflecting users' personal experiences and reactions to the content. Therefore, analysing expressive illocutionary acts in YouTube comments can provide insights into how emotions are communicated in digital environments.

Previous studies have examined expressive speech acts in various contexts, including films, social media, and daily conversations. However, limited research has focused specifically on expressive illocutionary acts in YouTube music video comments. Previous studies have examined expressive illocutionary acts in various contexts, particularly in digital communication. Briansyah (2021) analyzed expressive illocutionary acts in YouTube comments on mental health videos and found that expressions of condolence were the most dominant. Similarly, Jaya (2025) identified six types of expressive acts in the comment section of One Direction's YouTube channel, with mourning as the most frequent type. In addition, Armitha (2023) examined expressive illocutionary acts in the documentary film *My Mind and Me*, revealing that expressions of sadness were the most dominant. Furthermore, Putri, Sartini, and Al Fajri (2020) conducted a cross-cultural study and found differences in expressive speech acts between American and Asian contexts. Indriyana et al. (2021) also found that expressions of gratitude were the most dominant in Instagram comments.

However, these studies focused on different contexts and platforms, such as mental health content, film, and Instagram interactions. Therefore, limited research has specifically examined expressive illocutionary acts in YouTube music video comments, particularly in emotionally driven content such as Olivia Rodrigo's "Drivers License." This gap highlights the need for further investigation, which this study aims to address. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into how digital communication shapes



emotional expression. In addition, ethical considerations in the use of publicly available user-generated content remain an important aspect that must be addressed in digital pragmatic research.

Based on the above background, it aims to identify the types and functions of expressive illocutionary acts found in the comment section of Olivia Rodrigo's "Drivers License" music video. This research is expected to contribute to the understanding of pragmatic phenomena in digital communication and provide insights into how language is used to express emotions in online interactions.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze expressive illocutionary acts found in the comment section of Olivia Rodrigo's official YouTube music video entitled "*Drivers License*." A qualitative approach is selected because the objective of this research is to describe and interpret linguistic phenomena rather than to measure them statistically. The analysis focuses on identifying, classifying, and interpreting expressive illocutionary acts based on Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) framework, as well as examining their functions by applying Leech's (1983) theory.

Data source of this study is the comment section of the official YouTube video "*Drivers License*," which was uploaded on January 8, 2021. The video is part of the album *Sour (2021)* and remains publicly accessible, allowing users worldwide to post written comments. The selection of this video is based on its high level of audience engagement and emotionally driven narrative, which encourages viewers to express feelings such as sadness, admiration, and personal reflection. At the time of data collection on February 27, 2026, the video had approximately 614 million views and more than 324 thousand comments, indicating a high level of interaction and providing a rich source of linguistic data. Due to the large number of available comments, data selection was conducted in several stages. First, an initial screening was performed to identify comments containing expressive illocutionary acts. The data were then filtered based on several criteria, including comments written in English, top-level comments (excluding replies), comments containing identifiable expressive illocutionary acts, and comments consisting of complete verbal utterances. Non-verbal elements such as emoticons, images, hyperlinks, and hashtags were excluded to maintain focus on textual analysis. The selection process continued until data saturation was reached, resulting in a total of 60 comments as the final dataset.

The data were collected using documentation and observation techniques. Documentation was applied by collecting screenshots of relevant comments from the YouTube platform, while observation was conducted to systematically review and identify comments containing expressive illocutionary acts. The collected data were then organized and categorized based on the types of expressive illocutionary acts identified.

The data analysis was carried out using qualitative descriptive techniques through several steps, including coding, categorization, and interpretation. Coding was used to identify linguistic expressions that contain expressive illocutionary acts, while categorization was applied to group the data into types such as praising, thanking, sorrowing, blaming, congratulating, and boasting. Furthermore, interpretation was conducted to analyze the functions of each expression based on Leech's (1983) framework, which includes convivial, collaborative, and conflictive functions.

Finally, the results of the analysis are presented using a descriptive method, in which selected data are displayed in the form of comment excerpts followed by analytical explanations. Each example is analyzed based on its linguistic features and pragmatic function, allowing a clear understanding of how expressive illocutionary acts are realized in digital communication.

Ethical considerations were taken into account in this study. Although the data were obtained from publicly accessible YouTube comments, all user identities were anonymized to protect privacy. Usernames were replaced with labels such as User A, User B, and so on. No personally identifiable information is disclosed in this research. The data are used solely for academic purposes and comply with ethical standards in digital research. Sensitive content is presented with appropriate contextual explanation to avoid misinterpretation. The use of anonymization follows common ethical practices in linguistic research involving online user-generated content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents representative data of expressive illocutionary acts found in the comment section of Olivia Rodrigo's music video "*Drivers License*." This study identified six categories of expressive illocutionary acts found in the data. The categories are: (a) Thanking Expression, (b) Congratulating Expression, (c) Praising Expression, (d) Sorrowing Expression, (e) Blaming



Expression, (f) Boasting Expression. Each category is represented by one selected example and analyzed based on Searle and Vanderveken (1985) and Leech (1983).

A. Thanking Expression

Data 1

“Coming back here on the 5th anniversary of the song. Thank you Olivia for giving me a teenage heartbreak experience without even ever having a boyfriend.”

This comment is categorized as an expressive illocutionary act of thanking. The phrase *“Thank you Olivia”* functions as the primary linguistic marker of gratitude, directly addressed to the singer as the creator of the song. The subsequent clause, *“for giving me a teenage heartbreak experience without even ever having a boyfriend,”* provides the reason for the gratitude, indicating that the speaker associates the song with an emotional experience despite not having personally undergone a similar situation.

The structure of the utterance combines a reflective statement (*“Coming back here on the 5th anniversary of the song”*) with an explicit expression of gratitude, suggesting a continued emotional attachment over time. This indicates that the song has a lasting psychological impact on the listener.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker’s psychological state of appreciation, which aligns with Searle’s concept of expressive illocutionary acts, where the speaker expresses feelings toward a particular situation. In terms of illocutionary function, this expression belongs to the convivial function (Leech, 1983), as it expresses gratitude and contributes to maintaining positive social interaction. The utterance also allows the speaker to share emotional appreciation while reinforcing a sense of connection with other viewers. This comment illustrates how users express gratitude in response to emotionally engaging music content, highlighting authentic language use in digital communication environments such as YouTube.

B. Congratulating Expression

Data 2

“HAPPY 5TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY MY DEAREST PERSONAL BREAK UP SONG, DRIVERS LICENSE”

This comment is categorized as a congratulating expression. The phrase *“HAPPY 5TH YEAR ANNIVERSARY”* clearly conveys celebration and recognition of a significant milestone related to the song. The use of full capitalization functions as a stylistic feature that intensifies the emotional tone and reflects the speaker’s enthusiasm and excitement.

The expression *“MY DEAREST PERSONAL BREAK UP SONG”* indicates a strong emotional attachment and personal identification with the song. The possessive adjective *“my”* and the superlative form *“dearest”* emphasize the speaker’s subjective evaluation and emotional closeness to the song. Although elements of praising are present, the dominant illocutionary force remains congratulation, as the primary intention is to celebrate the anniversary of the song.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker’s positive emotional state, particularly feelings of admiration and appreciation, which are consistent with Searle’s framework of expressive illocutionary acts. In terms of illocutionary function, this expression belongs to the convivial function (Leech, 1983), as it conveys positive sentiment and contributes to maintaining social harmony. The utterance also encourages shared celebration among users and strengthens communal interaction within the comment section. This comment demonstrates how users participate in shared celebration within digital platforms, highlighting the role of YouTube as a space for communal emotional expression.

C. Praising Expression

Data 3

“Can we all just appreciate that this bridge is a masterpiece?”

This comment is categorized as a praising expression. Although the utterance is grammatically structured as an interrogative sentence, it does not function as a genuine question. Instead, it operates as a rhetorical device used to emphasize admiration. The phrase *“a masterpiece”* serves as a strong evaluative lexical item, indicating a high degree of positive judgment toward the song, particularly its bridge section. The opening clause *“Can we all just appreciate...”* does not seek information but rather invites collective agreement and shared recognition among viewers. This rhetorical structure strengthens the expressive force of admiration and encourages communal appreciation.



From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker's positive psychological state, which aligns with Searle's concept of expressive illocutionary acts. In terms of illocutionary function, this expression belongs to the convivial function (Leech, 1983), as it expresses admiration and contributes to maintaining positive social interaction. The use of inclusive language ("we all") also helps construct a sense of shared experience and reinforces social bonding among users. This comment reflects how users express admiration and collectively evaluate artistic elements, indicating interactive and socially shared appreciation in digital communication environments such as YouTube.

D. Sorrowing Expression

Data 4

"im not even brokenhearted but this song hurts like hell"

This comment is categorized as a sorrowing expression. The lexical item "hurts" functions as a clear emotional marker indicating pain, while the intensifier "like hell" amplifies the intensity of the emotional experience. Together, these elements signal a strong affective response to the song. Interestingly, the clause "im not even brokenhearted" creates a contrastive structure that emphasizes the unexpected nature of the emotional reaction. It suggests that the song is powerful enough to evoke deep emotional pain even in the absence of a direct personal experience. This highlights the emotional resonance of the song and its ability to connect with listeners on a psychological level.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker's internal emotional state, which is consistent with Searle's framework of expressive illocutionary acts. In terms of function, this expression belongs to the collaborative function (Leech, 1983), as it focuses on sharing personal emotional experience rather than maintaining politeness. The utterance allows the speaker to express feelings openly and contributes to shared emotional understanding among users. This comment shows how users convey emotional vulnerability in response to music, highlighting the role of YouTube as a platform for sharing personal feelings in digital communication environments.

E. Blaming Expression

Data 5

"This reminds me of my ex boyfriend who said he didn't cheat but we all knew he was lying"

This comment is categorized as a blaming expression. The clause "he was lying" functions as the primary linguistic marker of accusation, clearly indicating negative evaluation and disapproval toward the ex-boyfriend. The use of the pronoun "we all" strengthens the accusation by implying collective agreement, which intensifies the speaker's stance and reinforces the sense of certainty. Although the initial clause "This reminds me of my ex boyfriend" appears to be a personal reflection, the dominant illocutionary force lies in assigning blame and expressing moral judgment.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker's negative psychological state, particularly feelings of disappointment or resentment, which aligns with Searle's classification of expressive acts. In terms of function, this expression belongs to the conflictive function (Leech, 1983), as it expresses criticism and assigns fault to another individual. This type of expression may disrupt social harmony and introduce tension within the communicative context. This comment illustrates how users express negative emotions and personal experiences, highlighting how digital platforms such as YouTube facilitate the expression of criticism and emotional reactions.

F. Boasting Expression

Data 6

"I'm proud of myself for surviving the kind of heartbreak this song describes."

This comment is categorized as a boasting expression. The phrase "I'm proud of myself" serves as the main linguistic marker of self-directed pride, indicating a positive self-evaluation. The utterance highlights the speaker's personal achievement in overcoming emotional hardship. The clause "for surviving the kind of heartbreak this song describes" provides context for the pride being expressed, suggesting that the speaker has experienced and endured a similar emotional situation. Rather than focusing on sadness, the comment emphasizes resilience and strength, positioning the speaker as emotionally capable.



From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance reflects the speaker's psychological state of pride, which aligns with Searle's concept of expressive illocutionary acts. In terms of function, this expression belongs to the **collaborative function** (Leech, 1983), as it shares personal experience and self-evaluation without imposing on others. The utterance contributes to interaction by allowing others to relate to or recognize similar experiences. This comment demonstrates how users express self-reflection and personal achievement, highlighting the role of digital platforms such as YouTube in facilitating the sharing of individual experiences.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that expressive illocutionary acts are widely used in the comment section of Olivia Rodrigo's music video "Drivers License" as a means of expressing users' emotional responses. Six types of expressive illocutionary acts were identified, they are thanking, congratulating, praising, sorrowing, blaming, and boasting, with praising expressions appearing as the most dominant type. In terms of function, the findings show that expressive illocutionary acts serve different communicative purposes, including maintaining positive interaction (convivial), sharing emotional experiences (collaborative), and expressing criticism (conflictive). Overall, it highlights that expressive illocutionary acts play an important role in conveying emotions and shaping social interaction in digital communication, particularly within online comment sections.

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