An Analysis of Expressive Speech Acts in Comments on Lex Fridman's Podcast with Elon Musk

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes expressive speech acts on the viral YouTube podcast episode "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438," which drew massive attention and engagement from global audiences. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study identifies sixteen types of expressive speech acts based on the frameworks of Norrick (1978), Austin (1962), and Vanderveken & Kubo (2002), and examines their communicative functions using Leech's (1983) taxonomy. The data were collected through web scraping and restricted to English-language comments posted between August and October 2024. The analysis reveals that thanking, greetings, and attitudes are the most frequently used expressive types, with most serving convivial and collaborative functions. These findings highlight how digital platforms like YouTube facilitate public emotional engagement with technological discourse. The study contributes to pragmatic research by offering insights into how netizens express psychological and emotional responses in digital communication, especially in reaction to controversial innovations such as Neuralink.

1. Introduction

In the era of rapid technological advancement, language and communication have evolved alongside innovations such as digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and neurotechnology that are transforming the way humans interact with the world around them. These technologies not only drive scientific and societal change but also reshape how people articulate and evaluate their thoughts and emotions. Smith (2024) notes that digital environments reconfigure emotional expression and perception, influencing how individuals convey, interpret, and manage feelings in online exchanges. This shift is especially visible in public discourse on platforms like YouTube, where users actively debate emerging technologies and negotiate their emotional responses in real time.

One of the most groundbreaking innovations in the field of neurotechnology is Neuralink, a company founded by Elon Musk in 2016. Neuralink aims to create a direct interface between the human brain and computers, offering unprecedented possibilities for treating neurological disorders and potentially enhancing human cognitive functions. Among its most notable innovations are ultra-thin, flexible electrodes and neurosurgical robots engineered for precise brain implantation. These advancements blur the line between science fiction and reality (Musk, 2019). These innovations represent a shift from what was once considered science fiction to a rapidly approaching reality. The ethical, medical, and

technological implications of Neuralink continue to generate widespread public interest, reflection, and debate.

A powerful platform where public reactions to Neuralink are openly expressed is YouTube. On August 3, 2024, the Lex Fridman Podcast uploaded an episode titled "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438". The video features Elon Musk (CEO of Neuralink, SpaceX, Tesla, xAI, and CTO of X), DJ Seo (COO & President of Neuralink), Dr. Matthew MacDougall (Chief Neurosurgeon), Bliss Chapman (Brain Interface Software Lead), and Noland Arbaugh (the first human implanted with a Neuralink device). Their conversation presents both technical details and visionary insights into Neuralink's future impact on humanity. As of October 3, 2024, the podcast had garnered over 3.6 million views, 78,000 likes, and 9,000 comments—demonstrating the scale of audience engagement.

In this podcast video, researchers can see how viewers use comments to express a range of reactions, from admiration for Neuralink's potential to revolutionize the medical field, to concerns about the impact of the technology. This emotional dimension can be observed in actual comments from viewers. For example, as seen in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Screenshot of user comment data from YouTube showing an emotional response to Neuralink
(source: YouTube comment crawl on "Lex Fridman Podcast #438", accessed on August 3, 2024).

The comment by @TheLaxr1 conveys hope, admiration, and encouragement. The user expresses a deep, personal longing for Neuralink to restore their lost bodily connections due to paralysis, as seen in the heartfelt phrase I hope deeply in my heart. Their mention of Neuralink reflects respect and optimism for the technology's potential, while the closing word Godspeed serves as a blessing and encouragement for its success. This comment highlights a profound emotional investment and faith in the innovation.

Apart from that, there are also redundant comments written. Behind the written words, the speaker tries to convey a certain meaning. Understanding the meaning in these comments is very important and necessary. In connection with this, in the study of pragmatics, speech act theory, especially to investigate the phenomena mentioned in the speaker's comments above, expressive speech acts are used.

This study is anchored in the field of pragmatics, which focuses on meaning derived from context and the speaker's intention rather than literal expressions (Yule, 1996: 3). Pragmatics can be further defined as the study of how utterances acquire meaning in specific situations. As Leech (1983) states pragmatics can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations. This definition emphasizes the role of context in shaping the interpretation of meaning, highlighting the dynamic relationship between language and the circumstances under which it is used.

Levinson (1983) outlines several key aspects of pragmatics, including presupposition, deixis, implicature, and speech acts. Presupposition involves assumptions made by speakers before an utterance is produced. Deixis deals with the connection between language and context, covering personal, temporal, spatial, social, and discourse references. Implicature refers to meanings implied rather than explicitly stated, whether derived from context or embedded in the language structure itself. Lastly, speech acts are seen as actions performed through utterances, as further defined by (Yule, 1996: 43)

Building upon this, the speech act theory was first introduced by Austin (1962: 108), who proposed three levels of speech act: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the intended meaning or function), and perlocutionary (the effect on the listener). Searle (1979: 23-33) then developed five general categories of illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations.

Expressive speech acts fall under the illocutionary category and are essential in understanding how people use language to express psychological states and social attitudes in interaction. A comprehensive classification of expressive speech acts can be drawn from several prominent linguistic theories, focusing on their types and communicative functions.

The types of expressive speech acts are categorized based on three major theoretical perspectives. First, Austin (1962: 159) identifies basic expressive acts such as apologies, thanks, sympathy, attitudes, greetings, wishes, and challenges—each representing core emotional or evaluative responses. Second, Norrick (1978) expand on this by including more nuanced expressions like thanking, congratulating, apologizing, condoling, deploring, welcoming, lamenting, forgiving, and boasting. Third, Vanderveken & Kubo (2002) introduce additional types such as greetings, eulogies, verbal protestation, and public lamentation. These classifications are synthesized into sixteen types of expressive speech acts drawn from the works of Searle (1979), (Norrick 1978), and Vanderveken & Kubo (2002), including thanking, congratulating, apologizing, condoling, deploring, welcoming, greetings, eulogies, verbal protestation, public lamentation, sympathy, attitudes (e.g., criticism or praise), wishes, challenges, forgiving, and boasting.

In terms of communicative function, Leech (1983: 104) classifies expressive speech acts into four categories: constructive (aimed at building social relationships), convivial (focused on friendliness and politeness), collaborative (supporting cooperation), and conflictive (potentially creating discord). These classifications provide a valuable framework for analyzing how language conveys emotional and interpersonal meanings in social contexts, particularly in pragmatics.

Previous studies—such as those by Caresta (2023), Hambali et al. (2024), and Dini & Rika (2023) have examined expressive speech acts in digital communication platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and official government accounts. While insightful, these studies often emphasize entertainment, celebrity culture, or political discourse. However, expressive speech acts occurring in long-form podcast comment sections, especially those discussing complex scientific and technological issues like Neuralink, remain underexplored.

This study aims to address that gap by analyzing expressive speech acts found in the comment section of the Lex Fridman Podcast episode titled "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438." Based on this background, the present study is entitled "Analysis of Expressive Speech Acts in Comments on Lex Fridman's Podcast with Elon Musk" The objectives of the study are: 1) To clarify the intentions behind the expressive speech acts found in the YouTube comments on the podcast; and 2) To analyze the communicative functions of these expressions based on Leech's (1983: 104) theoretical framework.

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2.   Method

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze expressive speech acts in YouTube comments on the podcast "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438." Qualitative methods are suitable for interpreting language in natural contexts and understanding social meaning, as emphasized by Hancock et al. (2009) and Sugiyono (2013). Descriptive research, according to Williams (2007), helps clarify current phenomena by exploring how people convey emotional responses through language. The data consist of English-language comments from the video uploaded on August 3rd, 2024, collected using documentation techniques (Bowen, 2009) and web crawling via the YouTube API. Only original, public, and relevant comments posted within the first three months were selected. The analysis involved two-cycle coding based on expressive act categories from Searle (1979), Norrick (1978), and Vanderveken and Kubo (2002), identifying types such as thanking, congratulating, and criticizing. Following Saldana (2021), the First Cycle Coding labeled each expressive act, while the Second Cycle Coding identified broader patterns and themes. The communicative functions of these expressive acts were then analyzed using Leech's (1983) politeness principle, which includes competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive functions. To improve the validity of the findings, analyst triangulation was applied, where multiple researchers reviewed and cross-checked the data analysis to reduce bias and ensure consistency in the classification of expressive speech acts.

3.   Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study on expressive speech acts in the YouTube comment section of the podcast "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity" by Lex Fridman. The data are categorized based on types and communicative functions of expressive speech acts.

3.1 Results

This section presents the findings of the study, which aims to answer the research questions regarding the types and functions of expressive speech acts found in the YouTube comment section of the podcast "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438." The findings are categorized into two main parts: (1) the types of expressive speech acts, and (2) the communicative functions of those acts. The classification is based on Searle (1979), Norrick (1978), and Vanderveken and Kubo (2002) theories of expressive speech acts and Leech's (1983) framework for communicative functions.

3.1.1   Types of Expressive Speech Acts
Table 1 below summarizes the types, frequencies, and percentages of expressive speech acts found in the data.

Table 1. Types, Amounts, and Percentages of Expressive Speech Acts

No	Types of Expressive Speech Act	Amount	Percentage (%)
1	Greetings	457	85.26%
2	Thanking	41	7.65%
3	Attitudes	12	2.24%
4	Wishes	6	1.12%

5	Sympathy	5	0.93%
6	Apologizing	5	0.93%
7	Eulogies	3	0.56%
8	Challenges	3	0.56%
9	Congratulating	1	0.19%
10	Deploring	1	0.19%
11	Welcoming	1	0.19%
12	Forgiving	1	0.19%
	Total	536	100%

3.1.2   Communicative Functions of Expressive Speech Acts

The communicative functions of expressive speech acts were analyzed using Leech's (1983) framework. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Communicative Functions of Expressive Speech Acts

No	Function Type	Amount	Percentage (%)
1	Convivial	500	93.28%
2	Collaborative	22	4.10%
3	Competitive	12	2.24%
4	Conflictive	2	0.38%
	Total	536	100%

After presenting the data on the types and communicative functions of expressive speech acts in the comment section, the next section discusses these findings in greater depth. A detailed discussion of each type along with representative examples and interpretations is provided in the subsections below.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Types of Expressive Speech Acts

Table 1 presents a concise summary of these categories, including the number of occurrences for each type and one illustrative example, supported by screenshots from the CSV file obtained through web crawling of YouTube comments, which will be followed by a more detailed discussion.

Greetings

Greetings is the most frequently found type, with a total of 457 instances. These expressions serve as general pleasantries or positive recognition. For example, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @TheQuagg expressing a greeting. (Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The utterance in the comment by @TheQuagg is categorized as a greeting because it conveys an initial emotional engagement and positive recognition toward the content, which is a common function of greetings in online settings. Although it does not contain a literal salutation such as "hi" or "hello," the phrase "very blessed to get this one.." expresses a warm emotional reaction that welcomes the experience of watching the video.
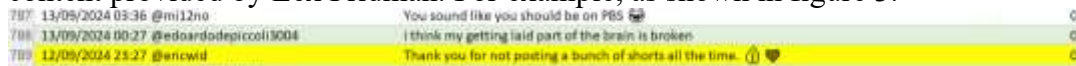
This utterance implicitly greets the content creator and fellow viewers by sharing a heartfelt emotional response. It shows openness, respect, and a positive attitude, which are

core elements of what greetings aim to achieve. Therefore, based on its function rather than form, this utterance fulfills the role of a greeting: it initiates a connection through positive emotion.

Thanking

Thanking is one of the dominant types of expressive speech acts found in this study, with a total of 41 occurrences. These comments generally express gratitude from viewers for the content provided by Lex Fridman. For example, as shown in figure 3.
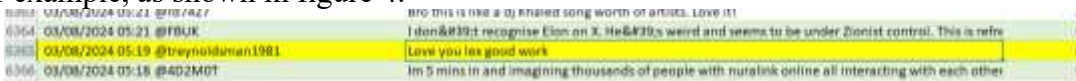

Figure 3. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @ericwid expressing a thanking. (Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The utterance in the comment by @ericwid clearly falls under the thanking category because it contains a direct expression of thanks ("Thank you") followed by a specific reason — the creator's decision to maintain long-form content instead of frequently uploading short clips. The added emojis (thumbs up and heart) further reinforce the positive sentiment and appreciative tone of the message.

Attitudes

Attitudes were expressed in 12 comments. These reflect opinions, emotions, or evaluations. For example, as shown in figure 4.
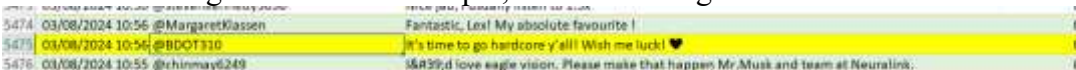

Figure 4. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @treynoldsman1981expressing an attitudes.

(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The utterance of comment by @treynoldsman1981 reflects the commenter's emotional admiration and positive evaluation of Lex Fridman and his work. The phrase "Love you lex" conveys a strong personal attachment or affection, while "good work" offers an evaluative compliment about the quality of the content. By expressing admiration and praise, the commenter contributes to a supportive, appreciative communicative atmosphere.

Wishes

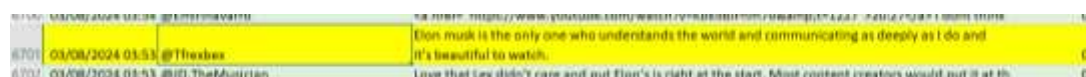Wishes occurred eight times. For example, as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @BDOT310 expressing a wishes. (Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @BDOT310 is a clear example of a wish because the speaker is expressing a desire for good fortune or success in the upcoming task. The use of "wish me luck" directly indicates the speaker's hope for a favorable outcome, which fits the convivial function, a social or friendly expression that seeks well-wishing from others.

Sympathy

Sympathy was found 6 times. These comments show understanding or emotional alignment with others. For example, as shown in figure 6.
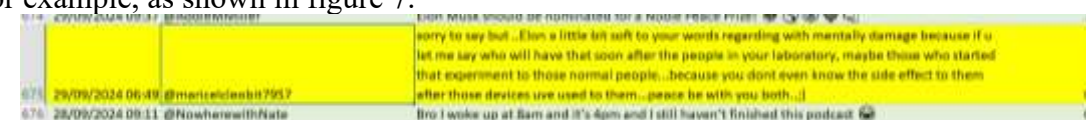
Figure 6. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @Tfrexbex expressing a symphaty.
(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @Tfrexbex illustrates a sense of emotional resonance or identification with Elon Musk. The speaker expresses a belief in a shared depth of understanding, which suggests admiration and emotional support. Rather than merely stating a fact, the speaker is aligning themselves with Musk's worldview in a personal, almost intimate way, a core characteristic of sympathetic expression.

Apologizing

Apologizing appeared five times. These comments express regret or aim to soften criticism. For example, as shown in figure 7.
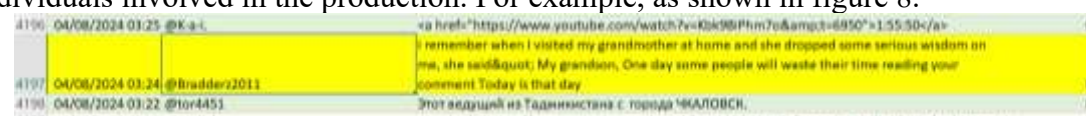

Figure 7. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @maricelcleobit7957 expressing an apologizing.
(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @maricelcleobit7957 above, the speaker opens with an apology ("sorry to say but"), which serves as a buffer for the critical opinion that follows. The user expresses disapproval of Elon's perceived tone on a sensitive topic, but does so with an apologetic tone, possibly to reduce offense or maintain civility.

Eulogies

Eulogies appeared three times. These comments express deep admiration, often directed at individuals involved in the production. For example, as shown in figure 8.
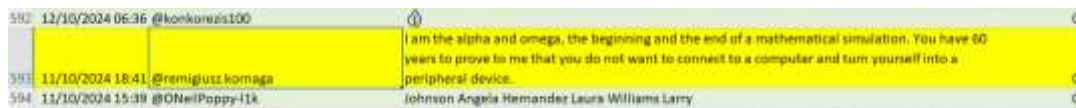

Figure 8. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @Bradderz2011 expressing an eulogies.
(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The utterance in comment by @Bradderz2011 can be categorized as a eulogy because it reflects a respectful and emotionally charged recollection of wisdom shared by the speaker's grandmother. Although the tone is humorous, the speaker recalls a moment of personal significance, introduced with "I remember when I visited my grandmother," which sets a nostalgic and reflective tone. The embedded quote, "My grandson, one day some people will waste their time reading your comment. Today is that day," presents the grandmother as a source of memorable insight.

Challenges

Challenges appeared once. This type often confronts or provokes thought. For example, as shown in figure 9.

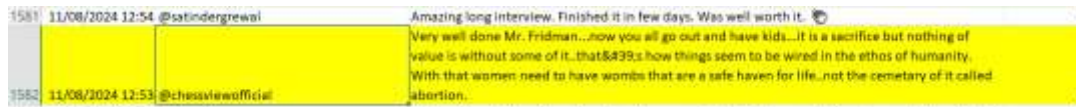| 592 | 12/10/2024 06:36 | @konkorezis100 | ⚠ | | 0 |
			I am the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end of a mathematical simulation. You have 60 years to prove to me that you do not want to connect to a computer and turn yourself into a	
593	11/10/2024 18:41	@remigiusz.kornaga	peripheral device.		0
594	11/10/2024 15:39	@ONeilPoppy-f1k	Johnson Angela Hernander Laura Williams Larry		0

Figure 9. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @remigiusz.kornaga expressing a challenges.

(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The utterance in the comment by @remigiusz.kornaga is highly assertive and symbolic, invoking religious or philosophical language ("alpha and omega") to position the speaker as a figure of ultimate authority or judgment. The phrase "You have 60 years to prove to me" presents a direct challenge, implying a demand for justification or worth over time.

Congratulating

Congratulating was found only once in the data. Although rare, this type still holds significance as it reflects support or praise for achievements. For example, as shown in figure 10.

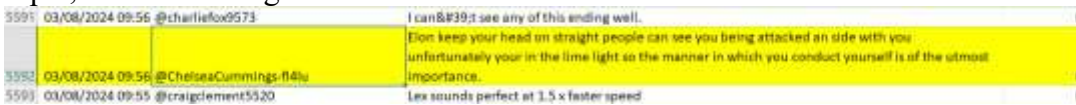| 1581 | 11/08/2024 12:54 | @satindergrewai | Amazing long interview. Finished it in few days. Was well worth it. 😊 | | 0 |
| | | | Very well done Mr. Fridman...now you all go out and have kids...it is a sacrifice but nothing of value is without some of it..that's how things seem to be wired in the ethos of humanity. With that women need to have wombs that are a safe haven for life..not the cemetary of it called | |
| 1582 | 11/08/2024 12:53 | @chessviewofficial | abortion. | | 0 |

Figure 2. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @chessviewofficial expressing a congratulating.

(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @chessviewofficial begins with a direct compliment to Lex Fridman, showing appreciation for the quality of the interview. The second part, while lighthearted, expresses an affirmation of human connection and values that were likely discussed in the podcast. Together, the comment serves as a form of praise both for the content and for broader humanistic ideals.

Deploring

Deploring appeared once, indicating disapproval or concern about a specific situation. For example, as shown in figure 11.

5591	03/08/2024 09:56	@charliefox9573	I can't see any of this ending well.		0
			Elon keep your head on straight people can see you being attacked an side with you unfortunately your in the lime light so the manner in which you conduct yourself is of the utmost	
5592	03/08/2024 09:56	@ChelseaCummings-fl4lu	importance.		0
5593	03/08/2024 09:55	@craigclement5520	Lex sounds perfect at 1.5 x faster speed		0

Figure 11. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @ChelseaCummings-fl4lu expressing a deploring.
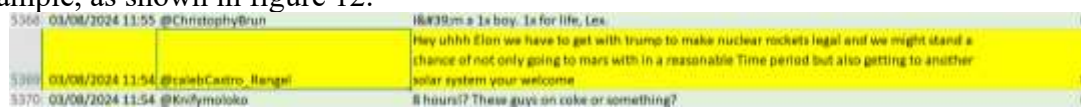
(Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @ChelseaCummings-fl4lu reflects such sentiment: "Elon keep your head on straight people can see you being attacked an side with you unfortunately your in the lime light so the manner in which you conduct yourself is of the utmost importance." This comment conveys concern for Elon Musk's behavior, warning him to stay focused and responsible. Although the tone includes an element of care, the underlying message points to a perceived issue with his conduct. The speaker highlights the importance of self-awareness and accountability, suggesting that Elon's actions carry significant weight.

Welcoming

Welcoming was also found once. This act expresses acceptance or encouragement. For example, as shown in figure 12.

Figure 12. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @TheQuagg expressing a greeting. (Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)
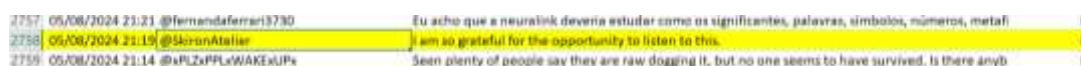
The comment by @calebCastro_Rangel is delivered with a humorous or casual tone, it can be interpreted as a welcoming gesture. By addressing Elon directly and using inclusive language like "we have to get with trump," the speaker positions themselves as part of a shared mission or plan. The phrase "your welcome," even with its likely spelling error, implies that the speaker feels they are contributing something of value to Elon's cause, reinforcing the sense of involvement and support. This utterance fits within the Welcoming category because it expresses a readiness to engage and collaborate. The comment reflects an informal invitation to partnership, emphasizing solidarity or a shared vision, even if expressed in a playful or exaggerated way.

3.2.2   Types of Expressive Speech Acts

Table 2 presents a concise summary of the communicative functions of expressive speech acts based on Leech's (1983) framework. It includes the number of occurrences for each function along with an illustrative example, supported by screenshots from the CSV file collected through web crawling of YouTube comments. This summary serves as the foundation for the more detailed discussion that follows.

Convivial

Convivial was the most dominant communicative function found in the dataset, with a total of 500 occurrences. This function includes expressive speech acts that aim to promote social harmony, such as thanking, greeting, congratulating, and expressing good wishes. For example, as shown in figure 13.
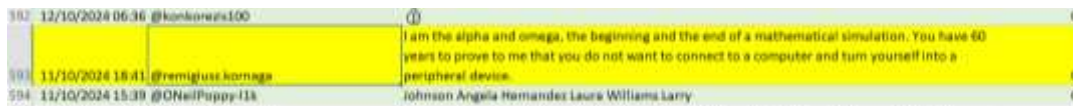

Figure 13. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @SkironAtelier
Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

This comment is categorized as a thanking act and reflects a convivial function because it is oriented toward politeness and the strengthening of social bonds. The speaker expresses sincere appreciation, not for any transactional purpose, but purely to show gratitude.

Conflictive

Conflictive was the least frequent, appearing only 3 times. This function is characterized by utterances that oppose, criticize, or challenge, often violating politeness norms to express confrontation or disagreement. For example, as shown in figure 14.
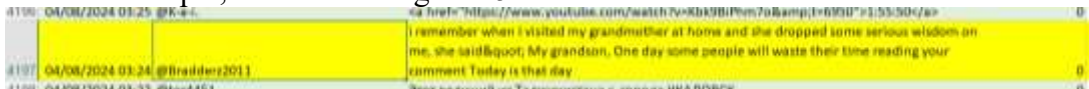
Figure 14. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @remigiusz.kornaga
Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @remigiusz.kornaga is categorized as a challenge and aligns with the conflictive function because it directly imposes a philosophical demand on the audience, using authoritative and provocative language. The tone is commanding and intimidating, signaling an intent to provoke thought or confrontation rather than cooperation.

Collaborative

Collaborative appeared 22 times and typically involve expressions of shared emotion, respect, or moral support. These speech acts aim to establish common ground and emotional resonance between speaker and hearer, often through sympathy, apologies, or respectful praise. For example, as shown in figure 15.
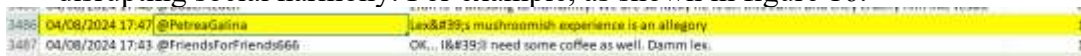

Figure 15. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @Bradderz2011
Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @Bradderz2011 is categorized as an eulogy and functions collaboratively because it expresses high praise and acknowledgment of another person's effort. Rather than merely complimenting, the speaker aligns emotionally with the editor, establishing mutual respect.

Competitive

Competitive was found 12 times and generally reflect personal needs or perspectives that may override politeness strategies. These include speech acts such as complaints, criticism, or strong attitudes that assert the speaker's stance, even at the risk of disrupting social harmony. For example, as shown in figure 16.

Figure 16. Screenshot of YouTube comment by @PetreaGalina
Source: CSV file retrieved via web crawling from YouTube comments on Lex Fridman Podcast #438)

The comment by @PetreaGalina is classified as an attitude type and represents a competitive function because the speaker asserts a strong personal opposition to Neuralink. The intention is to emphasize individual preference over technological advancement, thereby prioritizing personal value rather than seeking agreement or solidarity.

4. Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the types and functions of expressive speech acts found in the comment section of a YouTube podcast entitled "Elon Musk: Neuralink and the Future of Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #438." The results show that out of the sixteen types classified by Searle (1979), Norrick (1978), and Vanderveken & Kubo (2002), twelve types

were identified in the dataset, namely greetings, thanking, attitudes, wishes, sympathy, apologizing, eulogies, challenges, congratulating, deploring, welcoming, and forgiving. In terms of function, expressive speech acts in the comment section served various pragmatic purposes such as convivial, collaborative, and conflictive, based on Leech's (1983) theory. Most comments performed convivial functions that contribute to social harmony and politeness, such as expressing gratitude, admiration, and support, while a smaller number reflected conflictive functions, where speakers indirectly conveyed criticism or disagreement. These findings suggest that the comment section of the podcast served as a platform not only for appreciation but also for engagement and reflection, indicating the dynamic nature of communication in digital spaces. For future research, it is suggested to investigate expressive speech acts in other forms of digital interaction, such as TikTok or Instagram comments, or in podcasts with different themes, hosts, or guests. Further research may also examine the influence of cultural background or language choice on the use of expressive speech acts in online settings.

Acknowledgment

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