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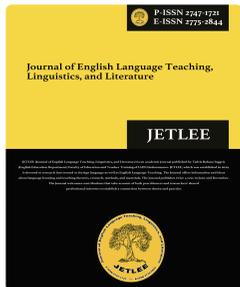# Vol. 6 No. 1 (2026): Journal of English Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature (JETLEE)

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Expressive Speech Acts in User Comments on the BBC Learning Podcast "Better Speaking"

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Abstract

Nowadays, there are a lot of digital platforms that offer interactive spaces for people to interact with each other. These platforms allow people to share information, exchange thoughts and opinions, give feedback, ask questions, or discuss a particular topic. YouTube is one of the most popular platforms that provides a space for people to give comments or responses to their posts. This natural interaction can be examined from a pragmatic perspective, especially in relation to how they express their emotional response in a written form. This research focuses on identifying and analyzing expressive speech acts in the user comments on the "Better Speaking" podcast by BBC Learning English, a globally recognized English learning channel. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method to examine 212 selected user comments from eight podcast episodes. The expressive speech acts were categorized into thanking, praising, complimenting, complaining, and lamenting. The findings show that thanking and praising are the most frequent types of expressive speech acts that indicate the existence of a dominant positive interaction pattern. Moreover, the comments also reveal four main pragmatic functions: affective alignment, relational work, feedback evaluation, and identity projection. These results suggest that user comments not only express their emotion but also contribute to a supportive and meaningful digital learning environment.

Keywords

Introduction

The development of digital technology has led to a significant transformation in language learning, especially through the use of online platforms. Some of the online platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts, are not only places to find learning materials, but also to interact with others. Nowadays, YouTube has become the most interesting and popular digital platform for education (Hoque & Siddiqua, 2020). Also, it can be used be used to improve some of the aspects of language, such as vocabulary, listening, writing, and speaking (Zaidi et al., 2018). Some of the English learners use YouTube not only to watch content, but also to give comments, share, and learn from others (Tahmina, 2023), and also through the podcast, it can stimulate language skills, social interaction, and reflection (Chaves-Yuste & De-La Peña, 2023).

This research aims to highlight on how the user interactions, specifically through the comments, illustrate developing digital literacy. This is significant because even the smallest comments posted on the online platform can reflect social dynamics and emotions from the communicators (Mortukane, 2024). Thus, analyzing the comments on the online platform is essential to understand how the language is used in the context of online learning and how it can expand the scope of digital literacy (Locher & Graham, 2021). Also, study conducted by Makhsunah et al., (2024) demonstrates that commenting behavior in educational

or informative YouTube content reveals how learners praise, criticize, or express gratitude toward creators and content quality. In fact, language use in digital comments can reveal learners' engagement, motivation, and their perceived identity as language users in the global context (Tagg, 2015). By using YouTube together with digital literacy, it can help students improve their speaking ability, especially for the educational videos that tend to attract more positive comments when the content is perceived as valuable (Coats, 2024; Khasanah & Lestiyanawati, 2024). Therefore, analyzing user comments becomes a valuable entry point for understanding pragmatics in an online learning environment.

Digital interaction can give language learners the chance to use the English language in meaningful ways, specifically through expressive comments. According to Jenkins (2009), learners in digital environments are not only passive receivers of information, but also active contributors who use language to share knowledge, support others, and build identity. In this context, expressive speech acts become important tools to express emotions and build social relationships online. Recent findings from Alimah & Prayitno (2025) show that in news or educational content, many users use complaining and criticizing speech acts to highlight issues or ask for improvements. Another study by Aslan (2025) on mediated metapragmatic repertoires finds that English language learners comment not only about content but also about how content is delivered, which suggests that expressive comments contribute to learner feedback and affective engagement.

BBC Learning English is one of the prominent educational channels on YouTube that provide interactive English language content. Also, it provides an authentic material to improve English skills (Herlisma et al., 2024). One of the contents that is available for public who want to learn English is Better Speaking Podcast. This podcast is focusing to improve English speaking skills and include high quality audio elements (Herda et al., 2023). This series also provides transcripts, conversation practices, and pronunciation tips that are used by millions of global users to learn English language independently. The user engagement is reflected from a lot of comments in every episode that indicate there is an active and participatory learning community. It shows that those contents are not only for studying, but also can trigger the interactions that are full of expression from the user comments. User's comments on English-learning YouTube videos also often include evaluations, suggestions, and gratitude that support the idea of expressive language use in this context (Alawadh et al., 2023). In a similar vein, Tarver (2023) state that viewer engagement in educational videos is not only about watch time, but also about how people comment, like, and interact on that video. This is of course, relevant to the pragmatic analysis.

The comments in the comments column often contain emotional expression, appreciation, critique, or self-reflection. It is in accordance with the characteristics of digital pragmatics that highlight the use of language in online platforms, it is not only to deliver the information, but also to form social relations and express identity (Kiskola et al., 2021; Locher & Graham, 2021). Moreover, emotional expressionist a key part of how people use language in everyday situations, including online (Aijmer, 2013). The research by Kraeva & Krasnopeyeya (2020) show that YouTube comments often contain emotional evaluation, such as praise and criticism, towards certain content. However, there has been little research that specifically analyze affective expression in the context of language learning through podcasts, including how the expressive speech acts play a role in shaping online educational interactions.

In a theoretical review, Searle and Vanderveken (1985) explain that expressive speech acts reflect the speaker's psychological attitude toward a condition, such as thanking, praising, lamenting, and complaining. This theory has been widely used to analyse human utterances in online and offline interaction. For example, expressive speech acts in YouTube music comments that are dominated by sadness and gratitude expression (Hambali et al., 2024). This approach is relevant for us to explore the way people interpret learning materials and interact with each other through affective expression in comments.

In the previous research, Irawansyah et al., (2024) analyzed the expressive speech acts in motivational videos on YouTube and found that the users often expressed support, empathy, and reinforcement toward the video narrative. They concluded that the comments on those videos have a function as a space for sharing collective emotions. Moreover, Kraeva and Krasnopeyeva (2020) examined

YouTube comments on film translation. In this research, it is found that the users tend to use expressive speech acts such as complaint, deplore, and praise in responding to the translation quality. Their studies emphasize how the comments can be a form of cultural evaluation of the content and language style.

The three studies above show that expressive speech acts are widely studied in the context of entertainment, music, and motivation (Hambali et al., 2024; Irawansyah et al., 2024). On the other hand, there has been no research that specifically explores the expressive speech acts in user comments on an English learning podcast. This is where the contribution and novelty of this research lie. Focusing on the Better Speaking podcast from BBC Learning English as a global English language education channel, this research offers a digital pragmatics context that has not been much explored. Therefore, this research aims (1) to identify the types of expressive speech acts in the Better Speaking podcast comments, and (2) to explore the pragmatic functions of those expressions in the context of online English learning. The results of this research are expected to enrich digital pragmatic studies based on the YouTube data.

Method

This research used a qualitative descriptive method to analyze expressive speech acts that occurred in the comment's column on the Better Speaking podcast from BBC Learning English. A qualitative descriptive method is one of the most direct and simple forms of qualitative research design that provides a factual description of a social phenomenon or human experience (Creswell, 2018). This method was chosen because this research aimed to understand the meaning and pragmatic function of user comments in a digital context deeply. It is suitable for the characteristics of a pragmatic research that highlights the interpretation of the use of language in a certain social context (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moleong, 2007). For instance, Ulfa et al., (2023) applied a qualitative descriptive method to classify compliments and responses in YouTube comments that show how expressive acts operate in an entertainment-related context. Similarly, Hendar et al., (2022) used descriptive qualitative analysis to examine impoliteness strategies in online comments.

This research object is user comments left on the eight episodes of the Better Speaking podcast that available on the BBC Learning channel. Those eight episodes are entitled: (*1*) *How to Organized Your Speaking, (2) How to Improve Your Fluency, (3) How to Give Your Opinion, (4) How to Improve Your Accent, (5) How to Hold People's Attention, (6) How to Sound More Fluent, (7) How to Talk about the Order of Events, and (8) How to Use Vague Language.* All those episodes were selected because they had a high level of user interaction and also directly related to English-speaking skills.

The data collection procedure was done by selecting the comments on each episode. Only the comments that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were used as data; they are the comments that contained expressive speech acts. It was not spam, empty comments, or just emojis. Those comments were compiled into a table to facilitate the process of classification and identification of speech acts. The classification of expressive speech acts was done by referring to the theory of Searle and Vanderveken (1985), which divided the expressive speech acts into some types, such as thanking, praising, complaining, greeting, and so on. All of the comments were analyzed according to the illocutionary function and categorized into these expressive types. The process of analysis was carried out manually by repeated reading of the data to ensure the accuracy of the classification. The total data analyzed was 212 comments from the eight episodes. By using this approach, this research is expected to describe the pattern of expressive speech acts usage in the online learning context accurately and contextually. The use of a qualitative approach is in line with the approach widely used in the digital pragmatic studies and online discourse analysis (Herring, 2013; Locher & Graham, 2021).

Findings & Discussion

According to the result of the analysis, the most dominant type of expressive speech acts is praising (88 data), thanking (57 data), praising and thanking (40 data), complaining (6 data), lamenting (5 data), and the rest is the combination of complimenting, greeting and praising, boasting and thanking in smaller numbers. The dominant number of praising and thanking shows that the YouTube comments not only functions as a feedback space, but also as a positive place to express emotions and as a form of appreciation for online learning content. Some representative examples were analyzed to illustrate how these expressions appear in a pragmatic context.

Praising

Data 1: "I love your podcast." (episode 1)
Data 2: "This is the best English listening and learning vocabulary postcard I have ever seen." (episode 2)
Data 3: "This video was pretty useful for me to learn how to communicate as better as before." (episode 3)

The example from the three comments above indicate that there is a positive assessment of the content of the *Better English* podcast on the BBC Learning English YouTube platform. As Searle and Vandenveker (1985) state, to praise is to express approbation, praising as one of the types of expressive speech acts that occur when users give a positive assessment of something. In this context, the users give a positive assessment of the content of the podcast. According to the data, the comments written by the users tend to praise the content of the podcast because the podcast makes it easier for them to understand in learning English. They feel that the podcast gives a lot of useful information and tips that are useful for them. The use of evaluative adjectives such as *love, amazing, useful, the best, nice, and awesome* in the user comments as an indicator that they express approbation toward something that is useful for them.

Thanking

Data 4: "Thank you BBC" (episode 1)
Data 5: "I listen BBC News when I get up early at the morning and I bring a lot of improvement in my speaking. Now I am listening it but I increased the video speed also. Thank u so much BBC news" (episode 2)
Data 6: "Thanks for useful information." (episode 4)

The comments above demonstrate the expressive function of thanking, and it is the verbal form of acknowledgement to the benefits that are received for the users. The focus of thanking is to express gratitude for an action. Keywords such as *thank you, thanks, thanks a lot,* and *grateful* are the main characteristics of this expressive speech act. According to the data findings, some of the users express their gratitude to the podcast for the useful information and the lessons that provide benefits for them.

Praising and Thanking

Data 7: "I like this podcast. I am from India and for me speaking English is difficult but I found this podcast
quite useful. The BBC learning English team is really amazing, I think it is the best. Thanks BBC 😊" (episode 1)
Data 8: "Excellent episode, you B.B.C always inspires us to keep learning. Thank you so much." (episode 4)
Data 9: "These podcasts were such a great help that it made me feel comfortable to speak English with some obvious mistakes. 😊 Thanks to BBC Learning English." (episode 7)

Besides praising and thanking, as many as 40 users express their praise and gratitude for the *Better English* podcast. User comments as show in the data 7, 8, and 9 are representative examples of expressive speech acts that are categorized as praising and thanking. On the data 7, the expression *I like this podcast. I am from India and for me speaking English is difficult but I found this podcast quite useful. BBC learning English team is really amazing, I think it is the best. Thanks BBC* 😊 shows the combination between praising and thanking directly. The utterances emphasize the recognition of value from the learning content and also gratitude for the benefits obtained. Meanwhile, the data 8 conveys direct praise to the BBC by saying *excellent episode,* and *you B.B.C always inspires us to keep learning.* On data 9, the expression *such a great help that it made me feel comfortable to speak English with some obvious mistakes,* shows an evaluative form. Although the user admits that he has shortcomings in his speaking ability, he still expresses his comfort and gratitude toward the podcast.

Complaining

Data 10: "This video is a little bit difficult for me, so which video would you like to advise to improve my hearing?" (episode 2)
Data 11: "It's too many repetitions." (episode 5)
Data 12: "I'd love it if the recording audio of this podcast can be louder." (episode 7)

Complaining is one type of expressive speech act that can be found in the data 10, 11, and 12 show how YouTube users express their discomfort or expectation toward the quality or the material in the podcast. From the digital pragmatics, this kind of actions reflect the active involvement in evaluating the interaction of online learning. From the data 10, *this video is a little bit difficult for me, so which video would you like to advise to improve my hearing?* Although the comments are conveyed slightly by using the emoji, it shows a perceptual barrier from the learner's point of view. A statement *a little bit difficult,* implicitly as complaining about the difficulty of the materials. In addition, data 11 shows a complain that is conveyed directly without emotional markers. The complaint reflects a critical response to the delivery strategy in the *Better Speaking* podcast, especially for the repetition. This kind of speech acts is a negative evaluation that shows the inconsistency of the user's expectation toward the learning format. Moreover, on the data 12. The phrase *I'd love it if* soften a complain related to the audio quality. In this case, complaining is combined with a politeness strategy. The user shows that he cares about the content of the podcast and want to understand more the material. However, he experiences technical difficulties in learning English through this podcast.

Lamenting

Data 13: "Expecting more on speaking with fluency" (episode 2)
Data 14: "When I talk, sometimes I can't express the word that is in my mind in English, I thought I need to
memorize a lot of vocabularies to speak very well but actually as you said (go around and trying to explain it). I hope that will work with me." (episode 2)
Data 15: "I was so ashamed to try to speak with a British accent that I ended learning the American one. One
Of my 2023 goals is to be able to speak with this accent □ hope I don't make a fool of myself." (episode 4)

Lamenting, as one of the expressive speech acts in user comments, can be used to express sadness, disappointment, regret, or self-doubt that appear as a part of an emotional language learning experience. According to the data 13 *expecting more on speaking with fluency*, this sentence seems simple but it implies the learner's expectation that is unfulfilled toward the podcast content. The phrase *expecting more* shows a hidden complaint that comes from the mismatch between expectation and reality. Pragmatically, this

expression is categorized as lamenting that shows passive disappointment. From the data 14, this sentence shows a strong form of regret. The statement *I can't express* and *I thought I need to memorize* are forms of personal reflection that convey internal difficulties and obstacles. On the data 15, the comment is very typical as a form of lamenting that shows shame, insecurity, and fear of being judged by others. The phrases *ashamed* and *hope I don't make a fool of myself* explicitly show a negative emotion related to the experience in language learning. The use of the emoji (□) strengthens the affective dimension of this comment.

The findings show that the dominant types of expressive speech acts of the user comments in the *Better Speaking* podcast is dominated by praising, followed by thanking. It is in accordance with the character of YouTube platform as a space that allows users to provide spontaneous feedback on the content. Although negative or evaluative comments, such as complaining and lamenting, appear in a small number, their presence is still significant because they also reflect the expression of frustration and their expectation regarding the quality of the material. The communication in the online space is not only to give support to the podcast content, but also reflection and criticism of the content.

In addition, after the researcher finds the types of expressive speech acts in the user comments, it is also found that the comments contain pragmatic functions according to the Interpersonal Pragmatic theory (Locher & Graham, 2021) and Relational Work (Locher et al., 2015). Those functions are affective alignment, relational work, feedback evaluation, and identity projection. The first function is affective alignment that refers to the user's effort to express their positive feelings toward podcast materials, as a form of emotional alignment. Some of the comments such as *I love your podcast (episode 1), this is the best English listening and learning vocabulary postcard I have ever seen (episode 2), thank you BBC (episode 1)* show high emotional involvement toward the content. This emotional alignment is important in the context of digital learning that support a positive learning climate of online learning participation.

The second function is relational work. This function focuses on maintaining social relationships through the expression of respect, appreciation, and active participation. The comments, such as thank you, praise, reflect the desire to strengthen the relationship between the learners and the user provider. For example, *Thanks a lot! Keep up the good work! (episode 5), I really appreciate what came in this video thank for your valuable tips (episode 7),* these examples of comments are not only to convey the assessment toward the content, but also as a form of social interaction. The relational work on the digital platform is not only to reflect the politeness, but also as a form of solidarity in online learning community.

The third function is feedback evaluation. The comments in this category are not only expressive, but also provide feedback toward the content of the *Better English* podcast. It also gives feedback toward the content and the quality of delivery. The form of the comments can be direct evaluation or suggestions. Here are the examples of the data: *this video is a little bit difficult for me, so which video would you like to advise to improve my hearing (episode 2), everything is brilliant about your videos, thanks. But, please pick different background music or make it so that it would not hurt our ears. It is loud and somehow unwanted. Could be something peaceful or focusing. Thanks in advance (episode 2).* From those comments, it can be shown that expressive speech acts also contain an evaluative function. It is in accordance with the concept of interpersonal pragmatics that affective expressions can contain constructive criticism. This is important as a form of user evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching.

As the last function, identity projection includes comments that insert the user's personal background, expectations, or social position. They display their identity as learners and also show affiliation to the global learning community. For example: *BBC, I'm a new person who is too much exiting to study English and also wants to understand news broadcasts from different channels specially BBC. I have plenty relatives those live different countries like UK and USA, show them that I can speak English like them because whenever they come Somalia, they show of me that they can speak English like however they need. Please, dear BBC, give me one tip that I can improve my English speaking in order to speak like them. Please 😥 (episode 1),* and the other comments is *I like this podcast. I am from India, and for me, speaking English is difficult, but I found this podcast quite useful. The BBC learning English team is really amazing, I think it is the best. Thanks BBC 😊 (episode 1).*

This kind of comment has an identity function. Through expressive speech acts, users not only communicate linguistically but also express who they are and how they want to be seen in the online community.

In addition, the analysis of expressive speech acts in user comments on the *Better Speaking* podcast shows a strong connection between the types of speech acts and their pragmatic functions in digital language learning. Each of the expressive speech acts such as thanking, praising, complaining, and lamenting do more than just show emotions or evaluations (Rahman et al., 2023; Alimah & Prayitno, 2025). These speech acts also help build social and emotional connections between users and the content creators (Chen, Li, & Sun, 2023). Pragmatic function like affective alignment, relational work, identity projection, and feedback evaluations appeared frequently in the data. It can be seen that the digital platform like YouTube are not only used for watching or listening, but also for meaningful interaction and communication. Therefore, this research helps us better understand on how digital platforms support language learning and highlights the need to consider the social and interpersonal aspects of online educational content.

Conclusion

This research explores expressive speech acts found in the comment section of eight episodes of the *Better Speaking* podcast, which is published by BBC Learning English on the YouTube platform. The findings show that expressive speech acts in the comments are not only emotional expressions, but also carry pragmatic functions including affective alignment, relational work, feedback evaluation, and identity projection. From a total 212 data points, the most common types of expressive speech acts were praising (88 data), thanking (57 data), praising and thanking (40 data), complaining (6 data), lamenting (5 data), and the rest is the combination of complimenting, greeting and praising, boasting and thanking in smaller numbers. The dominance of positive expressive forms suggests that users tend to create a supportive, participatory, and socially atmosphere in the digital language learning community. The four identified pragmatic functions show that the comments help strengthen social relationship, provide feedback on the content, express the user's identities as language learners, and offer emotional support to the content creators. The presence of expressive speech acts in a digital language learning context like on the *Better Speaking* podcast suggests that online interaction is not passive, but it provides active pragmatic activity that full of interpersonal meaning. This research also contributes to the growing field of digital pragmatics and opens up for the other researchers to explore how expressive speech acts help shape meaningful, emotional, and inclusive online learning experiences.

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