

The Speech Act of Promising in Political Speeches: A Case Study of Obama's Speeches

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Abstract—This study tried to present a pragmatic analysis of the act of promising made by Barack Obama during the presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012. It utilized a qualitative approach and the data were collected through speeches. However, this study also employed a quantitative method to calculate and present the frequency of promising utterances and performative verbs and their percentages. The researcher used Searle's taxonomy to analyze Obama's speeches. The findings showed that assuring, confirming, and reconfirming were the most frequent intentions of the speaker's speeches during the two election campaigns. Further analysis revealed that Obama used the performative verb "promise" in 7 samples. Moreover, the study showed that the speaker used the modal verb "will" and the form "be going to + infinitive" as ways of promising instead of the performative verb "promise." Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that further studies should be conducted in other contexts to obtain more comprehensive data regarding the act of promising.

Index Terms—commissive, campaigns, promise, performative, speech acts

I. INTRODUCTION

Promises are an integral part of the theory of speech acts in the field of pragmatics. The act of promising is an area of research which has received a lot of attention not only from linguists, but also from philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists. Very little research has been conducted in Kosovo in the field of speech acts, particularly on the topic of promising utterances. Politics cannot be conducted without language, which is known to be a powerful tool of communication for politicians to convey their ideas and to persuade their audience. Therefore, promises are unavoidable; especially during election campaigns when politicians show their character, individuality, responsibility, and other virtues. This study tried to present a pragmatic analysis of the act of promising made by Barack Obama during the two election campaigns in 2008 and 2012. It was guided by three research questions (RQs):

- RQ1. What are the intentions of the promising utterances in Obama's speeches in 2008?
- RQ2. What are the intentions of the promising utterances in Obama's speeches in 2012?
- RQ3. Do all utterances made by Obama contain the performative verb "promise"?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Speech Act Theory

Speech act theory has become one of the most important topics in the field of pragmatics as well as linguistics. The founder of the theory of speech acts is often considered to be the philosopher John Austin (1962), with his work *How to Do Things with Words*. Speeches play an important role in our daily life, especially in politics, when politicians want to attract the audience with their expressions. What does the word "speech" mean? According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online (n.d.), the word speech is defined as "a talk, especially a formal one about a particular subject, given to a group of people." Similarly, Oxford Dictionary (n.d.) defines speech as "the ability to talk, the activity of talking, or a piece of spoken language."

But what is a speech act? Yule (1996, p. 47) defined speech acts as "actions performed via utterances." Thus, through their communicative utterances, speakers convey requests, pledges, promises, etc. Hence, the idea drawn based on Yule's definitions is that the speech act is the procedure of performing different actions while uttering words. Austin is known for the classification of speech acts; therefore, all later studies made by other scholars are based on his classification. When the speaker produces an utterance, he uses three acts, and according to Levinson (1983, p.236), "Austin isolates three basic senses or dimensions in which saying something one is doing something." The three dimensions of a speech act are as follows:

- 1) locutionary act
- 2) illocutionary act
- 3) perlocutionary act

These three elements or levels have great importance and, according to Yule (1996), the locutionary act produces a meaningful linguistic expression. Lodge et al. (1997, p.168) claimed that “the locutionary act is the act of actually producing an utterance with specific references and meaning.”

Another important issue related to speech acts is that people do not produce utterances without purpose. So, the second element is known as the illocutionary act. Yule (1996) claimed that the illocutionary act is performed via the communication force of an utterance. According to Lodge et al. (1997, p.168), “the illocutionary act is the act of making a promise, a threat, even a statement, by virtue of producing an utterance.” Many linguists put emphasis on the social conventions as important factors of any utterance. Hurford et al. (2007, p.273) added that “the illocutionary act carried out by a speaker making an utterance is the act viewed in terms of the utterance’s significance within a conventional system of social interaction. One way to think about the illocutionary act is that it reflects the intention of the speaker in making the utterance in the first place.”

The third element or the perlocutionary act deals with the effect of utterances upon the listener. Speakers do not make utterances without intending them to have an effect (Yule, 1996). In line with this, Lodge et al. (1997, p.168) added that “the perlocutionary act is the act of producing an effect on the addressees by producing an utterance.” Further, perlocutionary effect has more importance because it tells us more about why people use a particular speech act (Mey, 2001). Hurford et al. (2007, p.271) claimed that “the perlocutionary act carried out by a speaker making an utterance is the act of causing a certain effect on the hearer and others.”

Another viewpoint is from Sadock. He discussed the role of communication when it comes to the difference between illocution and perlocution. Sadock (1974, p.8) stated that illocutionary acts are “acts that are performed in order to communicate,” whereas perlocutionary acts are “the by-products of acts of communication.” In conclusion: locution deals with the uttered words, illocution with the intention of the utterance, and perlocution concerns the effect of the utterance.

B. IFIDs (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device)

How can the illocutionary force be recognized? Two important issues related to speech acts, for indicating the illocutionary force are IFIDs - illocutionary force indicating devices and felicity conditions. The illocutionary force indicating device or IFID is “an expression that focuses on verbs that explicitly names the illocutionary act being performed (Yule, 1996, p.49). Such a verb can be called a performative verb (Vp).” e.g. I (Vp) you that.....

Furthermore, there are other devices that can be taken into consideration to identify the illocutionary force of an utterance, such as word order, mood, stress, punctuation, intonation contour, performative verbs, context, and the role of the speaker (Yule, 1996). Finally, there are some specific conditions that should be satisfied to perform a speech act correctly, known as the felicity conditions.

It was Austin who introduced the notion of performatives. According to Austin (1962, p. 6), “the name performative is derived from “perform,” the usual verb with the noun “action;” it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action– it is not normally thought of as just saying something.” So, according to Austin, a person is not only saying something, but he is also doing something. Performatives stand for an utterance that creates an act which is described by the verb (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). Levinson (1983, p. 244) claimed that “the structure is: “I (hereby) Vp you (that) S’, where V is a performative sentence while S’ is a complement sentence.” Based on Yule’s book, the subject must be in the first person singular “I” followed by the adverb “hereby,” and the utterance should be in the present simple tense. Austin distinguished two types of performatives, implicit and explicit (as cited in Yule, 1996, p. 52).

e.g. a. *The work was done by Elaine and myself.*

b. *I hereby tell you that the work was done by Elaine and myself.*

Thus, based on Yule’s comments, example (b) is used by the speaker as an explicit performative, whereas (a) is an implicit performative, sometimes called a primary performative. Implicit and explicit performatives are not equivalent. Yule (1995, p.52) stated that uttering the explicit performative version of a command has “much more serious impact than uttering the implicit version.” Palmer (1976) claimed that implicit performatives do not have expressions that name the act, whereas explicit performatives contain expressions that name the act explicitly performed.

How can performative verbs be identified? Vanderveken listed 270 performative verbs according to their illocutionary point, however, many speech act verbs have several uses and can name different illocutionary forces, e.g. one can swear that a proposition is true or one can swear that one will perform some future deed (as cited in Briggs, 2001, p. 99). On the other hand, Briggs (2003, p. 28) added that “all speech acts are performative, but some are more performative than others.” Further, he claimed that it is helpful to consider illocutionary acts ranging from strong to weak. Every utterance is a weak illocutionary act; while strong illocutionary utterances hold more power comparatively. Moreover, there are cases where the performative verb is not present, but there are other forms of verbs which help the hearer to identify whether the utterance is a form of promising or not. Similarly, Mey (2001) stated that there are cases where promises are given without the verb “promise.” Furthermore, some linguists are concerned with what the utterance describes. According to Hurford et al. (2007, p. 263), “*I promise to repay you tomorrow*” is performative because in saying it the speaker actually does what the utterance describes, e.g. he promises to repay the hearer the next day. That is, the utterance both describes and is a “promise.” But, if the verb is changed into the past simple tense, then the conventions of the speech act theory are violated; thus the utterance should be in the present simple tense.

C. Felicity Conditions on the Act of Promising

As previously mentioned, there are some conditions that must be fulfilled for a speech act to be felicitous. What are the conditions that must be fulfilled for a speech act of promising to achieve its goal? There are cases when linguists do not focus on the truth or falsehood of promises because their target is the person. According to Lodge et al. (1997, p.167), “now, with promises, the question of truth or falsehood is not really important.” The following conditions must be fulfilled for the act of promising (Lodge et al., 1997, p. 167):

1. *First, the person making the promise must be in a position to carry it out.*
2. *Secondly, that person must also be sincere in making the promise. Producing utterances with a rather ironical tone, referring to part of a course which is renowned as difficult and dry, would clearly not constitute that promise.*
3. *The promise must be equally acknowledged as such by those involved in the interaction.*

Searle developed some conditions what are known as the “Searlean conditions,” but as mentioned above, Yule refined his classification into general, content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions. According to Yule (1996, p.50), these are specifics for each condition:

TABLE 1
SUMMARY OF THE FELICITY CONDITIONS ON THE ACT OF PROMISING

FELICITY CONDITIONS	
General conditions	Participants understand the language being
Content condition	used The speaker’s utterance must be a future action
Preparatory condition	The hearer wants the speaker to carry the promised act
Sincerity condition	The speaker intends to do the promised act
Essential condition	The speaker undertakes to do the promised act

D. What Is It That Counts as a ‘Promise?’

Some scholars put emphasis on the circumstances, the context, the people who promise, the situation, and the setting as important elements to count an utterance as a promise. According to Mey (2001, p. 97), “all depends on the circumstances of the promises: in some cases, we pay attention to the people who promise, rather than to their exact words, while in other contexts, we focus on the social frame in which the promise is given.” Similarly, Shopen (2007, p. 277) claimed that “the precise speech act performed by an utterance is the result of an interaction between these properties and various contextual factors, such as the social situation, the current state of an interaction, and the background knowledge of the speaker and hearer.” It should be noted that there are many ways to interpret whether or not an utterance is a promise; however, it is often the context that determines the meaning of an utterance.

Griffiths (2006) also stated that it depends on the context when we want to count an utterance as a promise, and that the same utterance can have more than one meaning. He gives the example as “*I promise to be there*,” which could be considered a threat rather than a promise if the addressee would be intimidated by the speaker’s presence in the place referred to, and so on. It is also worth saying that Geis discussed the role of the interaction between the *H* and *S*, and suggested (1996, p. 5), “promises are normally uttered in contexts in which the promisor believes that the addressee has some need or desire that she wishes the promisor specifically to satisfy.” Whereas, Vanhoozer (2005, p. 64) claimed that the propositional content of the utterance does not make it a promise; an utterance becomes a promise only when an agent uses words to commit herself or himself to a course of future action. To summarize, there are many social and psychological factors that may help the hearer to decode the hidden meaning of any utterance.

E. Previous Studies on the Act of Promising

One of the more general existing studies was conducted by Suwandi (2013) with her research “A pragmatic analysis of promising utterances in Barack Obama speeches.” The researcher focused on the pragmalinguistic forms of promising utterance, and identified illocutionary acts of promising utterances. Suwandi analyzed five selected speeches delivered by Barack Obama. The researcher found 36 instances of the constative form (92%) and 3 instances for the performative form of promising utterance (8%). Further analysis showed intentions such as reconfirming (3%), influencing (3%), offering (5%), assuring (43%), and affirming (46%).

Rahayu (2009) conducted a qualitative study entitled “A socio-pragmatic analysis of promising utterance in Barack Obama campaign speeches.” The intentions of promising utterances were shown to be in the categories of giving a response, stating purpose, assuring, persuading, describing, inviting, and requesting. Attention, regret, cooperation, responsibility, relationship, mercy, affection, and prestige were the reasons of for these promising utterances.

Furthermore, Pudjilestari’s (2012) “Promising utterances in some manuscripts” showed that there are three kinds of sentences, including declarative sentences, imperative sentences, and interrogative sentences. There were five intentions for a speaker to make an utterance --command, assure, request, affirm, describe--and there were eight reasons of the speaker--responsibility, hope, anger, relationship, affection, teasing, attention, and misunderstanding.

Some scholars have analyzed the act of promising from different perspectives. One of them was Inge Egner (2002) with the study entitled “The speech act of promising in an intercultural perspective.” He studied the speech act of

promising used by Africans and Westerners. Egner found out that the African way of promising differs from the Western one. He claimed that for “an African speaker, just stating an intention to perform an act in the hearer's favour does not yet imply commitment or even presuppose the ability to carry out the fact” (Egner, 2002, p.10).

All the previous studies have similarities and differences. The similarity is that all studies focus on the act of promising. But the researchers used different data. For example, Pudjilestari conducted research about promises in some movie manuscripts, whereas Suwandi conducted research on promising utterances in political speeches, but the data of her research was focused on only five speeches made by Obama. Therefore, from all the previous studies, this study analyzed promising utterances in two election campaigns made by Obama, including the intentions and performative verbs.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive qualitative method because the researcher wanted to find out how the act of promising is used in political discourse and what effects it may have on the audience. However, this study also employed a quantitative method to calculate and present the frequency of intentions and performative verbs. The data for the study were collected from the transcriptions of speeches delivered by Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. The full texts or the transcriptions of the speeches were downloaded from the website of The American Presidency Project (ucsb.edu), and YouTube videos.

A. Data Collection

The promising utterances were divided into two groups. The first group included promising utterances taken from Obama's election campaign in 2008, whereas the second group covered promises from the 2012 election campaign. Each group consisted of 10 samples. The procedure of data collection for the study was as follows:

1. Selecting speeches from Barack Obama's election campaigns in 2008 and 2012;
2. Reading the transcripts of selected speeches;
4. Selecting the utterances – focusing on commissive utterances;
5. Identifying the promising utterances;
6. Categorizing the utterances based on their intention;
7. Describing the performative verbs;
9. Analyzing the utterances based on Searle's theory of speech acts.

B. Data Analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, Searle's classification of speech acts was used as a framework to analyze the act of promising. The locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts of promising utterances made by Barack Obama were investigated in the first phase of the analysis. Secondly, the focus was on the intentions of Obama's utterances in 2008 and 2012. Finally, the last phase analyzed performative verbs and other forms of verbs as ways of promising.

IV. RESULTS

This section shows the findings collected from the presidential campaigns in 2008 and 2012. Table 2 shows utterances from the 2008 election campaign, and Table 3 shows utterances delivered by Obama during the 2012 election campaign.

TABLE 2
OBAMA'S 2008 PROMISES

<p>Sample 1: Locutionary act: <i>I promise you we will win and you and I together will change this country and change the world. There is nothing we cannot do.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – assuring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 2: Locutionary act: <i>I will make our government more open and transparent. No more secrecy, that is a commitment I am making to you as a president.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – assuring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Responsibility</i></p>
<p>Sample 3: Locutionary act: <i>I believe in the Constitution and I will obey the Constitution of the United States. We are not going to use signing statements as a way of doing an end-run around Congress.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive (promising) – affirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 4: Locutionary act: <i>I will promise you this, that if we have not gotten our troops out by the time I am president, it is the first thing I will do. I will get our troops home. We will bring an end to this war. You can take that to the bank.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – confirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination and hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 5: Locutionary act: <i>I promise you that if you give me the extraordinary honor of serving as your president, I will work every single day, tirelessly, on your behalf and on the behalf of the future of our children.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – showing aims</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Hopefulness and encouragement</i></p>
<p>Sample 6: Locutionary act: <i>When I am in the White House, I will put on a comfortable pair of shoes myself, I will walk on that picket line with you as President of the United States of America because workers deserve to know that somebody is standing in their corner.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – inspiring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 7: Locutionary act: <i>The first thing I would do as President is- sign the Freedom of Choice Act.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – confirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination and hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 8: Locutionary act: <i>I will end this war in Iraq responsibly...</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising)- assuring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 9: Locutionary act: <i>I'll invest in early childhood education.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – confirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 10: Locutionary act: <i>And -- and as someone who watched my mother argue with insurance companies while she lay in bed dying of cancer, I will make certain those companies stop discriminating against those who are sick and need care the most.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – reconfirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>

Table 2 shows the most dominant intentions performed by Barack Obama in the 2008 election campaign. Obama used reconfirming 1 (20%), confirming 3 (30%), assuring 3 (30%), inspiring 1 (10%), showing aims 1 (10%), and affirming 1 (1%). Further results showed that Obama used the performative verb “promise” three times in 10 samples. He used “will” and the form “be going to+ infinitive” as ways of promising.

TABLE 3
OBAMA'S 2012 PROMISES

<p>Sample 1: Locutionary act: <i>I promise you, you will continue to have a President who hears your voices, a President who fights for your families, a President who spends every waking hour trying to figure out how I can make sure that your lives are a little bit better and, more importantly, that all of our children's lives are a whole lot brighter.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – guaranteeing</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Inspiration and determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 2: Locutionary act: <i>I believe we can seize this future together because we are not as divided as our politics suggests. We are not as cynical as the pundits believe. We are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions, and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and forever will be the United States of America. And together with your help and God's grace we will continue our journey forward ... and remind the world just why it is that we live in the greatest nation on Earth. Thank you, America. God bless you. God bless these United States.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – reconfirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Inspiration and hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 3: Locutionary act: <i>We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there. Yes, we can ... and those who tell us that we cannot, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people. Yes, we can.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – inviting</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Hopefulness and encouragement</i></p>
<p>Sample 4: Locutionary act: <i>I will work with anybody of, any party, to move this country forward. And if you want to break the gridlock in Congress, you will vote for leaders who feel the same way -- whether they are Democrats, Republicans, Independents -- Tom and Christie Vilsack, and Tom Harkin, and Leonard Boswell and Bruce Braley, and my great friends, Tom Miller and Mike Fitzgerald.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – reconfirming</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Inspiration and hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 5: Locutionary act: <i>I will never turn Medicare into a voucher system. No American should have to spend their golden years at the mercy of insurance companies. They should retire with the dignity and the respect and the care that they have earned.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – assuring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 6: Locutionary act: <i>Now, four years ago when I stood on this stage I said that I would cut taxes for middle-class families. And that's exactly what I did. We cut taxes for middle-class families by about \$3,600. And the reason is because I believe we do best when the middle class is doing well. We do have to lower the cost of health care. Not just in Medicare and -- and overall. But I also believe that government has the capacity -- the federal government has the capacity to help open up opportunity and create ladders of opportunity and to create frameworks where the American people can succeed. But I also on behalf of the American people and the middle class and all those who are striving to get in the middle class. I have kept that promise and if you will vote for me, then I promise I will fight just as hard in a second term.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – inviting</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Hopefulness and encouragement</i></p>
<p>Sample 7: Locutionary act: <i>As long as I am Commander in Chief, I will pursue our enemies with the strongest military the world has ever known. But it is time to use the savings from ending the war in Iraq, from transitioning out of Afghanistan, to pay down our debt, rebuild America, put people back to work repairing roads, making our schools state of the art, hiring our veterans, because if you fought for this country, you should not have to fight for a job when you come home. That is my commitment. That is what is at stake in this election.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – persuading</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Hopefulness and determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 8: Locutionary act: <i>But to the issue of Iran as long as I am president of the United States, Iran will not get a nuclear weapon.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – assuring</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination</i></p>
<p>Sample 9: Locutionary act: <i>So if you are willing to stand with me and work with me and knock on some doors with me and make some phone calls with me I promise you we will finish what we started in 2008, and we will remind the world just why it is that is the greatest nation on Earth.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – guaranteeing</i> Perlocutionary effect: <i>Inspiration and hopefulness</i></p>
<p>Sample 10: Locutionary act: <i>We'll improve any aspect of [the healthcare] law, and any recommendations and suggestions that those who actually know the health care system and aren't just playing politics put forward. But we're going to implement [the Affordable Care Act] and America is going to be better for it.</i> Illocutionary act: <i>Commissive act (promising) – assuring</i></p>

Perlocutionary effect: <i>Determination and hopefulness</i>
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Table 3 shows the most dominant intentions performed by Barack Obama in the 2012 election campaign. The results showed that Obama used guaranteeing 1 (10%), reconfirming 3 (30%), inviting 2 (20%), assuring 3 (30%), and persuading 1 (10%). Obama used the performative verb “promise” in four samples. Again, he used “will” and the form “be going to+ infinitive” as ways of promising.

V. DISCUSSION

It was sometimes difficult to decide for the intentions of the speaker in the selected samples. According to Palmer (1976), it is sometimes the case that “even the speaker may not have a clear idea of his intentions.” The context of the situation has its role in interpreting the pragmatic aspects of speech acts employed in promising utterances because it is an essential factor in revealing the intended messages said by the speaker. According to Yule (1996, p.21), “the physical environment or context has a powerful impact on how referring expressions are to be interpreted.” Therefore, context, intonation, short pauses, and breaths helped the researcher to analyze Obama’s utterances.

Regarding the first research question, the results of the present study indicated that the speaker used assuring, confirming, reconfirming, affirming, inspiring, and showing the aim. The perlocutionary effects seemed to be almost the same; therefore, the study revealed determination and hopefulness as effects of his utterances.

Regarding the second research questions in 2012, the speaker used reconfirming, guaranteeing, inviting, assuring, and persuading as his intentions, perhaps because he wanted to sound more prestigious than his opponent, Governor Romney. Inspiration, determination, and hopefulness seemed to be the perlocutionary effects of his utterances. The findings of this study are consistent with those of previous studies conducted by Suwandi (2013) and Rayahu (2009).

Regarding the third research question, both in 2008 and 2012, Obama used the performative verb “promise” in 7 samples. The speaker used the performative verb “promise” more in the 2012 samples. The study found four samples where the speaker used the performative verb “promise.” He used the performative verb “promise” because he believed himself to be a better prepared and dedicated candidate than his opponents in both election campaigns. Also, he used the modal verb “will” and the form “be going to + infinitive” as ways of promising instead of the performative verb “promise.” In line with this, according to Palmer (1976), people can promise without using the verb promise. According to Greenbaum et al. (1985), the modal verb “will” is used with future meaning; then the form “be going to + infinitive” can be used to express future fulfillment of present intention.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that Obama used confirming, reconfirming, guaranteeing, and assuring as intentions during his two election campaigns in 2008 and 2012. His intentions were almost the same in both election campaigns. Hopefulness, determination, and inspiration appeared to be the most frequent perlocutionary effects of the promising utterances in both election campaigns. The speaker used the performative verb “promise” in 7 samples. Further analysis showed that the speaker frequently used the modal verb “will” and the form “be going to + infinitive” as ways of promising. However, the other forms of verbs did not decrease the force of his utterances. He seemed to be equal in both campaigns when it comes to implicit and explicit performatives.

A. Limitations of the Study

The focus of this study was on the promising utterances delivered by the former President of the United States, Barack Obama, during his two election campaigns in 2008 and 2012. The researcher faced some unavoidable limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted on a small number of samples; in order to generalize the results of findings, the study would have benefitted from more speeches, including those of other politicians. Secondly, the study did not discuss all types of illocutionary acts. Ultimately, the researcher did not attempt to analyze whether Obama fulfilled the felicity conditions in both election campaigns. However, the present analysis provided sufficient information about the commissive utterances – that is, promises, made by Barack Obama.

B. Recommendations for Further Studies

Firstly, future studies might investigate promising utterances made by American and Albanian politicians. Secondly, another way to study promises could be the frequency of promising expressions among different cultures. Finally, further research may explore the use of other speech acts not only in political contexts but in other contexts as well.

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