
Hate Speech in Youtube Comments on Will Smith's Oscars Speech 2022: A Pragmatic Study

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Abstract

The title of this research is "Hate Speech in YouTube Comments on Will Smith's Oscar Speech 2022: A Pragmatic Study." The purpose of this research is to identify the types of speech acts focusing on illocutionary acts, types of hate speech, and to describe the functions of illocutionary speech acts in YouTube comments about Will Smith's Oscar speech in 2022. In analyzing the data, the method used is descriptive qualitative method. The theory used in this research is the theory stated by Austin and further developed by Searle to identify the types of illocutionary speech acts and to identify the functions of illocutionary speech acts. This study analyzes 6 data points from YouTube comments about Will Smith's 2022 Oscar speech. The research shows that: 2 Assertives, 1 Commissive, 1 Expressives, 1 Directives, and 1 Declaration types and functions of illocutionary acts. Additionally, this research identifies 4 types of hate speech in the form of insults, 1 type of unpleasant action, and 1 type of provocation. These findings help reveal how hate speech is constructed linguistically and how illocutionary acts contribute to shaping negative narratives online. This analysis is expected to provide insights into the relationship between speech acts and digital communication, especially in the context of viral or controversial matters.

Keywords: *Pragmatics; Speech Act Theory; Hate Speech; YouTube Comments; Illocutionary Acts*

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook has transformed the way people communicate and engage in public discussions. These platforms allow users to share opinions, emotions, and personal experiences instantly, making online interaction an integral part of everyday life. However, this openness also creates challenges, as online conversations often trigger disagreements, emotional debates, and, in many cases, harmful expressions such as cyberbullying and hate speech (Oktaviani & Nur, 2022; Howard, 2019). Hate speech has become especially prominent in the comment sections of viral content, where emotional reactions spread quickly and can deepen social tensions.

One of the most widely discussed events that generated significant online reactions was the incident between Will Smith and Chris Rock at the 2022 Oscars. Following Chris Rock's joke about Jada Pinkett Smith's medical condition, Will Smith confronted Rock on stage in a moment that quickly went viral. YouTube became a key space where users expressed strong emotional and moral judgments, particularly in the comments under Will Smith's acceptance speech. Many of these comments contained harsh criticism, negative labeling, and expressions that may be categorized as hate speech.

Hate speech on social media refers to statements that provoke, attack, or demean individuals or groups based on identity or personal attributes. Such expressions can damage personal dignity, escalate conflict, and even influence real-world behavior (Weber, 2009; Mubarok et al., 2021). From a linguistic perspective, hate speech is not only about the content of what is said but also about the intentions behind it. This aligns with Speech Act Theory, which explains how language functions as action through locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979). Illocutionary force, in particular, helps reveal whether statements are meant to insult, provoke, accuse, or express hostility—an essential lens for analyzing hate speech in online interactions.

Speech Act Theory identifies categories such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. These categories often appear in online hate speech: assertives may be used to present stereotypes as facts, expressives may take the form of insults or mockery, and directives may provoke punitive actions. Understanding how these speech acts function in digital spaces provides insight into how negative narratives spread and why certain online discussions become toxic.

By examining hate speech through the framework of speech acts, this research aims to show how language use on social media can escalate emotional responses and reinforce negative public perceptions. Given the influence of digital communication on public opinion, such analysis is crucial for understanding how online discourse shapes attitudes toward individuals, especially public figures involved in controversy.

Based on this background, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of illocutionary acts appear in YouTube comments related to Will Smith's 2022 Oscar acceptance speech?
2. What types of hate speech are expressed in these comments?
3. What do illocutionary acts function in shaping hate speech narratives?

The purpose of this study is to classify speech acts, identify forms of hate speech, and analyze their functions within the context of online discourse. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on examining hate speech on YouTube using a pragmatic approach grounded in Speech Act Theory an approach that has been less explored in previous studies, which often concentrate on political contexts, broader social issues, or other platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. By combining speech act analysis with hate speech categorization, this study provides a more nuanced linguistic understanding of how online hostility is constructed and expressed.

B.METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the meanings, functions, and patterns of hate speech in YouTube comments responding to Will Smith's 2022 Oscar acceptance speech. Qualitative research produces open-ended, non-numerical data and employs interpretive, non-statistical analysis. This approach is suitable for exploring how language is used in real digital interactions, especially when users express spontaneous emotional reactions and evaluations.

The analysis is guided by Speech Act Theory by Austin and Searle, supported by hate-speech definitions from KOMINFO and previous academic studies. Using this descriptive framework, the study aims to understand how hate speech emerges and operates within online communication.

The data consist of YouTube comments taken from the official video of Will Smith's 2022 Oscar acceptance speech. A total of 22 comments were identified and initially examined. Using purposive sampling, 6 comments were selected as the final dataset because they contained clear indicators of hate speech and identifiable illocutionary acts. The documentation method was

used to collect and organize all comments.

The analysis was carried out through several integrated steps. First, all 23 comments were read carefully, and data reduction was performed by removing irrelevant items such as off-topic remarks, spam, vague statements, and emoji-only posts. Only comments containing evaluative, hostile, or emotionally charged expressions were retained. From this process, six comments were selected as representative data for detailed analysis. Each of these comments was then coded using two analytical dimensions: the illocutionary act category based on Austin and Searle (assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative) and the type of hate speech identified through Kominfo and scholarly classifications, such as insults, provocation, or unpleasant actions.

After coding, each comment was interpreted contextually to determine the speaker's intention (illocutionary force) and its potential impact on readers (perlocutionary effect). This interpretation considered linguistic features such as wording, tone, evaluative labels, and the broader context of the Oscars incident. The insights gained from this stage were synthesized to identify recurring patterns and explain how different types of speech acts contribute to the construction of hateful narratives in digital spaces.

To ensure trustworthiness, several validation strategies were incorporated throughout the analysis. Theoretical triangulation was applied by cross-checking classifications with both Speech Act Theory and established hate-speech typologies. Peer debriefing was conducted by consulting a linguistics lecturer who reviewed the coding decisions to minimize researcher bias. An audit trail documenting each step from data selection and reduction to coding and interpretation was maintained in the Data Hate Speech Collection table for transparency and reproducibility. Additionally, every analytical claim was grounded in direct excerpts from the comments to strengthen confirmability and ensure that interpretations were firmly supported by the data.

C. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

This research focuses on analyzing hate comments found in the YouTube comment section in response to Will Smith's Oscar acceptance speech in 2022, following the widely reported incident involving comedian Chris Rock. These comments serve as examples of natural language use in the public digital space. Each comment is examined and categorized based on two main frameworks: the type of illocutionary act (such as assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative) and the type of hate speech involved (including insults, defamation, blasphemy, unpleasant actions, provocation, incitement, and spreading fake news). The goal is to understand how various forms of speech acts contribute to and shape the narrative of online hate speech.

Table 1. *List of hate speech found in YouTube comments on Will Smith's Oscar speech 2022*

Data	Type of speech act	Type of hate speech
"That whole family is toxic"	Assertives	Insult
"His wife is a toxic as hell"	Assertives	Insult
"Academy should take Will's Oscar back!"	Directives	Provocation
"Shame on you Will.. I will never wath any movies or show if you are involved in it."	Commissives	Insult
"Will is so pitful. Jada is so pathetic. The kids are also perplexed."	Expressives	Insult
"Violance is in the Blood."	Declarations	Unpleasant actions

Table 2. *Distribution Table of Speech Act Types*

Total data: 23 comments

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Percentage
Assertives	12	52.17%
Expressives	4	17.39%
Directives	5	21.74%
Commisives	1	4.35%
Declarations	1	4.35%
Total	23	100%

Table 3. *Distribution Table of Hate Speech Categories*

Hate Speech Category	Frequency	Percentage
Defamation	6	26.09%
Insult	4	17.39%
Provocation	6	26.09%
Incitement	3	13.04%
Unpleasant Actions	3	13.04%
Total	23	100%

Discussion

1. Assertives

Data 1

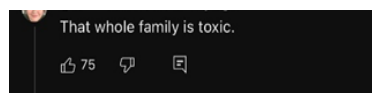


Image 1. Assertives

Type of hates speech: Insult

The comment "That whole family is toxic" is an example of an assertive illocutionary act, where the speaker presents a personal judgment as if it were an objective truth. Rather than simply expressing emotion, the comment makes a strong claim about the character of the Smith family. It qualifies as hate speech in the form of an insult, with the word "toxic" acting as a loaded, derogatory label that questions the family's moral or social value. While it may appear to be a straightforward opinion, the

statement functions as a declarative insult disguised as an evaluative remark. This illustrates how assertive speech acts can convey hate under the guise of neutral or factual commentary.

In hate speech narratives, assertive speech acts like this play a key role in reinforcing and spreading negative assumptions by presenting them as if they're indisputable facts. Calling the family "toxic," for example, doesn't just express dislike it assigns a fixed, harmful identity that can shape how others see them. This kind of language blurs the line between opinion and fact, making hostility seem reasonable or justified. By wrapping hateful ideas in what sounds like rational critique, such comments help normalize animosity and make it easier for others to accept or even echo these harmful views.

Data 2

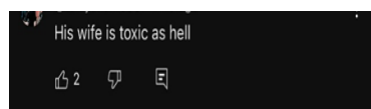


Image 2. Assertives

Type of hate speech: insult

The comment "His wife is toxic as hell" is a clear example of an assertive speech act, where the speaker shares a strong opinion about Jada Smith's personality as though it were an unquestionable fact. Instead of just expressing personal feelings, the comment delivers a judgment using the phrase "toxic as hell" that harshly attacks her character. This kind of language falls under hate speech as an insult. The assertive tone gives the comment a sense of authority and certainty, making the insult seem more believable or justified to others, even though it's rooted in personal bias.

In the context of hate speech narratives, this assertive comment plays into a broader pattern of personal attacks. By using intense, emotionally charged language to describe Jada Smith, the speaker helps shape a narrative that casts her as a source of conflict or negativity. Comments like this reinforce harmful perceptions by presenting strong personal opinions as if they're undeniable truths. That's what makes assertive speech acts so powerful in spreading and maintaining hostility they wrap personal criticism in a tone of certainty, making it sound more credible and convincing to others.

2. Directives

Data 3

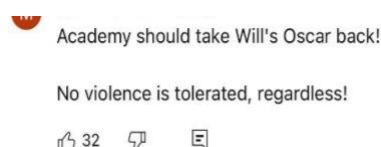


Image 3. Directives

Type of hate speech: Provocation

The comment "Academy should take Will's Oscar back! No violence is tolerated, regardless!" serves as a directive speech act, where the speaker makes a clear demand directed at a third party: "Academy should take Will's Oscar back!" This statement pushes for the Academy to take disciplinary action against Will Smith, framing the demand with a moral justification "No violence is tolerated, regardless!" While it may

appear as a call for justice, it also fits into the category of hate speech through provocation, as it encourages others to support punitive action. By urging an institution to publicly punish Smith, the comment doesn't just express disapproval it tries to escalate the situation and rally support for a harsh, collective response.

Directive speech acts like this play a significant role in shaping hate speech narratives by pushing for real-world consequences and influencing public opinion. Instead of just expressing personal frustration, they channel collective anger into demands for action often punishment. This makes the hate discourse more powerful, as it mixes moral reasoning with calls for retribution, encouraging wider societal judgment and condemnation. It's not just about expressing dislike anymore it becomes a push to take sides and act on that hostility.

3. Commissives

Data 4

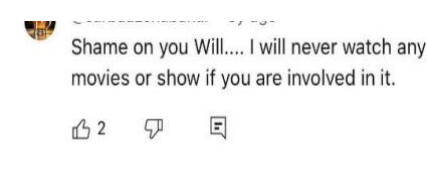


Image 4. Commissives

Type of hates speech: Insult

The comment "Shame on yo will... I will never watch any movies or show if you are involved in it" is an example of a commissive speech act, where the user makes a firm personal commitment: "I will never watch any movies or show if you are involved in it." This expresses a clear intent to boycott Will Smith's future work. Alongside this, the phrase "Shame on you Will" adds an expressive element, showing strong disapproval and passing moral judgment. Together, these statements amount to hate speech in the form of an insult, as they combine harsh criticism with a public rejection of his professional career. By openly refusing to support him, the commenter adds to a narrative that seeks to isolate and discredit Will Smith, reinforcing a broader pattern of hostility.

Within the broader context of hate speech narratives, this commissive act serves as a way to exclude and punish. It goes beyond simply expressing personal dislike it signals a refusal to support and subtly invites others to do the same. In doing so, it feeds into a wider culture of online shaming. Comments like this can shape public perception by turning emotional reactions into collective action, helping to amplify feelings of hostility and rejection in the digital space.

4. Expressives

Data 5

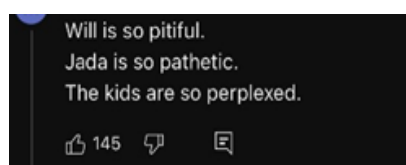


Image 5. Expressives

Type of hates speech: insult

The YouTube comment “Will so pitiful. Jada is so pathetic. The kids are so perplexed” is a clear example of an expressive speech act, where the commenter shares their emotional reaction toward the Smith family. Words like “pitiful,” “pathetic,” and “perplexed” reflect a strong sense of disapproval and contempt, revealing more about the speaker’s attitude than any objective critique. This comment crosses into hate speech in the form of an insult, as it targets the personalities and presumed emotional states of Will, Jada, and their children in a way that’s meant to belittle them. It shows how expressive language, when charged with negativity, can be used to deliver personal attacks that spread and reinforce harmful judgments.

Expressive speech acts play an important role in shaping hate speech narratives because they influence how others view the people being targeted. When a commenter attaches negative emotional labels to the Smith family, they’re not just sharing an opinion they’re adding to a larger wave of mockery and disapproval. These kinds of remarks often invite agreement from others, reinforcing the negativity. Over time, repeated comments like these can chip away at someone’s reputation and help create a toxic online environment. So, while expressive speech acts may seem like simple emotional reactions, they actually contribute to the spread of harmful social narratives by normalizing harsh, judgmental views.

5. Declaration

Data 6

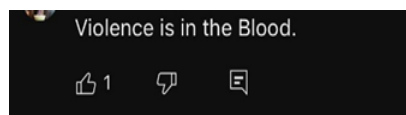


Image 6. Declaration

Type of hates speech: Unpleasant actions

The comment “Violence iss in the blood” is an example of a declarative speech act it goes beyond sharing a personal opinion and instead tries to make a definitive statement about someone’s identity. By suggesting that a person, or even their family, has an inherent tendency toward violence, the commenter isn’t just being critical they’re assigning a harmful label meant to define who that person is. This kind of comment fits into the category of hate speech as an unpleasant action because it links a negative trait, like violence, to someone’s character in a way that implies it can’t be changed. The declarative tone gives the comment a sense of authority, making it seem like a final judgment rather than just a viewpoint, and that can be especially damaging in shaping how others see the person being targeted.

Declarative speech acts like this can be especially powerful in spreading hate speech because they try to define people by negative traits, as if those traits are a fixed part of who they are. When someone says violence is “in the blood,” it goes beyond criticism it dehumanizes the person, suggesting that aggression is something they were born with or can’t escape. This kind of language fuels prejudice by implying that harmful behavior is tied to someone’s biology or culture, reinforcing damaging stereotypes. Because declarative statements often sound final and authoritative, they can strongly shape how others see and judge the person or group being targeted, making the impact of such comments even more harmful.

D.CONCLUSION

In conclusion, based on the analysis of YouTube comments about Will Smith's speech at the 2022 Oscars, that the most dominant type of illocutionary speech act is assertive, with two out of six data falling into this category. This type is used to express opinions or judgments that sound like objective facts, thereby giving an authoritative impression to the hate speech conveyed. Meanwhile, the least dominant types are commissive, expressive, directive, and declarative, each appearing only once. In terms of hate speech, the most frequently found type is insults, which appear in four out of six comments. This shows that insults are the most frequently used form of hate speech in netizens emotional reactions to viral events.

The prominence of assertives shows that hate speech is often framed as objective assessment, allowing personal biases to appear legitimate and potentially influencing public perception. Insults, as the dominant form of hate speech, primarily function to demean or discredit individuals on an emotional level. These two elements reinforce one another: assertive delivery strengthens the perceived credibility of insults, while the emotional impact of insults intensifies the hostility conveyed, contributing to a more toxic communication environment in digital spaces. Practically, the findings may support the development of strategies for content moderation and digital literacy aimed at reducing harmful communication. Future research could extend this study by conducting cross-platform comparisons or analyzing larger datasets to identify broader patterns of hate speech across various digital environments.

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