

## Speech Acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talks: A Pragmatic Study

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzed speech acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It," using Searle's (1979) Speech Act Theory. Few studies explore speech acts in motivational public discourse, despite their persuasive impact. The research aimed to identify and categorize speech acts in the talk's transcript, employing a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis. Findings revealed assertive speech acts dominated (80.1%), conveying facts and personal insights, followed by directives (19.9%), encouraging audience reflection, and minimal expressive acts (2.1%), fostering emotional connection. No commissive or declarative acts were found, reflecting the talk's focus on inspiration over commitment. This study extends speech act theory to motivational speeches, offering insights for public speakers to enhance communication effectiveness.

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### INTRODUCTION

Language plays a central role not only in communication but also in shaping identity, social interaction, and thought (Gaurav & Gulati, 2024). As Adami (2023) conceptualizes language as a social semiotic system, it serves as both a medium for meaning-making and a tool for enacting social action (Adami, 2023). In this view, communication is not merely the exchange of information but the performance of socially situated acts (Zdravkovska & Haque, 2023). Pragmatics, as a key branch of linguistics, investigates how language is used in context to convey intentions, manage relationships, and achieve specific goals (Dey, 2023). Within pragmatics, speech act theory-originating from Austin (1962) and developed further by Searle (1979)-explores how utterances function as actions such as stating, requesting, or expressing emotions. As Lin (2023) suggests, language choice reflects speakers' identities and strategic aims, particularly in settings where influence and persuasion are critical (Lin, 2023).

In the field of linguistics, there is one branch, pragmatics, which emphasizes contextual language usage (Dey, 2023). Pragmatics helps us understand how meaning is not only shaped by words, but also by who is speaking, to whom, in what situation, and with what purpose (Noviyenti & Anwar, 2023). In pragmatics, the concept of Speech act is an important concept. This concept explains that every utterance contains an action performed by the speaker, such as stating, commanding, promising, or expressing feelings (Rahayu et al., 2025). Searle (1979) developed this speech act concept, which was first introduced by Austin (1962). According to Searle (1979), every utterance has a specific intention, then utterances fall into five main categories: assertive (stating), directive

(commanding or suggesting), commissive (promising or committing), expressive (expressing feelings or attitudes), and declarative (changing reality through utterances) (Searle, 1979). Therefore, language can be considered a social act that affects the listener or the state of communication (Searle, 1979).

It is crucial to comprehend how to employ speech acts when speaking in public, such as a speech or presentation (Faiz, 2024). Speakers are not just providing information; they are also trying to convince, inspire, or encourage the audience to act (Nguyen Van Huy et al., 2024). TEDx Talks, which is a channel on YouTube, is one such public communication-type platform that is interesting to learn about. With this platform, speakers from various backgrounds can convey their ideas in an inspirational, motivational, and convincing way. Jovic et al. (2023) said that the delivery style, word choice, and communication structure show a complex and organized linguistic strategy, and it is related to the communication in TEDx Talks (Jovic et al., 2023).

Previous research has applied Searle's speech act theory across diverse communicative contexts, including fictional narratives, music lyrics, and social media platforms. For instance, Syafitri (2020) analyzed Facebook status updates and found expressive acts as the most dominant, illustrating the use of personal emotion to shape online identity (Syafitri, 2020). Mardiani and Leviani (2022) studied speech acts in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, revealing a high frequency of representative acts that reflect character psychology (Mardiani & Leviani, 2022). Similarly, Gawa (2023) explored Taylor Swift's song lyrics and emphasized representative acts that project beliefs and life values (Gawa, 2023).

These studies demonstrate the flexibility of speech act theory, yet they focus primarily on fictional, artistic, or asynchronous communication. Such contexts are limited in their ability to capture the spontaneity, persuasive intent, and audience engagement that characterize real-time public discourse. Fictional texts are constructed and curated; social media interactions are fragmented and user-specific. In contrast, TEDx Talks are pre-scripted yet delivered in live settings, aimed at persuading, motivating, and emotionally engaging a broad audience through structured rhetorical strategies (Jovic et al., 2023).

Despite the increasing global popularity and rhetorical influence of TEDx Talks, they remain underexplored in pragmatic scholarship. Most existing literature in this area neglects to examine how real-time motivational speeches utilize speech acts as tools of inspiration, emotional appeal, and behavioral suggestion (Ullah et al., 2025). As a result, there is a critical gap in understanding how speakers such as Katarina Blom craft their language to not only inform but move audiences toward introspection and action.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the speech acts used in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It" by applying Searle's taxonomy. Unlike fictional or artistic expressions, TEDx Talks prioritize direct connection and transformation, making them a rich site for pragmatic inquiry. This study contributes both theoretically-by extending speech act analysis into motivational public discourse-and practically-by offering communicative insights for educators, coaches, and public speakers seeking to enhance their persuasive impact.

Through digital channels like YouTube, TEDx Talks have emerged as one of the most popular forms of public communication in the world in recent years (Fitriani et al., 2023). In addition to being well-liked, these speeches have a significant impact on public opinion, self-analysis, and the dissemination of ideas that inspire change (Li et al., 2022). Despite their widespread use and persuasive influence, little linguistic study has been done on how language works in these motivational speeches, particularly from a

pragmatic standpoint. Examining how speakers like Katarina Blom use speech acts to engage and inspire audiences is not only pertinent but also crucial for both theoretical understanding and practical application in communication studies, given the growing importance of public discourse in digital media, education, and personal development.

Guided by Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts, this study aims to identify and analyze the types of utterances used by Katarina Blom in her TEDx Talk "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It" (Searle, 1979). The focus lies in uncovering how these utterances function to inform, engage, and motivate the audience within a real-time public speaking context.

Theoretically, this research extends the application of speech act theory beyond fictional and asynchronous contexts into live motivational discourse, offering insights into how language operates as both a cognitive and emotional instrument. Practically, the study provides communicative strategies for educators, public speakers, and communication professionals seeking to enhance their rhetorical impact in persuasive settings. By bridging pragmatics with contemporary public discourse, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language can be used not only to communicate-but to transform.

## **THEORY AND METHOD**

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis to examine how language functions as action in a public motivational speech. This approach enables a rich and contextual interpretation of meaning, particularly appropriate for spoken discourse where intention and persuasion intersect.

The theoretical framework is based on John Searle's (1979) Speech Act Theory, which builds on Austin's foundational work (1962) to explore how utterances perform actions. Searle classifies speech acts into five categories: assertives (stating facts or beliefs), directives (requests, suggestions), commissives (promises or commitments), expressives (emotional states), and declaratives (institutional acts that change status or reality). This framework is particularly suited for analyzing motivational discourse, such as TEDx Talks, because such speeches are designed not only to inform but to influence audience thought, emotion, and behavior. As Jovic et al. (2023) argue, TEDx speakers often structure language around persuasive strategies that align closely with speech act categories (Jovic et al., 2023).

The object of this study is Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk titled "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It," which was retrieved from the official TEDx YouTube channel on January 10, 2025, along with its official English-language transcript. The video was chosen due to its thematic relevance-discussing happiness through behavioral and cognitive change-and its stylistic blend of storytelling, scientific reasoning, and emotional appeal (Vrtana & Krizanova, 2023). The use of hedges in compelling TED Talk presentations-strong, planned lectures given in a unique communicative setting that blends aspects of written and spoken discourse-is the subject of the corpus-based study. The authors examine the hedging strategies employed to support the three rhetorical appeals using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies: ethos, pathos, and logos. The results show that only 2% of the words in the corpus serve as hedging devices, which is lower compared to previous studies on written and spoken discourse.

The incidence of hedges is highest in the logos parts, followed by pathos, with the lowest incidence in ethos. Strong credibility is generally established by avoiding hedging devices. To evoke emotions in the audience, the speakers mainly rely on adverbs and verbs. The employment of linguistic modifiers such as approximators and shields

contributes significantly to reinforcing the logical dimension of a speech, a function closely aligned with the use of hedging in academic writing. In-depth analysis reveals that four hedging expressions-namely actually, just, could, and I think-are particularly salient in persuasive discourse. The term actually often serves to soften statements, create conversational intimacy, or introduce nuanced corrections. Meanwhile, just typically conveys a subtle tone of encouragement or reassurance. The expression I think, frequently used in various rhetorical functions, and the modal could, which implies hypothetical scenarios, both play vital roles in enhancing argumentative reasoning. These linguistic choices suggest pedagogical relevance, especially for ESL instruction, by highlighting the rhetorical distinctiveness of spoken argumentation-an area that remains underrepresented compared to its written counterpart and therefore merits further scholarly exploration (Jovic et al., 2023).

The data collection involved several systematic steps. First, the researcher downloaded the transcript and watched the video multiple times to become deeply familiar with the verbal and non-verbal context. Second, utterances were segmented based on intonational, syntactic, and thematic boundaries. Third, utterances were selected based on clear illocutionary intent, meaning the speaker's communicative purpose-whether to state, ask, express, or suggest-was discernible from context. Sentences that were ambiguous or lacked complete context were excluded.

The analysis employed Searle's fivefold taxonomy to classify each selected utterance. The utterances were interpreted in their full context-considering co-text, speaker tone, audience response, and pragmatic intention. Each utterance was assigned to one of the five categories based on its dominant illocutionary force. To ensure validity and reliability, the categorization process was verified by a second independent coder, a fellow linguistics researcher familiar with speech act theory. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion until full agreement was reached.

This methodological triangulation reinforces the consistency of classification and helps avoid subjective bias. In total, 141 utterances were identified and categorized, forming the basis for the analysis in the Results and Discussion section. This methodological framework ensures both theoretical grounding and analytic rigor, allowing the study to contribute meaningfully to the understanding of pragmatic features in motivational public discourse.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study identified and categorized a total of 141 utterances from the transcript of Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It" using Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts. The distribution of speech act types is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Speech Acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talks

Type of Speech Act	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Assertive</b>	113	80.1%
<b>Directive</b>	28	19.9%
<b>Expressive</b>	3	2.1%
<b>Commissive</b>	0	0%
<b>Declarative</b>	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	141	100%

The data in Table 1 highlights the predominance of assertive speech acts, underscoring their central role in conveying the speaker's beliefs and psychological insights. This finding is consistent with Jovic et al. (2023), who argue that motivational speakers often rely on assertives to establish authority and cognitive alignment with the audience (Jovic et al., 2023). The presence of directive acts, while lower, signals a purposeful attempt to influence audience behavior through non-coercive prompts—a pattern aligned with Fitria (2022), who found that TEDx speakers frequently use directives to stimulate self-reflection rather than compliance (Fitria, 2022). The absence of commissive and declarative acts supports Searle's (1979) view that such acts require institutional contexts, which are not characteristic of TEDx platforms. Therefore, this distribution reflects the pragmatic structure of inspirational public discourse: rooted in informing, nudging, and empathizing rather than binding or authorizing.

From the data above, it is evident that the speech act most frequently employed by the speaker is the assertive type, accounting for 113 out of 141 utterances, or 80.1% of the total. This is followed by directive speech acts (28 utterances, 19.9%) and a minimal presence of expressive acts (3 utterances, 2.1%). No instances of commissive or declarative acts were identified throughout the speech. This frequency pattern reflects a clear predominance of informative and belief-asserting utterances within the talk.

The overwhelming dominance of assertive speech acts illustrates the speaker's primary communicative strategy: delivering claims, descriptions, and evaluative statements based on personal experience and psychological principles. These utterances establish authority, convey scientific concepts, and share autobiographical insights, all of which align with the pedagogical and persuasive goals of TEDx Talks.

Directive speech acts form the second most frequent category. These include instructions, suggestions, and reflective questions intended to prompt audience engagement and behavioral reflection. While not as frequent as assertives, directives are crucial in inviting the audience to apply the ideas presented.

Expressive speech acts are rare but strategically placed. Their limited presence suggests that emotional expression is not the primary rhetorical tool but serves to humanize the speaker and foster relational warmth.

The absence of commissive and declarative speech acts is consistent with the nature of the TEDx platform. The speaker neither commits to future actions nor enacts institutional changes, but instead delivers ideas intended to influence cognition and emotion without formal authority or personal obligation.

To provide a deeper understanding of how speech acts are manifested in motivational discourse, representative utterances from each identified category are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Representative Speech Acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk

Speech Act Type	Example Utterance	Description
Assertive	"We are evolutionarily built to be sensitive to threats."	A factual statement grounded in psychological theory.
Assertive	"I had just broken up with the person I thought I'd spend my life with."	Personal narrative establishing emotional credibility.
Directive	"Don't think about anything else for five minutes."	Direct instruction to guide focus and engagement.
Directive	"Why do we carry this emotional asymmetry?"	Rhetorical question to stimulate reflection.
Expressive	"One, two, three... Yay! Great!"	Expresses enthusiasm and fosters a playful connection.

**Expressive**

"Thank you."

Repeated expression of gratitude toward the audience.

The examples in Table 2 illustrate how each speech act type functions pragmatically within the TEDx genre. Assertive utterances often combine factual statements with autobiographical elements, serving both informational and relational purposes—mirroring the "storytelling logic" described by Ramalingam et al. (2021), where personal narrative fosters speaker authenticity (Ramalingam et al., 2021). Directive acts, such as rhetorical questions or inclusive instructions, invite the audience into a co-reflective process, activating the "second-person engagement" (Usera, 2023). Although expressive acts are rare, their placement at key moments strengthens emotional rapport and audience retention, echoing Lin's (2023) emphasis on affective alignment in monologic public speaking. These representative utterances demonstrate that TEDx speakers strategically orchestrate speech acts not only to inform, but to emotionally and cognitively involve their audience.

The utterances listed above illustrate the distinct pragmatic intentions associated with each speech act type. Assertive statements dominate in both quantity and discursive function, as they form the speaker's means of conveying knowledge, experience, and authority. Directive utterances, though fewer, serve to activate the audience's cognitive and emotional engagement through direct and reflective prompts. Expressive acts, while limited in frequency, contribute to building rapport and maintaining a warm interpersonal tone.

No utterances were identified as belonging to commissive or declarative categories. This absence reflects the nature of TEDx talks, which are not grounded in institutional authority nor structured as commitments but rather serve to share perspectives, inspire reflection, and suggest change through influence rather than obligation.

### A. Assertive Speech Act in Motivational Discourse

Assertive speech acts, which accounted for 80.1% of the utterances in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk, form the communicative backbone of the discourse. According to Searle (1979), assertives express the speaker's belief regarding the truth of a proposition and convey a commitment to that belief (Searle, 1979). In motivational public discourse, such as TEDx Talks, assertive acts go beyond the function of stating facts; they become rhetorical devices for establishing ethos, delivering insight, and shaping cognitive engagement.

Blom utilizes assertives across three distinct yet interwoven communicative layers: expert authority, narrative vulnerability, and conceptual framing. For example, the statement "We are evolutionarily built to be sensitive to threats" conveys psychological knowledge in a declarative format. This type of utterance simultaneously positions the speaker as informed and empathetic. The strategy aligns with Jovic et al. (2023), who argue that motivational TEDx speakers frequently fuse scientific authority with human relatability through narrative-logical blends (Jovic et al., 2023).

Personal assertions, such as "I had just broken up with the person I thought I'd spend my life with," exemplify how assertives are also employed to humanize the speaker. These utterances are not emotive expressions per se, but rather calculated self-disclosures that serve relational and persuasive goals. They establish shared emotional grounds with the audience while maintaining rhetorical control—a crucial element in TEDx delivery where time constraints demand efficiency and impact.

Furthermore, Blom's assertives often function as cognitive anchors-generalized psychological truths that facilitate collective identification. Phrases like "This is a very common human experience" or "Happiness is not something we find; it's something we create" encapsulate abstract ideas into accessible, declarative forms. As Ramalingam et al. (2021) suggest, such formulations offer listeners ready-made frameworks for reflection and internalization (Ramalingam et al., 2021).

Comparatively, in other motivational settings, assertive speech acts also hold primacy but vary in tone and function. For instance, in Elon Musk's TED interview analyzed by Bahrani et al. (2024), assertives projected visionary ideals and technological foresight (Bahrani et al., 2024). In contrast, Blom's assertives are introspective, emotionally grounded, and psychologically oriented, emphasizing personal transformation over futuristic ambition. This contrast reveals how assertives in motivational discourse are not monolithic but adapt to speaker identity, subject matter, and rhetorical context.

The dominance of assertive acts in Blom's speech highlights a key feature of motivational discourse: persuasion through shared cognition and gentle credibility, not through command or obligation. This supports the idea that in non-institutional public speaking, the most effective form of influence often comes not from telling people what to do, but from helping them understand why and how they might choose to change.

Thus, assertive speech acts in this context serve as vehicles of internal persuasion-inviting belief, fostering reflection, and positioning the speaker as a trustworthy guide. Their strategic use illustrates how the simple act of "stating" can become a powerful tool in transformative communication.

## **B. Directive Speech Acts and Behavioral Influence**

Directive speech acts represent 19.9% of the total utterances in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk, forming the second most dominant category after assertives. While assertives shape understanding and belief, directives function to influence audience behavior, cognition, or emotional focus. Searle (1979) defines directives as attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something, ranging from direct commands to subtle suggestions. In the context of motivational discourse, however, directives often operate with nuanced intention-not to compel, but to invite reflection, simulate experience, or catalyze inner change (Searle, 1979).

Blom strategically employs directives to guide the audience through interactive engagement and introspective processing. For instance, utterances like "Don't think about anything else for five minutes" serve as momentary mental interventions, designed to focus the listener's attention and align them with the narrative trajectory. These are not authoritarian commands, but rather momentary reorientations that enable immersive participation. Such directives reflect as "guided co-presence"-a technique that maintains speaker-audience connection in the absence of two-way dialogue.

Other examples, such as "I'd like us to explore this further in a little thought experiment," reveal how Blom adopts an inclusive and exploratory tone. These suggestive forms-categorized as soft imperatives-mitigate face-threatening acts and instead create a collaborative learning space. They echo the findings of Priambada et al. (2021), who observed similar directive strategies in Lýdia Machová's TED Talk, where speakers guided audiences toward action through subtle, non-coercive language (Priambada, 2021).

Rhetorical questions such as "Why do we carry this emotional asymmetry?" and "Why do we have this preparedness to experience unpleasant and negative emotions?" further exemplify indirect directives. Although these utterances do not explicitly request action, they are crafted to provoke self-reflection-a central psychological mechanism in

motivational speaking. As Jovic et al. (2023) note, such questions simulate internal dialogue, prompting the audience to search for meaning within their own experiences (Jovic et al., 2023).

The influence of directives in this genre extends beyond momentary behavioral triggers. They form part of a broader motivational architecture wherein the speaker guides the audience through a structured journey: from awareness to insight, from contemplation to personal resolution. TEDx speakers, including Blom, thus function less as lecturers and more as facilitators of cognitive agency-offering language that activates rather than dictates.

Comparatively, directive acts in political or institutional discourse often aim at tangible, external action. In contrast, directives in motivational TEDx talks are predominantly inward-oriented, designed to catalyze emotional shift or self-driven decision-making. This difference highlights the contextual flexibility of speech acts and affirms that directive force is not solely defined by syntactic form, but also by rhetorical purpose and interpersonal dynamic.

In sum, Blom's use of directive speech acts underscores the genre's ethos: to empower, not instruct; to awaken, not impose. These utterances model a type of speech that is gently influential, sustaining the speaker's role as a guide who invites change from within rather than demands it from without. In doing so, directives serve not only pragmatic ends but also ethical ones-respecting the autonomy of the audience while nurturing their transformation.

### C. Expressive Speech Acts as Emotional Anchors

Although expressive speech acts were the least frequent category in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk-comprising only 3 of the 141 identified utterances-they carry significant rhetorical weight. According to Searle (1979), expressive acts communicate the speaker's psychological state, such as gratitude, enthusiasm, disappointment, or joy (Searle, 1979). In motivational discourse, expressive acts serve as emotional anchors: brief but powerful moments that humanize the speaker, break cognitive distance, and foster affective resonance.

Blom's use of expressions like "One, two, three... Yay! Great!" following audience engagement reveals more than surface-level enthusiasm. These utterances serve as affective cues, reinforcing a sense of shared emotional space. The speaker does not merely convey ideas; she celebrates the process of connection. As Lin (2023) suggests, emotional expressions in public speaking function as social alignment tools, strengthening interpersonal solidarity even in monologic formats like TEDx (Lin, 2023).

Repeated use of "Thank you" throughout the talk likewise reflects deliberate emotional reciprocity. While brief and formulaic, these expressions are strategically positioned to acknowledge audience attention and foster goodwill. In public discourse, such expressions subtly reinforce the listener's presence and importance, making the communicative act feel relational rather than performative. This aligns with Green (2017), who asserts that expressives are often underrepresented in frequency but overrepresented in emotional impact (Puccia et al., 2021).

Importantly, the rarity of expressive acts does not indicate rhetorical deficiency but rather strategic minimalism. Given the TEDx genre's focus on clarity, insight, and time efficiency, excessive emotionality may appear disingenuous or distract from core arguments. Therefore, the presence of a few sincere expressive acts-delivered with

spontaneity and contextual appropriateness-creates emotional contrast that amplifies their effect.

This phenomenon mirrors the findings of a study in *Elysian Journal* (2021), which analyzed the TED Talk of Melati and Isabel Wijzen. Although expressive acts were minimal, they significantly contributed to establishing emotional authenticity and audience empathy, particularly when used in moments of vulnerability or gratitude (Jovic et al., 2023).

Furthermore, expressive speech acts play a complementary role to assertive and directive categories. While assertives convey knowledge and directives stimulate engagement, expressives infuse the talk with emotional cadence, ensuring that the communication is not only persuasive but also felt. These utterances allow the audience to glimpse the speaker's internal state-be it joy, humility, or appreciation-which in turn invites deeper trust and identification.

In sum, expressive speech acts in Blom's TEDx Talk function as subtle but vital rhetorical elements. Their scarcity enhances their salience, and their emotional clarity fortifies the speaker's relational credibility. Within the dynamics of motivational discourse, expressive acts remind us that impactful communication is not only about what is said, but also how sincerely it is felt and expressed.

#### **D. The Absence of Commissive and Declarative Speech Acts**

One of the most notable findings in this study is the complete absence of commissive and declarative speech acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk. While on the surface this might appear to be a simple statistical observation, the lack of these two categories reflects deeper genre-specific, contextual, and functional considerations intrinsic to public motivational discourse.

Commissive acts, as defined by Searle (1979), are utterances that commit the speaker to a future course of action-such as promising, offering, or vowing (Searle, 1979). In legal, political, or interpersonal negotiation contexts, commissives are central to establishing responsibility, expectation, and trust. However, in the TEDx format, and particularly in motivational speeches, the speaker typically functions as a guide or inspirer rather than as an agent of contractual commitment. Katarina Blom does not promise to act; instead, she shares insights that are designed to provoke audience action. The burden of change is subtly transferred to the listener, aligning with the ethos of self-directed transformation.

This rhetorical strategy resonates with the performative balance TEDx speakers aim to achieve-being authentic yet non-prescriptive, personal yet universally relatable. As such, the speaker's authority is built not on obligation but on resonance. This absence, then, is not a limitation but a deliberate reflection of non-authoritative persuasion.

Declarative acts, in contrast, require institutional authority and specific contextual preconditions to successfully alter social reality (e.g., "I now pronounce you married" or "You are hereby fired"). According to Searle (1979), declaratives are highly context-dependent and can only be performed by someone with recognized power within a given institutional frame (Searle, 1979). TEDx Talks, despite being influential, do not possess institutional or legal status; they are platforms of thought leadership, not institutional enactment. Thus, no context exists within which a speaker like Blom could perform a declaration in the strict sense.

The absence of declarative acts also underscores the dialogic imbalance inherent in TEDx genre: while the speaker has voice and visibility, the audience has only presence.

Without institutional hierarchy or legal consequence, TEDx speakers influence through suggestion and modeling rather than through enforceable speech acts.

The absence of these two categories also invites a theoretical reflection on the flexibility and limitations of Speech Act Theory itself. Searle's taxonomy, though influential, was primarily conceived with institutional and conversational speech in mind. When applied to genres such as TEDx Talks-scripted monologues performed for wide digital audiences-the theory must be understood contextually. In these cases, certain speech act categories will remain structurally absent not due to oversight, but because they are functionally incompatible with the genre's communicative goals.

In sum, the absence of commissive and declarative speech acts in this TEDx Talk is both predictable and revealing. It reflects the non-contractual, non-institutional, and affectively influential nature of motivational public discourse. Rather than commanding or committing, the speaker persuades and positions the audience as agents of their own change-an approach that aligns with the TEDx mission of "ideas worth spreading," not orders worth obeying.

### **E. Speech Acts and Audience Engagement Strategies**

Beyond their grammatical and taxonomic roles, speech acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk function as tools of audience engagement, enabling the speaker to simulate interaction, foster intimacy, and manage attention in a one-directional communicative setting. This is especially significant given the TEDx platform's inherently monologic format, where the speaker must bridge the psychological gap between themselves and an invisible, asynchronous audience.

Assertive acts, which dominate the talk, contribute to engagement by offering shared truths that invite alignment. By presenting generalizations like "This is a very common human experience," Blom invites listeners to see themselves reflected in the narrative, creating a cognitive overlap that encourages identification without requiring direct participation. Such speech acts serve as mirrors, reflecting back the audience's lived experiences and beliefs, thereby reinforcing connection.

Directive acts, on the other hand, serve as simulated interactivity. While the speaker cannot receive real-time responses, questions like "Why do we carry this emotional asymmetry?" or instructions like "Try this thought experiment" create the illusion of dialogue. These moves mirror classroom or coaching discourse, where the speaker gently steers the audience toward introspection or small-scale behavioral activation. As Patterson et al. (2023) notes, this kind of virtual interaction is pragmatically rich-it activates the second-person frame of reference even in the absence of genuine feedback (Patterson et al., 2023).

Expressive acts add an additional layer of affective alignment. Though few, expressions such as "Thank you" and "Yay!" humanize the speaker and elicit emotional attunement. These utterances offer relief from cognitive processing, providing the audience with affective punctuation that strengthens attention and enhances message retention.

Taken together, Blom's strategic orchestration of speech acts demonstrates how motivational discourse crafts engagement not through physical presence, but through discursive simulation. This kind of engagement is particularly suited to TEDx Talks, where reach is global and audience feedback is deferred. By activating the audience's cognitive and emotional faculties through carefully modulated speech acts, Blom creates a felt presence, a crucial factor in the perceived authenticity and effectiveness of her message.

## F. Pragmatic Characteristics of TEDx Genre

TEDx Talks occupy a unique niche in the communicative landscape—a hybrid genre that blends academic authority, personal storytelling, and public performance. From a pragmatic perspective, this genre presents distinctive patterns of speech act usage that diverge from both institutional and casual registers. Katarina Blom’s talk exemplifies this hybridity, balancing logos, ethos, and pathos through speech act orchestration.

Unlike legal or political discourse, which often features declarative and commissive acts grounded in institutional roles, TEDx speeches rely heavily on assertive and directive utterances, combined with minimal expressive acts. This reflects a core feature of the genre: it is persuasive without being prescriptive, and personal without being informal. As Jovic et al. (2023) argue, TEDx Talks operate within a framework of “structured spontaneity,” where the illusion of free speech is embedded in carefully crafted rhetoric.

Moreover, the TEDx genre prioritizes audience transformation over speaker action. The absence of commissive acts reflects the speaker’s role not as a protagonist but as a catalyst. The speaker shares knowledge, prompts reflection, and models vulnerability—but avoids imposing personal obligation or institutional declaration. This pragmatic orientation aligns with the ethos of TEDx: to inspire change through ideas, not authority.

Speech acts in TEDx Talks are also shaped by platform constraints. Talks are time-limited, visually mediated, and designed for mass digital distribution. As a result, speech acts are optimized for clarity, memorability, and emotional resonance. This encourages the use of short, declarative sentences, second-person appeals, and first-person anecdotes—all of which are present in Blom’s delivery.

Finally, the TEDx genre embodies a “social semiotic” function of language. Speech acts here are not only functional but symbolic—asserting identity, modeling behavior, and shaping communal meaning across cultural boundaries. In this way, TEDx discourse represents a high-functioning site of pragmatics in action, where language becomes a bridge between scientific insight and human experience.

The findings of this study offer several practical contributions for professionals engaged in public communication, education, and motivational speaking. By analyzing the types and functions of speech acts in Katarina Blom’s TEDx Talk, this study provides a model for effective verbal strategies that combine cognitive clarity with emotional resonance.

For public speakers and motivational coaches, the dominance of assertive and directive speech acts demonstrates the value of balancing knowledge-sharing with behavioral activation. Rather than overwhelming the audience with imperatives or promises, speakers can rely on carefully structured assertions and thoughtful prompts to guide listener introspection and transformation. This approach respects audience autonomy while still encouraging action—a key principle in persuasive ethical communication.

In the field of education, particularly in language teaching and teacher training, this study reinforces the importance of pragmatic awareness in discourse design. Language instructors can draw upon the findings to teach speech acts not only as grammatical or theoretical concepts, but as strategic tools for building engagement and impact in classroom or public settings. Educators can also incorporate TEDx-style speaking tasks to help learners practice authentic communicative intent in English.

For communication trainers and corporate facilitators, understanding the subtle power of assertive speech acts can improve leadership messaging, team communication, and presentation strategies. Rather than relying on commands or institutional authority,

professionals can adopt a tone of narrative authority—one that combines expertise with relatability—to drive engagement and alignment within teams or audiences.

Lastly, for content creators and digital storytellers, this study illustrates how speech acts can be curated to evoke emotion, build trust, and foster audience loyalty even in asynchronous platforms. The analysis suggests that speech acts are not only linguistic devices but also relational tools that help bridge the psychological distance between speaker and audience in the digital space.

These practical implications underscore the relevance of pragmatic analysis beyond academic contexts. They affirm that understanding how speech acts function in real-world communication can significantly enhance the clarity, connection, and credibility of spoken discourse—making speech not only a tool for expression, but a vehicle for transformation.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of speech acts in Katarina Blom's TEDx Talk "You Don't Find Happiness, You Create It", using Searle's (1979) taxonomy to classify and analyze the speaker's utterances. The findings revealed a strong dominance of assertive speech acts (113 instances), followed by directives (28 instances), and a minimal presence of expressives (3 instances), with no occurrences of commissive or declarative types. The speaker's consistent use of assertives highlights her intention to share personal insight and psychological knowledge, while the directives serve as gentle invitations for audience reflection and behavioral engagement. Although expressives were used sparingly, they played a strategic role in fostering emotional connection. Theoretically, this research expands the application of speech act theory by illustrating how it operates within motivational public discourse—a genre that blends informative content with emotional appeal. By applying Searle's framework to a TEDx context, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how speech acts function beyond institutional or literary settings, offering insight into how language performs social actions in persuasive, real-time communication. Practically, the findings offer valuable implications for public speakers, educators, and communication practitioners. Understanding the balance between assertive and directive speech acts can help enhance the effectiveness of motivational speaking, making it more engaging, reflective, and ethically persuasive. Educators in applied linguistics and ESL fields may also draw on these insights to teach pragmatic competence in spoken discourse, using TEDx materials to bridge theory with authentic language use. In sum, this study demonstrates that motivational speeches rely more on informative and invitational strategies than on formal declarations or commitments, positioning language not only as a medium of expression, but as a transformative tool for public influence and personal growth.

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