

A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Condolence Messages by Obama

By

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Abstract

Communication can be done in different ways; one of which is a condolence message. A person can communicate his feelings and express his condolences to the person who has suffered a loss of a loved one or something like that. Finding the right words to say when someone's mourning death can be difficult. The present study is an attempt to investigate the concept of condolences in certain messages given by the American President Barak Obama. It aims to: reveal the most frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech acts used in his condolence messages; find out Elwood's strategies used by Barak Obama. It is hypothesized that: declarative sentence is the most frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech acts used by Obama in the data under study and expression of sympathy is the most common strategy of Elwood's strategies that are used in these messages. The study develops an eclectic model of analysis based on syntactic structure of expressive speech acts and Elwood's 2004 strategies. Both of the hypotheses above are validated.

Key words: Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Condolence Messages, Elwood's strategies, Obama.

I. Introduction

All people experience death yet discussing death can be challenging because of how sensitive the subject is. The majority of individuals think it is challenging to comfort the bereaved, and many listeners think other people are not sympathetic enough to comprehend their circumstances (Williams, 2006). It depends on the relationship between the speaker and the bereaved when expressing a meaningful expression as condolences (Moghaddam, 2012:34). Condolences fall under the expressive category of speech acts according to the classification of Searle in 1979. The main goals of sending condolences are to show sympathy and offer support to someone who has lost a loved one (Yahya, 2010:620). It can be difficult to find the perfect condolence words at the right time. The research questions are: (a) what is the most frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech acts that are used by The American President Barak Obama, (b) what are Elwood's strategies that are used in Obama's condolence messages?

It aims to: (a) reveal the most frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech acts used in Obama's condolence messages, and (b) find out the use of Elwood's strategies in these messages. It is hypothesized that: (a) declarative sentence is the most frequent syntactic structure of expressive speech acts used by Obama in the data under study, (b) expression of sympathy is the most common strategy of Elwood's strategies that are used in these messages. The study develops an eclectic model of analysis for the syntactic structure of expressive speech acts and Elwood's strategies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatics: An Overview

According to Allott (2010:1), pragmatics is a branch of philosophy that aims to address certain questions about meaning, particularly the connection between what sentences mean and what speakers intend when they say them. It can be viewed as a grammar extension that takes into account and codifies some of the connections between sentence meaning and context. According to this theory, pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics. To create a psychologically realistic explanation of human communication, pragmatics can be pursued as a long-term effort; in this way, pragmatics would become a subfield of cognitive science (Austin, Oyedeji, & Tade, 2020).

2.1.1 Searle's Theory

In his foundational work "Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language," J. R. Searle significantly modifies Austin's concept of a speech act in an effort to fill in some gaps in Austin's theory (Searle, 1969:23-4). He claims that Austin's intuitions only applied to formal or ceremonial speaking acts as a result of how he organized Austin's ideas about felicity requirements. Instead, he suggests a set of guidelines for the effective creation of non-institutionalized speech acts, such as promising, requesting, and other commonplace forms of communication. If any of these guidelines are broken, the act is infelicitous (ibid.). The following guidelines apply to the propositional act (Azmi, Ginting, & Runtung Sitepu, 2021):

- 1) Content requirements for the proposition.
- 2) Preparatory conditions are background circumstances and information about speakers and hearers that must exist before the act is performed.
- 3) The speakers' intentions, convictions, and objectives are taken into account by the sincerity criteria.
- 4) An act's illocutionary point, or "what the utterance counts as," is connected to prerequisites (ibid)

Using felicity criteria, Searle (1979: 65) divides speech acts into five fundamental classes; each of which has a large number of extra sub-acts. Some of them are as follows:

Assertives (representatives) are truth-valued speech acts that express whether the speaker believes something to be true or not.

Expressives are verbal activities that convey the speaker's emotions.

Declaratives are speaking acts that cause the world to change in the light of their creation.

Directives are attempts to persuade the listener to take action. They express the speaker's desires.

Commissives are verbal acts that bind the speaker to a specific course of conduct in the future.

2.2 Elwood's Strategies

According to Elwood (2004:49-74), there are five kinds of strategies of condolence utterances:

(1) An Expression of Sympathy

An expression of sympathy is an expression that shows his sympathy after knowing someone is in a bad state.

(2) An Acknowledgement of Death

An acknowledgement of Death is an expression that includes an interjection like "Oh, my goodness".

(3) An Offer of Assistance

An offer of assistance aims to offer help to someone who is in trouble to lighten the burden of the person.

(4) A Future Oriented Remark

A Future oriented remarks are usually encouragements.

(5) An Expression of Concern

An expression of concern relates to showing concern for the welfare of the speakers.

2.3 Condolence: An Overview

The etymology of the word "condolence" sends a powerful message. There are two Latin roots: *con*, which means "together," and *dolere*, which means "to sorrow" (Zunin and Zunin, 2007:98). Condolences are words that are used to express one's sympathy (Bromberg, 2000:337). They are formal professions of regret or sadness for persons who have lost a loved one. Condolences do not have to include an action that the listener is liable for. People are emotional creatures, and this emotionality may be seen in daily conversation. The loss of a loved one can leave one in a condition of profound sorrow, grief, and shock. (Smith, 2010; Bakhshi, Wesley, & Reddy, 2021).

Condolence is an expression of sympathy with another in grief. Condolences have the phatic communication feature in the way they are used in our everyday (Muihaki, 2004: 134). The term 'condolence' is used when there is an occasion for losing a beloved person.

Condolence expressions convey sympathy for the listener's distress (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985: 212). Condolences are more than just words of compassion; they are active, purposeful gestures of support and encouragement in the face of misfortune. They alleviate the suffering of people who are impacted. The mourner and his or her family are usually grateful for any kind of condolences. Condolence recipients are not searching for flashy novelty, but rather a genuine statement of emotion, Smith (2010:76).

Condolences are "communicative" speech acts, as opposed to "conventional" speech acts (such as sentencing, and appointing), which are not essentially acts of communication and have the function of influencing institutional conditions of affairs rather than communication (Bach, 2012:27).

Communication speech acts are actions taken with specific communicative goals that must be recognized by the listeners in order for them to be successful. They communicate a particular attitude, and the manner in which they speak reflects that attitude. Condolences, for example, convey regret, anguish, or sorrow. (ibid)

Condolences, according to Searle (1979:15), belong to the category of "expressives". This class's illocutionary point (or intent) is to convey only the speaker's emotional state, as determined by the sincerity requirement, with regard to an event or series of events, as determined by the propositional content.

2.4 Syntactic Structure of Condolences

Declarative sentences are used in the structure of some condolences. The subject is present in these condolences and usually comes before the verb, as in:

(1) You have our deepest sympathy. (Ropchan, 2013 :96)

Words can't really describe my sorrow for your loss. Another grammatical kind of condolences is the imperative. In this instance, condolences lack a clear grammatical subject and have a base-form verb, as in:

(2) Please accept my / our condolences. (ibid)

Some irregular sentences are referred to as fragmentary, according to Quirk et al. (1985: 883), since they lack components that are often required. This is an attribute of some condolences. The grammatical structure of the sentence, such as the absence of the subject and the verb as in:

(3) Sorry about your grandfather. (ibid)

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Model of Analysis

The data that the study deals with are condolence messages. Three condolence messages for American President Barak Obama have been chosen. The data of this study are taken from different web sources that are mentioned in the references. The model of analysis to be adopted is an eclectic one. It is based on Searle's speech 1979, Ropchan's 2013 syntactic structure of condolence and Elwood's strategies 2004 as shown in Figure (1).

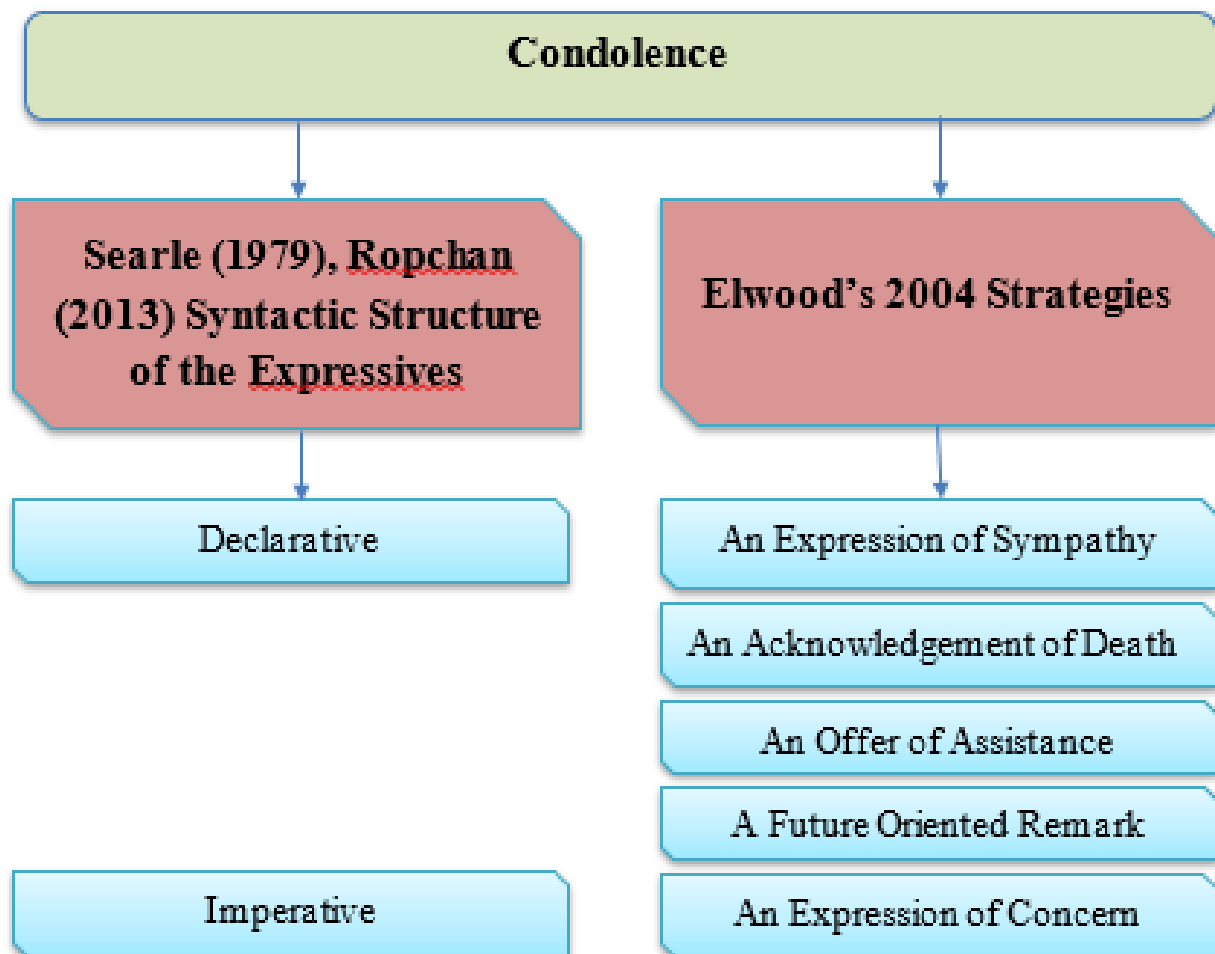


Figure (1): The Eclectic Model of Analysis

Figure (1): *The Eclectic Model of Analysis*

3.2 Data Analysis

3.2.1 Sample 1

Dear Wege Family:

I was saddened to learn of the passing of Peter Melvin Wege, and I extend my heartfelt condolences as you mourn his loss.

The security that lets us live in peace, the prosperity that allows us to pursue our dreams, the freedom that we cherish—these were earned by the service and sacrifice of our Nation's veterans. We are forever indebted to these heroes, and I hope you find solace in knowing Peter's legacy lives on not only in the family and friends he left behind, but also in the country he helped defend.

At this difficult time, I hope cherished memories help temper your grief. Please know you are in my thoughts and prayers.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/c1fDbxY4HZAD29RTA>

Obama sends condolence message to Wege Family after the death of Peter Melvin Wege.

A. *Syntactic Structure of Expressive Speech Acts*

Declarative syntactic structures of expressive speech act have been used twice in the initial stage: Obama uses the expressive speech act of "Condolening" which has declarative syntactic structure as in 'I was saddened to learn of the demise of Peter Melvin Wege' and 'I extend my heartfelt condolences.'

Obama employs imperative syntactic structure of expressive speech act at the closing stage (*Please know you are in my thoughts and prayer*).

B. *Elwood's Strategies*

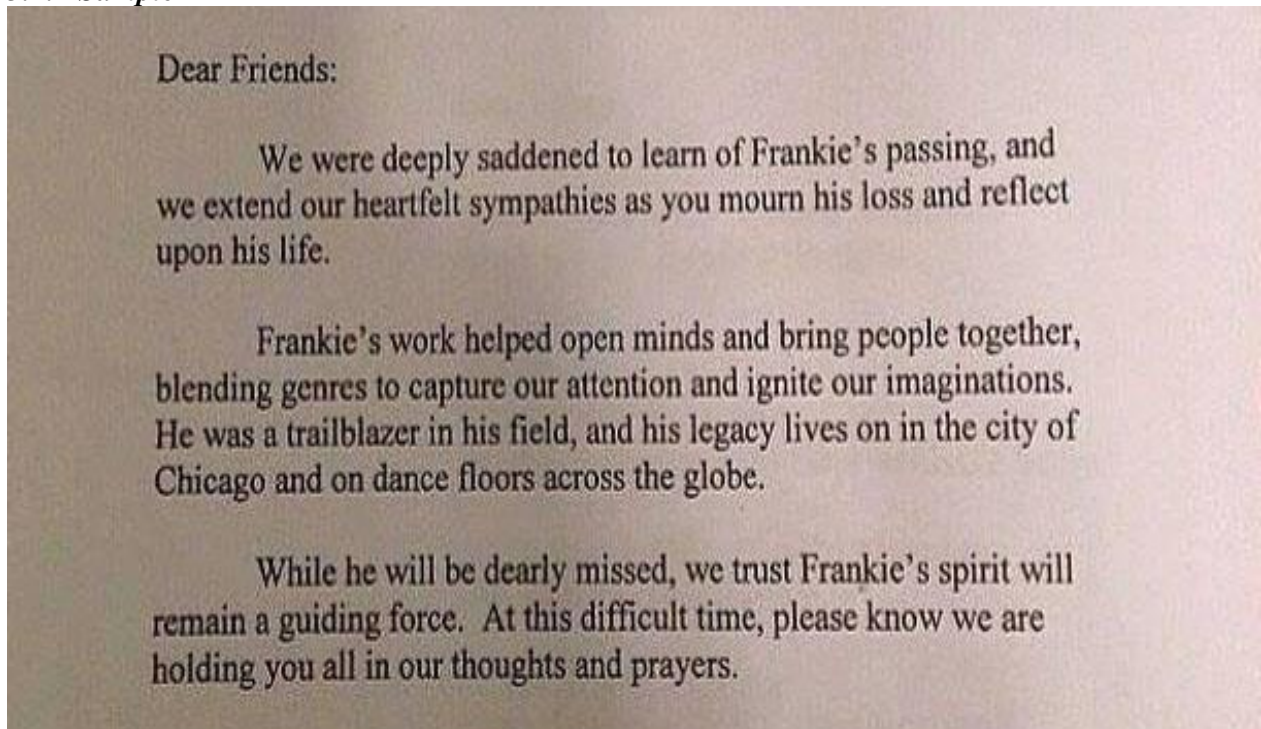
Obama uses one of Elwood's strategies, which is expression of sympathy: (I was saddened to learn..... my heartfelt condolences as you mourn his loss), to express his sadness in the opening stage of this message. He also uses an acknowledging of death strategy to officially announce Peter M. Wege's passing, as in (*The passing of Peter Melvin Wege*).

In the acknowledging stage, Obama utilizes future oriented remark Peter's legacy which is 'Peter's legacy lives on not only in the family and friends he left behind, but also in the country he helped defend'

In the ending stage, Obama ends his condolence message by referring to one of Elwood's strategies which is expression of concern (*Please know you are in my thoughts and*

prayers).

3.2.2 Sample 2



<https://images.app.goo.gl/gjxtSnDVsxqoW2T9>

A. *Obama's condolence message to Frankie Knuckle's Friends and Family.*

B. *Syntactic Structure of Expressive Speech Acts*

In the initial stage, Obama employs expressive speech of "condoling" twice to show his sorrow at Frankie Knuckles' passing by using declarative syntactic structure (We were deeply saddened to learn of Frankie's passing) and (we extend our heartfelt sympathies as you).

In the acknowledgment stage, Obama once more utilizes expressive speech act "praising" throughout declarative syntactic structure as in " (He was trailblazer in his field, and his legacy lives on in the city of Chicago and on dance floors across the globe.)

In the ending stage, Obama uses an imperative sentence which is another grammatical type of condolence (Please know we are holding you in our thoughts and prayers).

A. *Elwood's Strategies*

In the initial stage, two types of Elwood's strategies are used: Obama expresses his sadness by using one of Elwood's strategies which is expression of sympathy as in (we were saddened to learn..... our heartfelt sympathies as you mourn his loss) and an acknowledging of death in order to ensure the death of Frankie Knuckles by uttering the word 'passing' as in (... to learn of Frankie's passing,).

In the acknowledging stage, Obama refers to the importance of Frankie 's work in the sense that it will be extended to the future generation. As such, he uses future oriented remark which is one of Elwood's strategies as in (and his legacy lives on in the city of Chicago and on dance floors across the globe.).

In the ending stage, an expression of concern that relates to showing concern for the welfare of the speaker (Please know we are holding you all in our thoughts and prayers).

3.2.3 *Sampl 3*

Dear Jim:

I am deeply saddened to learn of the loss of your daughter, Master Sergeant Tara R. Brown, USAF. Our Nation will not forget her sacrifice, and we can never repay our debt to your family.

A simple letter cannot ease the pain of losing a child, but I hope you take solace in knowing that her brave service exceeded all measures of selflessness and devotion to this country. We honor her not only as a guardian of our liberty, but also as the true embodiment of America's spirit of service to a cause greater than ourselves.

Michelle and I offer our heartfelt sympathy, and pray that God's grace gives you comfort as you grieve. In life, your daughter was a shining example of all that is best in our land. In rest, may she find the peace we all seek.

<https://images.app.goo.gl/amAwYSJaZZD2iPoU7>

This condolence message was initiated by The President of the United State of America Barak Obama to Mr. Jim A. Jacobs who lost his daughter Master Sergeant Tara. She died April 27, 2011, serving during operation Enduring Freedom.

A. *Syntactic Structure of Expressive Speech Acts*

In the initial stage, The President expresses his sadness about the death of the daughter of Mr. Jim. So, he uses expressive speech act " Condoling "by using declarative syntactic structure (I am deeply saddened to learn of the loss of your daughter...).

Once again, Obama and his wife offer their condolences throughout expressive speech act 'Condoling' by using declarative syntactic structure which is shown in the ending stage (Michelle and I offer our heartfelt sympathy,).

C. *Elwood's Strategies*

In the introductory stage, two types of Elwood's strategies are used: the president expresses his sadness by using expression of sympathy as in (I am deeply saddened to learn.....) and future oriented remark, the president says that her sacrifices will never be forgotten as in (Our nation will not forget her sacrifice.).

In the acknowledging stage, an acknowledging of death which is another strategy is used by the president in order to ensure the death of Mr. Jim's daughter as in (A simple letter cannot ease the pain of losing a child....).

In the ending stage, Michelle and the president offer psychological support which is one of Elwood's strategies that is called offer of assistance as in (Michelle and I offer our heartfelt sympathy, and pray that God's grace.., may she find the peace we all seek).

3.3 Discussion of Analysis

The current study has two objectives. The first objective of the research is to specify

the types of syntactic structure of expressive speech acts that are used in Obama's condolence messages. Declarative sentence is the most frequent syntactic structure that is used in Obama's condolence messages (71.43%) while imperative sentence (28.57%) in the data under study as it appears in Table (1).

Table (1): Syntactic Structure of Expressive Speech Acts

Syntactic Structure of Expressive Speech Acts	Text 1		Text 2		Text 3		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Declarative Sentence	2	66.67	3	75	2	100	5	71.43
Imperative Sentence	1	33.33	1	25	0	0	2	28.57
Total	3	100	4	100	2	100	7	100

Freq. = Frequency

The second objective of this study is to find out Elwood's strategies used by the American President Obama in his messages. The result of this study shows that expressions of sympathy, acknowledging of death, and future oriented remark are used (25%) while an offer of assistance (8.33%) in Obama's condolence messages as it is shown in Table (2).

Table (2) Elwood's Strategies Percentages

Elwood's Strategies	Text 1		Text 2		Text 3		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Expressions of Sympathy	1	25	1	25	1	25	3	25
Acknowledging of Death	1	25	1	25	1	25	3	25
An Offer of Assistance	0	0	0	0	1	25	1	8.33
Future Oriented Remarks	1	25	1	25	1	25	3	25
Expression of Concern	1	25	1	25	0	0	2	16.67
Total	4	100	4	100	4	100	12	100

4. Conclusion

Condolences can be classified as an expressive speech act that has two types of syntactic structure: declarative sentence and imperative sentence. A condolence can be expressed as a sympathy, an acknowledgment of death, an offer of assistance, a future-oriented remark, and an expression of concern. The declarative sentence is the most frequent syntactic structure that is used in Obama's condolence messages (71.43%) while the imperative sentence constitutes (28.57%). He uses an expression of sympathy, acknowledging of death, and future oriented remark (75 for all i. e., 25% for each type), an offer of assistance (8.33%), and an expression of concern (16.67%) in his condolence messages.

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