

A Speech Function Analysis of Taylor Swift and The Kelce Brothers' Utterances in the New Heights Podcast

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ABSTRACT

Language is central to the construction of social relationships and the communication of meaning. Within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), speech function is an important interpersonal resource that enables speakers to exchange information, negotiate roles, and maintain interaction through language. This study investigates the realization of speech functions in the New Heights podcast episode entitled Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl, featuring Taylor Swift as the guest and Travis Kelce and Jason Kelce as the hosts. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study uses the podcast transcript as the primary source of data. The findings reveal that statement is the most frequently used initiating speech function (1,166), followed by question (219), command (63), and offer (11). Regarding responding speech functions, answer is the most dominant type (963), followed by acknowledgement (398), contradiction (46), disclaimer (35), undertaking (30), acceptance (24), while refusal and rejection do not occur. These findings indicate that the interaction is primarily characterized by the exchange of information, experiences, and opinions. The dominance of statements, answers, and acknowledgements demonstrates the

collaborative and interactive nature of the conversation, allowing the speakers to maintain engagement and negotiate meanings effectively throughout the podcast.

Keywords: short functional linguistic; interpersonal meaning; speech function; podcast analysis

INTRODUCTION

Language is essential for human interaction because it allows people to communicate information, express attitudes, negotiate relationships, and construct social identities. Communication is not simply the sending of messages but a process whereby speakers position themselves in relation to others. All linguistic choices are indicative not only of what speakers want to say, but also of how they construct and maintain interpersonal relations in a given social context. From this perspective, language is a resource for social semiotics through which social interaction is created and sustained by people [1,2]. This view is central to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) which sees language as a resource for making meaning, not a system of grammatical rules [3].

In SFL, meaning is construed through three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual [1]. Among these, interpersonal meaning concerns how speakers establish relationships, negotiate social roles,

exchange information, and express attitudes during interaction. One important linguistic system that realizes interpersonal meaning is speech function. According to Gerot and Wignell, speech function refers to the communicative role of an utterance in interaction, including giving or demanding information as well as giving or demanding goods and services [4]. These communicative purposes are realised through four major speech functions: statement, question, command, and offer. An analysis of speech functions yields useful information about how speakers structure their talk, negotiate meaning, and sustain interpersonal relationships in communication.

The fast development of digital communication has changed the way people communicate. Communication is no longer just face to face but has gone to many online platforms like podcasts. Podcasts are generally off-the-cuff conversations with turn-taking, storytelling, humour, sharing experience, and co-creating meaning, unlike scripted broadcasts. Such features make podcasts an important data source for the study of real spoken interaction as speakers constantly negotiate meanings while also establishing rapport with each other and involving their audience [5].

One of the most popular examples of this conversational format is the New Heights podcast, hosted by Travis Kelce and Jason Kelce. Since its launch, the podcast has attracted millions of listeners through informal discussions covering sports, entertainment, family life, and personal experiences. Among its episodes, Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl has gained considerable public attention because it brings together internationally recognized figures from the fields of music and sports. Throughout the episode, the participants discuss Taylor Swift's musical career, the reclamation of her master recordings, reflections on the Eras Tour, artistic projects, and personal experiences. The naturally occurring interaction throughout the

conversation provides rich data for examining how speech functions are realized in authentic spoken discourse.

Previous researches have been carried out on the topic of speech functions in various discourse communities such as educational discourse, political discourse, social media discourse, and podcasts. For instance, previous study has shown that interpersonal resources are significant in educational interaction [6]. Similarly, the studies done by other researchers in the previous indicate that in podcasts, statements occur more frequently since people talk about information, experience, and opinions [7,8]. These examples show that speech function is an important linguistic resource to explain interpersonal interaction in various discourse communities.

Although there have been many researches on the topic of speech function in the last few years, researches done specifically on celebrity podcast conversations are not many. Previous researches have mostly been carried out in relation to educational discourse, political discourse, or institutional discourse. Celebrities' podcasts have not been studied much due to their spontaneous nature and interpersonal interactions that occur in them. They can offer a chance for studying speech functions.

Taking into account all of the mentioned aspects, the current paper is intended to examine the realization of speech functions in the New Heights podcast episode "Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl." The study of speech functions will make an important contribution to the SFL-based research into spoken discourse by investigating authentic interaction in a celebrity podcast.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Systemic Functional Linguistics and Interpersonal Meaning

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) views language as a social semiotic resource through which people create meaning in particular social and cultural contexts rather

than merely as a system of grammatical rules [1]. Every linguistic choice reflects not only the speaker's communicative intention but also the social relationship established with others. Consequently, language functions not only to represent experience but also to construct interpersonal relationships and organize messages into coherent discourse [3].

Language concurrently actualizes three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual [1]. Ideational metafunction deals with the representation of human experiences whereas textual metafunction involves organizing linguistic items into messages. Interpersonal metafunction, on which this research is based theoretically, is focused on the means by which the speakers create social relations, negotiate their roles and statuses, exchange information, and convey attitudes through interaction. One such linguistic system that accomplishes interpersonal metafunction is speech function. Therefore, speech function provides an appropriate analytical framework for understanding interpersonal interaction in naturally occurring spoken discourse, including podcasts.

Speech Function

Speech function is one of the primary interpersonal resources through which speakers negotiate meaning during interaction. Communication is fundamentally an exchange involving either information or goods and services [1]. Based on these dimensions, four primary speech functions are identified: statement, question, command, and offer. Statements serve the purpose of providing information, questions seek information, commands require actions, and offers make suggestions of exchanging things.

Communication, however, does not comprise separate acts of speech only. Any initiating speech act implies some sort of reaction from another person, thus forming an interaction sequence. In accordance with the communicative situation, the possible types of the reactions include

acknowledgement, answer, contradiction, disclaimer, acceptance, refusal, rejection, or undertaking [1]. This is why analyzing both initiating and responding speech acts is important for understanding conversation structure and interpersonal relations maintenance through communication.

Despite the fact that speech functions are usually related to the grammatical mood, sometimes the relation between the two is not straightforward. The declarative clauses are used to make statements, the interrogative clauses to pose questions, and the imperative clauses to give commands. However, sometimes people use indirect realizations of those moods in order to accomplish their communication tasks. Thus, for example, an interrogative clause can be a request not a question and a declarative one, advice or suggestion. Hence, the identification of speech functions should take into account both grammar and intention [1,4].

The previous research has found that the realization of speech functions depends on the context of the discourse. The classroom discourse is mainly statement and question-oriented since the teachers' main task is to exchange information and control learning process [9]. Podcast discourse is focused on narration, sharing opinions, using humor and conducting discussions, which results in a more equal participation in interaction [8]. Therefore, speech function analysis offers an effective framework for investigating authentic spoken interaction in podcast conversations.

Previous Studies and Research Gap

There were studies conducted on the functions of speech in several discourse contexts, proving the adaptability of the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach in analyzing discourses. It was proved that people negotiated their relations and created meaning through interaction. In addition, studies on podcasts have shown that the most prevalent function of speech in this discourse context is statements since speakers mostly provide information, opinions, and experiences. Thus, for instance, the previous

researches have proved that the most prevalent function of speech in the Podcast was statements, which was due to the conversational nature of podcast interaction. [7,8]

However, despite the significant contribution to the development of knowledge about speech functions in various discourse settings made by these studies, some gaps in current research still exist. Firstly, previous studies have paid much attention to educational, political, and professional discourse, whereas celebrity podcasts have not been studied so widely. Secondly, there has been little academic interest in conversation in podcasts that include discussions about education and professional topics instead of entertainment podcasts with well-known personalities. These conversations are real examples of spoken interaction during which people exchange experience, negotiate meanings, and build interpersonal relations. Thirdly, according to the information available to the researcher, no study has previously been conducted on speech functions in the episode Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl from the New Heights podcast. This conversation is the first appearance of Taylor Swift in the podcast after she has got back her masters, and thus provides an excellent example for studying speech functions in celebrities' conversations.

Therefore, this study explores the realization of speech functions in the New Heights podcast to reveal how interpersonal interaction is constructed through natural conversation. With its emphasis on real-world discourse by international public personalities, this study adds another dimension to the application of SFL theory to modern digital communication and also contributes to the emerging research on the function of speech in podcasting.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study in order to describe speech

functions realization in podcast discourse. A qualitative research method seemed to be more suitable for this study because the aim of this study was not the testing of hypotheses and statistical relations but an in-depth analysis of linguistic phenomena which take place in naturally produced oral communication. Through qualitative research, researchers have the opportunity to analyze language in its natural context and learn how people use language to communicate meanings while interacting. This study was carried out within the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), more precisely Halliday's interpersonal metafunction theory. Even though there are many different ways through which interpersonal meaning may be realized, this particular study concentrated on speech functions which are regarded as a means to achieve those aims. While analyzing the podcasts, special attention was paid to initiating and responding speech functions as defined by Halliday and Matthiessen. While the frequencies of speech functions were calculated to support the findings, the primary emphasis of the study was the qualitative interpretation of how speech functions were realized within the context of the podcast interaction.

Data Source

The data were obtained from the transcript of the *New Heights* podcast episode entitled *Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl*. In the chosen episode, Taylor Swift is the guest, and Travis Kelce and Jason Kelce are the hosts. It was chosen as the source of authentic interaction where the speakers naturally share their personal experience, views, memories, jokes, and insights regarding their profession. Unlike interviews based on prepared questions, this podcast contains spontaneous conversation where there is a lot of collaboration, turns, changes of topics, and participation of the speakers. The podcast transcript was the main source of data because it allowed having the full text of the interaction. The

clause was the main unit of analysis according to the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Data Collection

The first step in collecting the data was getting the transcript of the chosen podcast episode. Then, it was carefully checked for accuracy and completeness in comparison with the audio file of the episode. After that, the transcript was analyzed thoroughly. Following this, the transcription was divided into clauses and coded based on their speech functions according to the framework by Halliday & Matthiessen [1].

Data Analysis

The collected data was then analyzed qualitatively in four phases:

- First, identify all clauses that used in the podcast text. Every single clause was analyzed individually in terms of its communicative function in the conversation.
- Second, identify speech functions. The initiating speech functions were

categorized into statement, question, command, and offer. The responding speech functions included acknowledgement, answer, contradiction, disclaimer, undertaking, refusal, acceptance, and rejection.

- Third, compute the frequency of each category and interpreting the results in a qualitative way.
- Last, representative examples from the transcript were analyzed to show how the speech functions and modalities worked to form interpersonal relations between the participants.

In order to increase the reliability and validity of the interpretation, coding was performed in a systematic manner based on the analytical categories introduced by Halliday & Matthiessen. It implied that the researcher analyzed each clause several times in order to make sure that its speech function and modality category correspond to its communicative role in the conversation.

RESULT

Table 1. Initiating Speech Function

No	Speech Function	Frequency
1	Statement	1166
2	Question	219
3	Command	63
4	Offer	11
	Total	1459

Table 2. Responding Speech Function

No	Speech Function	Types of Responding	Frequency
1	Statement	Acknowledgement	398
		Contradiction	46
2	Question	Answer	963
		Disclaimer	35
3	Command	Undertaking	30
		Refusal	0
4	Offer	Acceptance	24
		Rejection	0
	Total	1498	

DISCUSSION

Initiating Speech Functions in the New Heights Podcast

The findings observed that all the four types of initiating speech functions which are statement, question, command, and offer,

occur in the New Heights podcast with Taylor Swift. However, the frequency of use of these functions is very different. According to the data provided in Table 1, the dominant type of speech function in the interaction is statement, its frequency being

1,166. Next in frequency are the questions (219), the commands (63), and the offers (11). It can be stated that the nature of the interaction is based on the exchange of information rather than on the exchange of goods and services.

In terms of the speech functions performed at the initiation stage of the speech act cycle, the most frequent are statements, which suggests that conveying information is the main purpose of the communication act performed. Throughout the episode, Taylor Swift regularly uses statements in order to talk about her experience in the world of music, describe the process of reclaiming her master recordings, and share significant episodes from her career. For example, when Taylor Swift's statement: *"I wanted to own my work and have control over my music"*, As an example of a statement because it performs the speech function of giving information using a declarative clause. The utterance conveys the speaker's personal intention and experience in the ownership of her musical works rather than a request for an answer or instruction to another participant. This statement is a springboard for more interaction. The hosts can respond, ask follow up questions and open up the discussion. Thus, the utterance is not merely informative but also enables the joint construction of meaning throughout the conversation. At the same time, Travis Kelce and Jason Kelce use statements in order to start new topics of conversation, to react to the stories told by Taylor, and to make jokes that continue the conversation. In this case, statements are used not only to convey some information but also to initiate more dialogue and enhance the interpersonal communication of the participants in the interaction. This finding confirms that statements are the unmarked form of giving information in interpersonal communication [1].

In addition, the domination of statements is closely linked to the features of podcast communication. In contrast to official communication like classroom lessons and workplace discussions, podcasts motivate

speakers to communicate experiences using longer stories and personal reflections. Therefore, declarative clauses are created automatically while the participants talk about events, make opinions, and react to what each other says. This result correlates well with the findings of the research done by previous authors who claimed that statements are dominating in the speech function because podcast communication is mainly about the experience exchange [7,8]. Questions represent the second most common type of initiating speech function that is found in the episode, with a total frequency of 219 instances. Questions are not limited to requesting information but are rather used in order to elicit more detailed answers and thus continue the conversation flow. Travis Kelce and Jason Kelce often ask open-ended questions that motivate Taylor Swift to share her opinions on certain topics and give details about her experiences. Through such questions, the guest can produce longer answers rather than short ones. Thus, it is concluded that questions in podcasting have a conversational role. As opposed to classroom discourse where questions are usually employed in order to evaluate students' knowledge [9], questions in the New Heights podcast serve as interactional strategies.

On the contrary, the number of commands and offers is much lower, totalling 63 and 11 cases respectively. Such scarcity can be explained by the nature of the relationship between the speakers who have an equal status. In case commands are used, they are utilized for managing the conversation process rather than trying to control other people. Offers, on their side, are mostly made in a humorous way without the intention of really offering any goods or services. Therefore, it can be concluded that the lack of hierarchical relations in the conversation is one more proof of the fact that its goal is informal communication.

Responding Speech Functions in the New Heights Podcast

Analysis of the responding speech functions shows that the participants interact with each

other through all the time in the interaction. Among the listed responding speech functions, the answers prevail with 963 examples, next go acknowledgements (398), contradictions (46), disclaimers (35), undertakings (30), acceptances (24), while there are no refusals and rejections. It means that the participants respond to each other's utterances and collaborate in the development of the interaction. In terms of frequency of usage, the dominating role of answers is correlated with the great number of questions in the interaction. Unlike providing short replies, the participants give long answers that add some information and start discussions on other issues. In many cases, an answer is not the end of one interactional sequence, but rather a beginning of the next conversational exchange.

Often interjections like “*Yeah*,” “*Right*,” or “*Exactly*” occurred and acted as acknowledgements, signifying that the listener was keeping up and encouraging the speaker to proceed. These replies helped to keep the interaction going and to preserve the collaborative spirit of the podcast. The acknowledgments category is the second largest group in terms of responding speech functions, thus revealing a high degree of listening and interpersonal activity from the speakers. Through agreeing with someone, confirming his words, showing appreciation, or simply acknowledging what was said, speakers show the validity of the contribution made by the other person and keep the communication going on smoothly. Acknowledgments play an important role in creating such a friendly atmosphere in the podcast. Instead of interfering with the communication process, they build rapport between the speakers. On the other hand, the presence of contradictions, disclaimers, undertakings, and acceptances are relatively rare and the refusal and rejection do not exist within the dialogue at all. The rarity of these responses to the speech acts implies that the discussion is not characterized by any disagreements. While some of the speakers may have divergent ideas, those disagreements are expressed quite politely

and sometimes even in humorous ways. In this case, the speakers are more concerned about the quality of their relations and the fun they will have while talking.

In summary, the use of both initiating and responding functions of speech proves that the interaction in the New Heights podcast is based on collaborative information exchange. Statements play an essential role in the initiation of ideas and experiences sharing, while questions promote clarification and prolonging of the interaction. In addition, answers and acknowledgments keep up the flow of interaction and interpersonal involvement of the interlocutors. The infrequent usage of such speech acts as commands, offers, refusals, and rejections confirms that the conversation is based on equality, cooperation, and mutual storytelling rather than hierarchy. These results confirm the statement about the fact that speech functions play an important role of interpersonal resources [1].

CONCLUSION

This study was aimed at investigating the realization of speech functions in the New Heights podcast episode Taylor Swift on Reclaiming Her Masters, Wrapping the Eras Tour, and the Life of a Showgirl viewed from Systemic Functional Linguistics. The results show that all four initiating speech functions which are statement, question, command and offer, are found in the interaction. Refusal and rejection, however, are not found among the responding speech functions. Statements are the dominant initiating speech function and answers are the most frequent responding speech function. The results show that the interaction is mainly directed at exchanging information rather than exchanging goods and services. Throughout the conversation, the participants actively construct interaction by sharing personal experiences, responding to one another's ideas, and collaboratively developing topics of discussion.

The results also indicate that speech functions play an important role in the

construction of interpersonal interaction in podcast discourse. Statements, questions, answers and acknowledgements all work together to keep a conversation going, encourage active participation and build stronger relationships between the speakers. The relative infrequency of commands, offers, contradictions, refusals and rejections suggests the collaborative, egalitarian nature of the interaction where maintaining rapport is more important than exercising authority or expressing disagreement.

In addition to providing an insight into the distribution of speech functions, the present study provides evidence that the study of speech functions can be an effective tool for the analysis of real-life interaction in digital media. According to the results of the study, the conversations of podcasts include not only exchange of information but also constant negotiation of interpersonal relations with the help of dialogue collaboration. It is possible to prove this assumption by studying the way in which speakers start and react to each other's utterances. Hence, the results obtained in the course of the study can be used in further research of spoken discourse.

The present research enriches the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics through its analysis of the role of speech functions in a celebrity podcast of our time, which is not yet well researched. The results of this analysis show that real-life podcasts serve as a great source for studying how people build meanings and interact in their relationships in digital communication. Further research could examine speech functions in various types of podcasts or analyze communication between various speakers in podcasts to reveal more about meaning-making in digital communication.

Declaration by Authors

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