Manual Annotation of Speech Acts in American Political Speeches about Financial Crisis

Annotation Guidelines

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1 Annotation Guidelines

1.1 Introduction

The study of speech acts for political rhetoric has fascinated literary and linguistic scholars for many years (Moghadam and Jafarpour 2022; Buczowski and Strukowska 2022; Irwandika 2021). Progress in this particular area keeps complementing and improving qualitative research on political discourse, allowing scholars to examine politicians' use of persuasive strategies in response to public issues. And while big advancements in automatic speech act annotation have made themselves evident throughout the years, manual annotation remains essential for conducting thorough analyses of speech act usage, particularly by complementing research intended to delve deeper than merely identifying speech act verbs in written text (Milà-García 2018)

The following annotation guidelines ground heavily on pragmatics and the early traditional speech act taxonomies as proposed by Austin (1975) and Searle (1979). They aim at providing scholars with a comprehensive framework that facilitates the annotation of speech act classes in political discourse, specially of indirect utterances that go beyond a word or a sentence, or where contextual nuances can difficult speech act categorization (Weisser 2014).

The present guidelines are intended for annotators who are scientists in the realms of linguistics and literary studies, computer and data science, as well as political science. They seek to aid researchers of literature and computational linguistics in enhancing automated speech act annotation algorithms. This work advocates for the integration of linguistic pragmatics and speech act theory, along with political science knowledge, to facilitate comprehensive analysis of language use in political communication, including notions of context and communicative function.

1.2   Annotation of Speech Act Classes

In his work "How To Do Things With Words" (1975), Austin positions performative utterances as the doing of a certain kind of, action with speech, namely illocutionary acts. He argues that every sentence has an illocutionary property which can be explicit, or otherwise implicit, which may depend on given contextual information. Utterances classified as direct illocutionary acts can be often distinguished by the presence of a performative verb. In the case of indirect illocutionary acts, utterances should be carefully inspected based on context cues to determine speech act categorization.

Searle (1979), for his part, proposes the further classification of illocutionary acts in five classes of speech acts, these being assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives, all of which describe a distinct type of speaker intention. This classification seeks to cover all speech act possibilities, but the categories are not mutually exclusive – meaning that more than one speech act can happen within a single sentence simultaneously.

Drawing from these concepts, the present annotation guidelines pose three key preassumptions necessary for the feasible annotation and classification of political discourse in speech act classes. These are as follow:

1. Any sentence can be categorized into speech acts following Searle's Speech Act Taxonomy

2. Sentences with a direct illocutionary force can be intuitively or systematically categorized, while for sentences with indirect illocutionary force should be classified based on contextualization

3. There are instances in which a sentence could be categorized in more than one speech act class, following Searle's Speech Act Taxonomy

Based on these preassumptions, a comprehensive tagset has been developed.

1.3 Annotation Unit and Tagset

This section records all details concerning annotation unit description, as well as the final annotation tagset proposed. The latter comprises Searle's five speech act classes as main tags, in conjunction with fine-grained subtags under each class. The annotators strived for giving precise, clear-cut and independent definitions to each subtag, as described in the following sections.

For the purpose of this study, the annotators have opted for a pragmatic approach involving the identification and annotation of words or utterances that directly convey meaning and serve pragmatic functions, such as making requests and promises, giving commands or expressing opinions, and that allow for smooth speech act categorization.

The annotation unit may vary depending on the presence of direct and indirect speech acts. When it comes to direct speech acts, annotation cleary spans over a single word, such as an imperative verb, or a combination of words, like phrases that explicitly and accurately represent the illocutionary act intended by the speaker. In the case of indirect speech acts, determining the annotation boundary relies heavily on annotators' comprehensive identification and evaluation of contextual cues within a politicians' speech.

The hereby presented tagset has been developed for political speech annotation following Searle's taxonomy (1979), taking the previously established theoretical framework and preassumptions into account.

Assertives

At the first level of categorization, there are assertive speech acts, which denote a statement that commits the speaker to the truth of a proposition. Here, the speaker conveys information or expresses beliefs with the intention of transmitting accurate and reliable information to the hearer.

1. Assertive Speech Acts

Subtag	Definition
1.1 Affirming	The speaker confirms the truth or validity of a statement or makes a positive statement.
1.2 Rebutting	The speaker refutes an idea, opinion or statement.
1.3 Informing/Explaining/Recounting	The speaker provides detailed information or gives account of an event or experience.
1.4 Observing	The speaker describes or highlights something they have perceived or have become aware of.
1.5 Evidencing	The speaker presents accountable reasons or evidence to support a claim.
1.6 Conceding	The speaker acknowledges the validity of a viewpoint.

Table 1: Affirming Speech Acts Tagset

Directives

Directive speech acts, on the other hand, refer to the illocutionary force with which a speaker aims to influence the hearer to perform a specific action. These utterances often take the form of commands, requests, or advice, as shown in Table 2.

2. Directive Speech Acts

Subtag	Definition
2.1 Commanding	The speaker issues a direct order or imperative.
2.2 Requesting	The speaker seeks or asks for assistance, permission, information, etc.
2.3 Advising	The speaker offers guidance, recommendations, or suggestions.
2.4 Warning	The speaker indirectly requests changes by alerting the hearer about a potential danger, threat, or undesirable consequence
2.5 Condemning	The speaker indirectly requests change by articulating strong disappointment, criticism, or censure towards a particular action, behavior or idea.

Table 2: Directive Speech Acts Tagset

Commissives

Commissive speech acts are utterances through which a speaker commits him- or herself to specific actions or obligations in the future. These utterances often take

the form of promises or vows and are common in political discourse.

3. Commisive Speech Acts

Subtag	Definition
3.1 Promising	The speaker expresses committed dedication or a formal assurance to a future action or goal.

Table 3: Commissive Speech Acts Tagset

Expressives

When it comes to expressive speech acts, these are the ones that help convey the speaker's genuine emotions, feelings, or attitudes regarding the content of a proposition. These utterances are often associated with the speaker's psychological state and are defined in the subcategories listed in the following tabele.

4. Expressive Speech Acts

Subtag	Definition
4.1 Apologizing	The apologizes for a perceived offense or mistake.
4.2 Thanking	The speaker expresses gratitude.
4.3 Acclaiming	The speaker expresses praise, appreciation, acknowledgement or admiration.
4.4 Congratulating	The speaker expresses good wishes to someone else's achievement, success, or a significant event.
4.5 Condoling	The speaker expresses sympathy or sorrow in response to loss or suffering.
4.6 Greeting/Welcoming	The speaker expresses a friendly salutation or welcome.
4.7 Wishing	The speaker expresses good wishes or hope for positive outcome towards an individual or a particular situation.
4.8 Confessing	The speaker openly admits or acknowledges something of emotional or personal nature.

Table 4: Expressive Speech Acts Tagset

Declaratives

The last category, declaratives, refers to speech acts that correspond to the successful performance of propositional content to reality. These utterances are performative in nature, as the act of voicing them brings about a change in the real world.

5. Declarative Speech Acts

Subtag	Definition
5.1 Greeting/Welcoming	The speaker makes a formal or public declaration of information officially or with authority.

Table 5: Declarative Speech Acts Tagset

1.4 Challenges

The annotators have identified challenges when annotating indirect illocutionary acts or when an utterance may have a second lurking speech act.

Facing indirect speech acts, the questions the annotators may ask themselves in order to be able to best annotate speech acts are as follows:

1. Does the utterance amply satisfy the conditions of at least one speech act class, as defined in the present annotation guidelines?

2. If yes, which word, words or context cues should be annotated that are determinant of a speech act category?

In cases where an utterance may be categorized into many speech act classes, it may usually take several rounds of discussions and back-and-forth revisions among annotators.

By asking the same two aforementioned questions, the annotators may eventually reach the collective decision that several speech acts can coexist within one utterance or sentence as long as the speech acts are marked reasonably within a valid annotation

boundary and with well-grounded interpretation of the politicians' intent. A basic example of such a case could be the utterance "Give Marta a big round of applause", which could be categorized as acclaiming, directive, or both.

1.5   Practical Implementation

To put the present annotation guidelines into practice effectively, manual annotation using computer-assisted tools like CATMA is recommended. CATMA, short for Computer Assisted Text Markup and Analysis, is a free online annotation tool that facilitates text visualization and analysis (Gius et al.2023) and that can be used collaboratively and simultaneously by many annotators for group efforts.

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