

Speech Acts in Millennials' Election-Related Posts and Tweets: A Sociopragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

Language power is not only limited to in-person spoken discourses. As the world embraces digital platforms to communicate, the hidden power of mass media discourses cannot be ignored. This study attempts to analyze the posts and tweets of millennials during the May 2019 elections in the Philippines within the theory of Speech Acts to unravel their political agenda and movement. Specifically, it seeks to determine the directness and indirectness of the posts and tweets, their types of speech acts, and illocutionary forces using the qualitative type of research, with reference to the idea of sociopragmatics. The findings reveal that millennials are not all the time direct with their social media posts and tweets. It also became evident that despite their younger ages compared to other generations, they hold the authority to influence their followers to agree with them. They also assert their claims that indicate how persistent they are in voicing out their opinions. The results of the study practically imply that the posts and tweets of millennials contribute to the language power of mass media discourses and may have an influence on the users of such digital platforms. Additionally, their mass media discourses may have an indirect effect on the vital aspects of society, such as politics.

Keywords: linguistics, millennials, political engagement, sociopragmatics, speech acts

Introduction

Politics is a vital element of society as it contributes to the structure in making up the nation's identity. Today, the political arena is established using different platforms. Hence, much pieces of information are obtained through various media outlets. Particularly, social media, such as Facebook, becomes an avenue for the citizens to socially interact within the aspects of politics. According to the study by Pew Research Center (as cited in Mitchell, Gottfried, & Matsa, 2015), the main source of millennials for political news is Facebook. In figure, 61% of millennials obtain information about government and politics from social media. From this news and other political related stories, advertisements, and posts, they constantly become informed about politics.

In 2015, 90 percent of Millennials were reported to be using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter as compared to 51 percent of Boomers (Perrin, 2015). Given this premise, it is important then to look into how they react on posts and other news related to politics. Their contribution to politics is crucial as they are considered the cohort that casts the largest votes during elections. In the Philippines, a little over half of the registered voters during the May 2019

elections are Millennials and Generation Z. According to the data report of the Commission on Elections, those whose age was 25-39 accounted for almost 23 million voters, while those who were 18-24 years old accounted for 10 million voters (Büchenbacher, 2019).

Relevant to this, it is also of major concern to study the use of language in their expression of ideas and insights through different platforms. As Fairclough et al. (2015) claim, language is significant enough to capture the interest of all citizens. Nobody who is interested with the modern society, and definitely, in relation of power to modern society can manage to disregard language.

Language and power in mass media discourses

Discourse as a space where power relations are actively performed and enacted is what power in discourse is all about. This could include 'face-to-face' spoken discourse, 'cross-cultural' discourse involving individuals from many ethnic groups, and the 'hidden power' of mass media discourse. The contemporary society cannot be described without the inclusion of mass media. These mass media include television, radio, film, newspaper, and social media platforms. According to Fairclough et al. (2015), discourses in this type are fascinating because the nature of the power relations being put into effect is often ambiguous. Hence it involves hidden relations of power.

Relevant to this, being called the digital natives, millennials were molded by different online platforms as they got exposed to internet at an earlier stage of their lives. Thus, they are largely involved in the hidden power of the discourse of mass media. Moreover, the findings of the study of Ton, Kim, & Newman (2016) reveal that when it comes to seeking political information, millennials do indeed spend more time on social media for information relevant to politics than traditional media. As a result of their enhanced access to knowledge, they are now able to act as both consumers and creators of material (Diggles, 2014). Because of this, different parties and groups exert efforts to mobilize young voters to vote and participate in other ways (Kiessa, et al., 2007; Milkman, 2017). It is even claimed in the late 1990s that the internet became a great weapon for activists which resulted to less expenses for spearheading mobilization and implementing strategies of recruitment for social movement (Earl and Kimport 2011; Juris 2008).

Millennials' Political Engagement

In prior research, the millennial generation was described as "lazy, egotistical, and possessing a feeling of entitlement" that outstripped preceding generations. They were also labeled as politically disengaged. A Time magazine cover story from 2013 branded them the "Me Me Me Generation," claiming that "they have less civic involvement and political activity than an older generation." (Stein, 2013). A 2014 Pew Research Center study similarly concluded that Millennials are "relatively unattached to organized politics" (Taylor, 2014).

In contrast, according to a Japanese scholar specializing in an international corporation, young people's interest in politics seemed to be only formed through an interest in international affairs. So, they used to leave up to politicians and businesses how the country is run. But today, millennials are considered key innovators of social change. They are in fact more aware of the problems that the country is facing and they see politics as way to fix the issues (Eldridge, 2018).

Further, while millennials have been maligned for using and relying too much on technology, they actually took advantage of it by being well-informed about a lot of things such as politics. As emphasized, "If knowledge is power, then Millennials have been empowered at an earlier stage in life than any other generation" (Diggles, 2014).

As to the predictors of youth political engagement, data suggest that one predictor is whether a political issue or candidate is regarded to be of personal interest. With the rampant clicks of political-related news and posts from social media, millennials became more active and used Twitter and Facebook as their first-alert systems to share news or express political beliefs (How Millennials Get News 2015; Mitchell, Gottfried & Matsa 2015).

It is also interesting to note that millennials are driven to follow the news for social reasons. It was figured out that another key predictor of civic engagement is whether a political event or campaign has a social component and interest for students' peer groups (How Millennials Get News, 2015).

Given that the most of millennials used social media to obtain general political information, it is critical then to investigate their motivations for taking the time to create a post or react to a political post. This is important to consider since political consumption is primarily obtained online.

The premises above suggest the critical involvement of millennials in politics and the role they have during elections. Alongside this, they are also the primary users of the social media which became an outlet for political-related agenda and movement. Another aspect to look into is the evolving engagement of millennials by using language in addressing issues about politics. Previously characterized as disengaged, they are now considered the participants who actively create posts to express their ideas and opinions. With the aforementioned, the present study aims to unravel the millennials' political views through the lens of sociopragmatics. Particularly, their posts and tweets during the May 2019 elections, from which they outnumbered other generations, are analyzed to determine the power of their mass media discourses.

Theoretical Framework

The linguistic approach for the research effort is pragmatics, which is one of the key topics in linguistics that may be used to explain meaning in language use (Ayeomoni & Akinkuolere, 2012). It is "the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language,"

according to Brown, Clark, McMahon, Miller, and Milroy (n.d.). It is also a current branch of linguistic research that stems from the philosophy of language. The work of philosophers Charles Morris, Rudolf Carnap, and Charles Peirce in the 1930s revealed its intellectual foundation. In addition to implicature, presupposition, speech actions, and deixis, implicature, presupposition, and speech acts can be all central themes of investigation.

In this study, the theory of Speech Act by Searle (1969) is used for the analysis of data. Searle improves on Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory by determining the difference between direct and indirect speech acts. Additionally, he categorizes the illocutionary act into five classes: (1) Representatives, which bind the speaker to the truth of the stated statement and hence have a truth-value; (2) Directives, which are attempts by the speaker to persuade the addressee to act; (3) Commissives, which bind the speaker to a future course of action; (4) Expressives, such as joy, grief, and likes/dislikes, are employed to reflect a speaker's psychological attitude or mood; and (5) Declarations, which affect immediate changes in some existing state of affairs.

The Objective of the Study

This research attempts to analyze the posts and tweets of millennials during the May 2019 elections within the theory of Speech Acts to unravel their political agenda and movement. Specifically, it seeks to determine the directness and indirectness of the posts and tweets, their types of speech acts, and the illocutionary forces used.

Methodology

The sociopragmatic approach used in this study is based on Searle's Speech Acts theory framework (1969). Leech developed the term sociopragmatics to describe the study of how pragmatic meanings reflect "particular "local" conditions on language use" (Grundy, 2014).

Considering the form and context of the source of data, the researcher used a purposive sampling since the samples need to meet the established criteria: 1) the facebook and twitter users must be millennials and 2) the facebook posts and tweets must be relevant to the May 2019 elections. The second was established to make sure that all the tweets and posts are politically motivated.

The collected posts and tweets are as follows:

1. You expect us to respect a decision to vote for comedians, plunderers, and murderers? Are you crazy?
2. So, are you saying that it is better to vote for someone who currently has a plunder case and currently on bail to vote for someone who is pro-divorce/same-sex marriage?
3. Credit goes to a few DDS friends I know who claimed that this year's election is the dirtiest they have witnessed so far.

4. I say though, blame it to your beloved 'Tatay Digong.'
5. You can't keep doing the exact same thing and expect different results.
6. You cannot put the same criminals in power and expect them to become saints.
7. Better get to know the unfamiliar and maybe better results.
8. We just need to be attentive to the signs - by then, we will know it is already time.
9. No complacency is allowed!
10. Vigilance is a must!
11. We cannot let an opportunity pass us by again unguarded like #Halalan2019.
12. We were confident Comelec was not infiltrated yet; it was a dismal mistake!
13. I think, they (favored politicians) chose not to dwell on the negativities around them and not just paid attention to what they can do to reach out to people as far as they can extend.
14. For me, that is a primordial attribute of an effective team.
15. Choose who is deserving, not the hype.
16. Do not be fooled by his (Atty. Gadon) social media stunts and "cool and funny" viral videos on the upcoming 2019 Philippine senatorial elections.
17. Truly, (there's) no hope for the Philippines.
18. In the 2019 elections, the partial tally of the senatorial top 12 consists of a plunderer trying to "budots" his way to the senate, two Duterte puppies and a meticulous liar.
19. The good candidates even struggle to get into the top 20.
20. The final and official results of this 2019 midterm elections are not reliable.
21. The Comelec is no longer a credible constitutional commission of the Philippines.
22. Your votes can change the lives of the Filipinos.
23. Every vote is a dream for the future.
24. We should elect people with integrity, care for our country, and are just.
25. The next generation depends on us, Filipinos.

26. The upcoming 2019 elections will be the real test of the national character of Filipinos, not just Cebu.
27. It will define who we are as people.
28. Cebuanos, like most of the Philippines, will choose wisely this time; I'm certain.
29. If you will vote for at least one Otso Diretso, vote for *****; forget about *** and ***, okay?
30. You know what's missing or at least lacking here? A culture of respect for views and opinions different from one's own.
31. It's morbidly amusing that in this election and because of social media, one gets to see a different side of other people's personalities – a chance to examine oneself also to see how you'll instinctively react.
32. When some people say “Only in the Philippines” but you know they have not even gone to other countries and have not even read some literature about their politics.
33. Have you guys voted already? Always remember that every vote counts.
34. Do it for you, for the people, and for the country.
35. Vote wisely!

The researcher followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) data analysis technique to examine the data, which included data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data reduction is the process of discarding irrelevant tweets and posts from the collected samples. For the data display, a table is made to present the data on the direct and indirect speech acts, types of speech acts, and illocutionary forces through indicating the frequency and percentage. For the conclusion drawing and verification, the analysis of the data is provided coupled with the findings from relevant literature.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 reveals that millennials are more indirect with their speech acts. This implies that they tend to have underlying meanings with what seemed to be a statement or affirmation. Nevertheless, the thin difference between the two manifest the two sides of the millennials: the first face indicating their bravery and straightforwardness with the speech acts performed, and the second face indicating that there is way deeper meaning to what is heard and listened from them. The second face just shows that millennials cannot just be understood by understanding their posts literally, but there might be a deeper meaning to look into the language they use.

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

Direct/Indirect	f	%
Direct	17	48.57
Indirect	18	51.43
Total	35	100.00

Table 2 shows that from the social media posts of the millennials during the midyear elections 2019, they mainly used their posts to give directives among their followers. Dominating the number of speech acts performed based on Searle's is directive, implying that even though they are in the second-youngest generation, they still hold authority over others. To emphasize such, they used questions, advice, and commands both directly and indirectly. This authority may stem from the political implications of a generation educated on information; millennials believe they have sufficient knowledge to make informed decisions and draw their own views on a variety of topics (Diggles, 2014).

For example, one of the posts read is "You expect us to respect a decision to vote for comedians, plunderers, and murderers? Are you crazy?" Directly, the illocutionary force used is questioning. This affirms the findings of Rezvani and Monahan (2017) that millennials prefer practicality and action over talk and theory. This means that they do not easily accept what other people tell them, but they create their decisions based on what they see and know. It is also an implication that they value logical reasoning upon deciding who to vote.

Second to the highest type of speech act performed is the representative. Mostly asserting and stating, millennials' illocutionary points indicate how persistent they are in voicing out their opinions and claims. They also used these to strongly report their observations and thoughts. These findings conform with that of Laganas, Mcleod, Lowe, Laganas, & Mcleod's (2017) indicating that the reasons for writing political posts on social media are to inform the online community, express opinions, share personal views, and seek acceptance.

Interestingly, coinciding with their sense of authority is their frequent ranting about politicians as they portray the 'blame game' in their posts. Having commissive and expressive as the types of speech acts, they blamed the antis of their beliefs, threatened the voters going against their chosen candidates, and advised them on what and who to vote. All these dictate their capacity to influence other people by using the media which they are very knowledgeable of. More so, these emphasize their strength and bravery as part of the generation willing to cause changes in the society.

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage of Types of Speech Acts

Type of Speech Act	f	%
Representative	8	22.86
Directive	15	42.80
Commissive	6	22.86
Expressive	6	17.14
Declaration	0	0.00
Total	35	100

Table 3 indicates the illocutionary points or forces that determine the types of speech acts performed by the millennials in their tweets and posts. Having the highest percentage is *commanding* which reveals that millennials are active voters who would insist on others what they know is right. Along with this, they also question, order, and give a piece of advice that convey imperatives to their followers. This means that it is not enough for them that their voices are heard, but they also want to call for an action or to influence other voters. Moreover, they are also assertive with their claims and opinions which signify their strong desire to let others know what they believe in. Further, their directness and indirectness of blaming and threatening other voters imply that they would not just sit and accept the opposing ideas, but they will remain standing to wait for the unfavorable consequences of the oppositions' decisions. It is also a way of saying that they are ready to point fingers once the worst happen after the elections.

These findings are contrasting with that of Dookhoo (2015). On the one hand, he claims that when it comes to social-political issues, millennials are predominantly "slacktivists," and that some of them avoid engaging in these matters both online and offline. On the other hand, he noted that millennials do engage in social media activism since it allows them to express themselves, belong, and participate in social interactions. When Millennials inspire others to participate in online activism, the following behaviors appear to be "slacktivism" habits. (Dookhoo, 2015). As a result, widespread internet slacktivism may lead to the belief that someone else will shoulder responsibility. This concept of slacktivism may explain why blaming is one of the illocutionary factors found in the posts and tweets of millennials.

Table 3

Frequency and Percentage of the Illocutionary Forces

Illocutionary Forces	f	%
Blaming	4	11.43
Ordering	2	5.71

Commanding	8	22.86
Promising	1	2.86
Stating	5	14.29
Accusing	2	5.71
Threatening	2	5.71
Assuring	1	2.86
Refusing	2	5.71
Advising	3	8.57
Questioning	2	5.71
Asserting	3	8.57
Total	35	100.00

Conclusions and Recommendation

With all the literature revealing that millennials are politically disengaged, this study proves otherwise. Millennials, in fact, take advantage of the digital era to do the two-way process: being informed and being able to give their opinions to have their voices heard. In the May 2019 elections in the Philippines, they faced the role of having the highest number of registered voters. With this, their posts on facebook and tweets were considered vital among politicians. Most political candidates even used such platforms to reach the millennials and eventually get their votes. This, then, becomes an interesting picture to look at. How did these millennials, who are considered digital natives, portray themselves on the Social Networking Sites? Seeking to determine the directness and indirectness of their posts and tweets, types of speech acts, and the illocutionary forces used, the researcher analyzed the collected data within the Speech Act theory.

It is revealed in this study that the millennials are not all the time direct with what they say. In rooting for their chosen candidates and even expressing discontentment among others, they used indirect speech acts. Thus, this indicates that generalizing their characteristics based on the literal meanings of their posts and tweets may not be the most reliable way to do it. There is a need to decode the underlying meanings before making conclusions about them.

Moreover, despite their younger ages compared to other generations, they hold the authority to influence their followers to agree with them and even persuade them to believe in what they are believing in. They also assert their claims that indicate how persistent they are in voicing out their opinions. Providing meaning to their commissive and expressive speech acts, they tend to blame the opposing parties if unfavorable situations happen. Based on their assumptions, they also threatened about the possible outcomes of voting for the candidates who they think are not deserving. Further, their illocutionary forces are mostly commanding which affirms that they are active voters who would insist to others what they know is right. Along with this, they also

question, order, and give a piece of advice that convey imperatives to their followers. These suggest that their young age does not equal to inferiority when it comes to imposing their ideas and opinions.

All these findings practically imply that despite the massive research data about millennials, there are still more to know about them. Also, an interesting part to look into is that they are evolving in terms of their political engagement. From being disengaged to being actively engaged does not happen overnight. So, it might be motivating for the future researchers to analyze what causes the evolving features of the millennials' political perspective and movement.

As to the limitation of the study, a larger number of data, that is, more facebook posts and tweets have to be analyzed. Also, other pragmatic approaches such as implicature and presupposition may be used to understand other aspects of millennials' linguistic features.

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