

Directive and Expressive Speech Acts in Support Heroes' Voice Lines: Enhancing Team Coordination in *Mobile Legends*

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ABSTRACT

Voice lines are a distinctive element of online multiplayer games that not only reinforce character identity but also serve as strategic communication tools. This study analyzes the directive and expressive speech acts found in the voice lines of Support heroes in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, intending to uncover their pragmatlinguistic function in enhancing team coordination and synergy. Using Searle's (1975) speech act theory and a qualitative descriptive approach, voice lines are analyzed and categorized into directive subtypes—commanding, urging, requesting, advising, warning, and offering—and expressive subtypes—encouraging, convincing, appreciating, expressing belief, motivating, criticizing, complaining, and emotional expression. The findings indicate that directive speech acts function as tactical cues in team decision-making. In contrast, expressive speech acts play a role in maintaining morale, strengthening solidarity, and building a supportive identity. The novelty of this research lies in the application of speech act theory to the context of a scripted, non-interactive online game, yet still capable of producing meaningful communicative effects. This study expands the discourse on pragmatics by highlighting the role of language in digital game design as a medium for strategic coordination and team emotion management. Practically, the findings contribute to the study of applied linguistics and digital communication, while also opening new insights for game developers in designing effective soundtracks, both as a tactical tool and a means of fostering a collaborative atmosphere.

Keywords: speech acts, directive, expressive, pragmatics, support heroes, *Mobile Legends*

INTRODUCTION

The quick advancement of digital technology has made online games not just a source of entertainment but also a means of dialogue. The facial effect of the voice lines in games use of which is character speeches that convey messages, give strategy, and create the atmosphere, became one of the most noticeable features. In this case, the Main article: *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* (MLBB) by Moonton is the best one, particularly support heroes whose voice lines usually have motivational, teaching, and emotional expressions. From a linguistic perspective, those speeches are full of the things that people say and the ways that they behave, especially directive and expressive acts as opposed to simply the medium of these acts to the account (Searle 1979). Yet a lot of the earlier research has been either about gameplay or game mechanics, not caring so much about the speech acts of the MLBB game, and the limited

research on its linguistic aspects, of which the best examples are the speech acts of support heroes. By making an inspection of the support hero voice lines in the bright sunshine of directive and expressive acts by the character and the communication between the team, this research makes an exciting jump from the findings, which are expected to make the pragmatic studies of digital contexts richer and thus be beneficial to the users of the virtual gaming community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in pragmatics, specifically the speech act theory introduced by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1979). Speech acts denote the smallest units of interaction where one, in addition to describing the situation, effectively changes the facts as well. Among the five types that Searle suggested - assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations- the current research points to the use of directive and expressive speech acts. The latter two themes are the most contributive to the investigation of the voice lines of support heroes in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* as they are the two main in-game communication aspects that are the closest to the emotional and the strategic ones.

1. Types of Directive Speech Acts

In a directive speech act the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something (Searle, 1975). Commands, requests, advice, and warnings are some of the many forms that can be found in directives, and all of them have a common pragmatic goal which is to involve the addressee in some kind of action. As for the game, the role of directives is very important as they can not only lead the team through the next moves by suggesting various tactics, but also encourage the players at the battle moments. Vanderveken (1990) identified the characteristics of directive acts as:

- **Commanding:** Short and direct instructions to do something, e.g., “Get behind me.” In games, this justifies urgency and authority.
- **Requesting:** Polite requests for help, e.g., “Can you help me?” This indicates cooperation and trust in others.
- **Advising:** Only if it is for the good of others, offering advice, e.g., “Stay close to me.” This is the support hero who is helping the team by protecting them.
- **Warning:** Warning about the danger, e.g., “Watch out!” Such warnings disallow unmindful behavior in the middle of the fight.
- **Urging:** Powerful exhortation to act quickly, e.g., “We must move now!” which draws the team’s energy.

In *Mobile Legends*, support heroes’ directive talks are the hinge that collective action turns to, allowing easier coordination and more efficient tactics in rapid battles.

2. Types of Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts convey the speaker’s emotional or psychological state (Searle, 1975). Unlike directives, their purpose is not to influence immediate action but to reflect feelings, create atmosphere, and reinforce social bonds. In the context of online games, expressive help builds morale and maintains positive emotional engagement among players. Vanderveken (1990) identifies several subcategories of expressive acts, including:

- **Encouraging/Motivating:** Utterances like “Tomorrow will be even better,” which raise morale and optimism.
- **Thanking/Valuing:** Acknowledging effort or support, e.g., “Thanks for your help.”
- **Reassuring:** Calming teammates during tense moments, e.g., “Don’t worry, we’ll succeed.”
- **Complaining/Criticizing:** Expressing dissatisfaction or disappointment, often reflecting frustration in difficult situations.
- **Stating belief:** Expression of personal belief or principle, for example: “I believe love conquers all.”


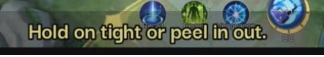
In *Mobile Legends*, expressive voice lines align with the supportive role of heroes, as they provide not only healing or protection but also emotional reinforcement, motivating teammates to persist in the game.

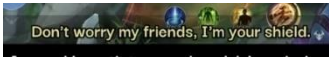
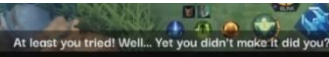
METHODOLOGY

This research used a Qualitative Descriptive method to analyze the speech acts in the voice lines of Support heroes in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*. The aim of qualitative descriptive research is to explore and understand how utterances such as words, phrases, and sentences function pragmatically in digital communication. The data source of this study was the official voice lines of 14 Support heroes, collected from the Mobile Legends game and the official YouTube channel. These characters, including *Rafaela*, *Angela*, *Floryn*, *Lolita*, *Estes*, *Diggie*, and others, were chosen because of their role in providing assistance and emotional reinforcement to teammates.

All voice lines were transcribed manually into written form to obtain accurate data suitable for analysis. Transcription was necessary since the source materials did not always provide subtitles. After transcription, the data were classified into two main categories based on Searle’s (1979) theory: directive speech acts and expressive speech acts. Directive acts included subcategories such as requesting, advising, and warning, while expressive acts included encouraging, reassuring, and criticizing.

Table 1. Example of Table Coding Data

No	Hero	Voice Lines	Speech Act Type	Functions	Explanation
1.	Angela	“Kikikaka, the strings of my puppet got all tangled up, can you help me with that?”  (Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Angela Voice Lines 1:12)	Directive - Request	Light-hearted request to foster engagement and team closeness.	Angela is making a lighthearted request for help. According to Searle, requesting aims to get the hearer to do something, and here it is framed within a playful tone, maintaining its directive function.
2.	Johnson	“Hold on tight or peel out” 	Directive - Warning	Prepares teammates for rapid movement	Johnson gives a cautionary directive to brace oneself. This utterance is meant to

		(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Johnson Voice Lines 0:38)		or aggressive action.	prepare others for fast movement or impact. As per Searle's directive category, warning is used to alert or prevent possible danger or surprise.
3.	Lolita	<p>"Don't worry my friends. I'm your shield"</p>  <p>(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Lolita Voice Lines)</p>	Expressive - Reassuring	Provides emotional assurance and reinforces protection role in team.	Lolita reassures her team of her protective role. Reassurance is an expressive act that conveys support and calms others.
4.	Mathilda	<p>"At least you tried! Well... yet you didn't make it, did you?"</p>  <p>(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Mathilda Voice Lines 1:07)</p>	Expressive - Criticizing	Evaluates team performance with sarcasm; may decrease morale.	This utterance conveys Mathilda's criticism wrapped in sarcasm. Although it begins with acknowledgment, it turns into a judgment. According to Searle's classification, criticizing is part of expressives, as it reflects the speaker's negative evaluation of the hearer's effort or result.

To ensure systematic analysis, the data were coded, highlighted, and classified into these subcategories, allowing patterns and functions to be identified clearly. This coding process also facilitated the preparation of tables that display the distribution of speech acts, making the findings more transparent. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data by interpreting the communicative functions of each utterance and observing recurring patterns that reveal how Support heroes' voice lines operate as tools for both strategy and emotional engagement in gameplay.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings indicate that Support heroes' voice lines in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* are dominated by directive and expressive speech acts, which serve complementary roles in gameplay. Directive acts primarily function to guide and coordinate team strategies, while expressive acts provide encouragement, reassurance, and emotional reinforcement that sustain player morale. These results highlight that voice lines operate not merely as scripted dialogue, but as pragmatic tools of communication that combine strategic signaling with affective support. Consequently, the analysis demonstrates how language in digital games contributes to team cohesion, interactive immersion, and the broader understanding of communication in virtual environments.

Types of Directive Speech Acts

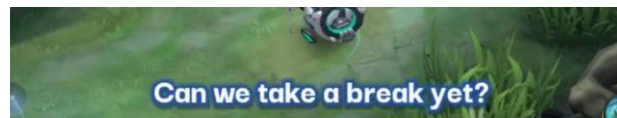
1. Commanding



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Estes Sparkle Voice Lines 0:05)

“Follow my rhythm, groove with us!” from Estes is a **directive speech act** under the **commanding** subtype. By instructing teammates to match his pace, the utterance acts as a cue for synchronized movement or action, particularly during coordinated attacks or retreats. In Searle’s framework, commands are a form of directive intended to get others to perform a specific action. Here, the choice of rhythmic language frames the instruction in an encouraging and almost celebratory tone, which can boost morale while still maintaining its tactical function, ensuring the team operates as a unified force in gameplay.

2. Requesting



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Chip Voice Lines 0:27)

Chip’s utterance *“Can we take a break yet?”* falls under the **directive speech act** category, specifically as a **request** framed in a casual, almost humorous tone. Although not a direct command, it subtly urges the team to momentarily halt aggressive actions—such as pushing or engaging in a team fight, due to a temporary disadvantage, like a skill cooldown. By posing this question, Chip communicates the need for regrouping and pacing the battle, ensuring that the team doesn’t overcommit during a vulnerable moment. This indirect approach maintains team coordination while softening the directive through lighthearted language, which can help preserve morale during tense gameplay.

3. Advising

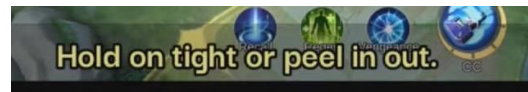


(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Johnson Voice Lines 2:28)

The line *“Should have worn your seat belts”* spoken by Johnson conveys an advisory tone that blends mild warning with reflective guidance. In Searle’s (1975) framework of illocutionary acts, this falls under the category of **directive**, specifically the **advising** subtype, as it implicitly urges the hearer to consider precautionary action. Rather than issuing a direct command, Johnson frames his message as a hindsight observation, which makes it softer yet still purposeful. In the setting of team-based gameplay, such an utterance can foster situational

awareness among allies, reminding them of safety or readiness measures that could prevent mistakes or vulnerabilities in future encounters.

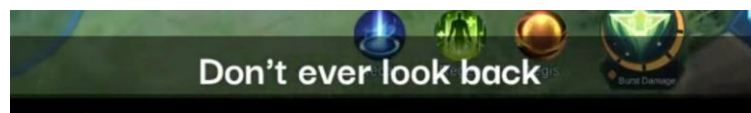
4. Warning



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Johnson Voice Lines 0:38)

The line “*Hold on tight or peel out*” delivered by Johnson functions as a **directive** speech act under the **warning** subtype, as described by Searle (1975). It signals an imminent situation requiring immediate readiness, either bracing for impact or executing a swift retreat. Rather than directly stating the specific threat, Johnson uses a casual yet urgent phrasing that still conveys a clear sense of caution. In the dynamics of team-based gameplay, this utterance prompts allies to prepare both mentally and physically for a rapid change in the game’s pace, ensuring they can respond cohesively to potential danger.

5. Urging

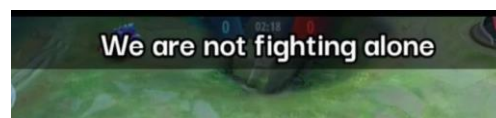


(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Mathilda Voice Lines 0:23)

Mathilda’s utterance “*Don’t ever look back*” reflects an **urging directive** aimed at motivating her teammates to maintain forward momentum in the match. The statement carries both motivational and assertive force, suggesting that retreating or dwelling on earlier setbacks would be detrimental to the team’s progress. In the in-game context, this line is typically used when the team still has enough strength and resources to initiate another engagement or “open war.” By delivering this directive, Mathilda reinforces team confidence and alignment, ensuring that allies push forward together rather than dispersing or withdrawing.

Types of Expressive Speech Act

1. Encouraging

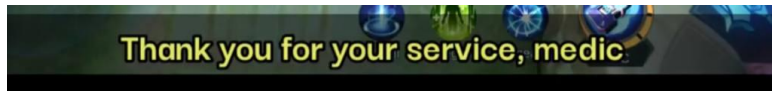


(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Floryn Voice Lines 0:35)

Floryn’s line, “*We are not fighting alone*,” functions as an **encouraging expressive speech act**. It emphasizes solidarity and teamwork, reminding allies that support is present and they are part of a collective effort. The statement reflects Floryn’s mindset of unity and reassurance,

boosting confidence and fostering a sense of togetherness that can strengthen collaboration and morale during critical moments.

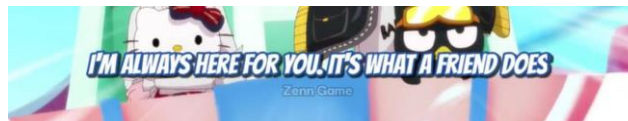
2. Valuing



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Johnson SABER Voice Lines 1:44)

Johnson's utterance "*Thank you for your service, medic*" is classified as an **expressive** speech act under the **valuing** category. While the surface structure appears as a **thanking** expression, its pragmatic force goes beyond gratitude. Johnson acknowledges and appreciates the crucial role of the healer in sustaining the team's survival. By explicitly recognizing the medic's contribution, the utterance serves as a form of valuing that reinforces respect and solidarity among teammates. This aligns with Searle's (1979) view that expressive acts convey the speaker's psychological state, where appreciation and recognition strengthen team morale.

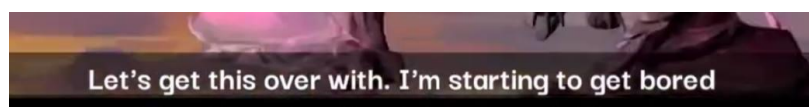
3. Reassuring



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Angela Sanrio Voice Lines 1:08)

Angela's statement, "*I'm always here for you, it's what a friend does,*" acts as a **reassuring expressive speech act**. It communicates her steadfast support and commitment to her teammates, helping to ease concerns or uncertainty. By affirming her presence, Angela fosters a sense of trust and security within the team, contributing to a positive and stable emotional environment during gameplay.

4. Complaining



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Estes Voice Lines 1:16)

"*Let's get this over with, I'm starting to get bored*" from Estes is a **complaining, expressive speech act**. This line conveys his frustration during prolonged late-game situations, signaling that the match has become tedious or slow-paced. In the context of Mobile Legends gameplay, this expression can subtly prompt teammates to act more decisively or conclude ongoing engagements efficiently. The candid tone communicates Estes' emotional state while also influencing team dynamics, helping maintain focus and momentum in extended battles.

5. Stating Belief



(Source: YouTube Channel Zenn Game; Angela Aspirants Voice Lines 1:13)

Angela's utterance "*I must not go too far away from the others*" can be classified as an **expressive** speech act under the subcategory of **stating belief**. Through this line, Angela reveals her conviction about the necessity of staying close to her teammates. This belief aligns with her role as a support hero whose effectiveness depends on proximity and connection with allies. Rather than expressing value or appreciation, the utterance conveys a guiding principle that underscores the importance of unity. Pragmatically, such speech reinforces team cohesion, reminding both character and players of the strategic significance of staying together in order to sustain coordination and protection.

In the context of *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang*, directive and expressive speech acts in Support heroes' voice lines function as essential communicative resources. Directives—such as commands, warnings, and requests—facilitate strategic coordination and quick responses during gameplay, while expressives—such as encouragement, reassurance, and valuing—help maintain morale and strengthen team cohesion. Together, these utterances highlight the dual role of language in digital gaming: guiding tactical action and sustaining emotional balance within cooperative play.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that directive and expressive speech acts in the voice lines of Support heroes in *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* have complementary strategic and affective functions. Directives—such as commands, requests, advice, and warnings—act as a primary mechanism for organizing tactics and facilitating rapid responses in the game. Expressives—such as encouragement, reassurance, assessment, and motivation—nurture the emotional dimension, maintain morale, and strengthen team cohesion. The synergy between the two demonstrates that communication in digital games is not merely entertainment, but a pragmatic blueprint for strategic coordination and collective emotional management. The novelty of this research lies in the understanding that scripted, non-interactive voice lines retain pragmalinguistic power that can influence the effectiveness of team play, while also extending the application of speech act theory to the realm of language design in online games.

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