

A pragmalinguistic study of the strategies in motivational discourse (Based on Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard commencement speech)



Yelena Yerznkyan¹

¹Chair of the English Language N2 of Yerevan State University, Armenia.

Email: yerznkyan@ysu.am

Lusine

Harutyunyan²⁺

²Chair of Languages of Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia.

Email: lusineharutyunyan100@yahoo.com



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 30 October 2023

Revised: 6 December 2023

Accepted: 10 January 2024

Published: 16 February 2024

Keywords

Commencement speech

Discourse analysis

Discourse strategies

Motivational discourse

Motivational speeches

Motivational strategies

Speech acts.

The present paper addresses the main pragmalinguistic strategies employed by speakers within the framework of motivational discourse. Motivational discourse is defined as a verbal and non-verbal influence on the person to positively change their attitudes, actions and behaviour. The research specifically focuses on Mark Zuckerberg's 2017 commencement speech to Harvard graduates. The study uses discourse analysis to pinpoint different linguistic and pragmatic methods as well as the main speech acts that Zuckerberg uses in order to motivate and inspire his audience. The researchers identify the strategies of praising, gratitude, humour, identification with the audience or inclusion strategy, direct or indirect instruction, storytelling, recognition and acknowledgment of others' success as the main pragmalinguistic tools used in motivational discourse. From the perspective of the types of speech acts employed in motivational discourse, we adhere to Searle's classification of speech acts (representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations) since this typology of illocutionary acts contributes to a comprehensive analysis of motivational discourse. In these terms, the researchers observe the predominance of expressive, assertive and directive speech acts in motivational discourse. These interactions are successful at influencing the interlocutors' behavior and attitudes favorably. The study can be used as a foundation for further research into various formats of motivational discourse to better understand other techniques and strategies used to influence people's attitudes and behaviors.

Contribution/ Originality: This study is devoted to the pragmatic strategies employed by speakers in motivational discourse. The focus on the types of the most common speech acts and the classification of pragmatic strategies based on the language data from Harvard commencement speech by Mark Zuckerberg contribute to the originality of the research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues related to what the speaker says, what one really means and what kind of impact one would like to have on the addressee have always been at the heart of the research within the framework of pragmalinguistics which is focused on the study of communicative meaning. Various scientists addressed the main questions concerning meaning in context and its components that contribute to building relationships among people (Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995; Van & Teun, 2011; Yule, 1996). According to Thomas, the components of

communication by their nature are functional, emotional and cultural. These components are intricately connected with the conditions, causes and effects of communication (Thomas, 1995).

The speaker's intention is a vital component of communication that shapes the message and influences how the addressee perceives it. It implies the purpose and desired outcomes that the speaker aims to achieve through the exchange of information. For his purpose, the speaker employs a whole set of pragmalinguistic strategies that can be considered the linguistic tools and techniques used by the addressor to convey the message effectively. These techniques include social context and the addressee's cognitive abilities in addition to the literal meaning of words and sentences. These strategies imply more than the literal meaning of words and sentences also involve social context and the addressee's cognition. The choice of words, sentence structure and non-verbal means all help the speaker adjust the message to achieve the intended communicative goals. The addressee's cognition is a critical component in the communication process. It involves the mental processes through which people interpret and perceive incoming information. The addressor is able to modify the message in order to achieve the communicative aim by taking into account the hearer's cognitive abilities, prior knowledge, age, literacy, status and other variables. Similarly, motivational discourse seeks to boost people's self-efficacy by providing them with the resources, tools, and skills to contribute to their goal-achievement process.

Positive language, positive thinking, personal stories, goal setting and visualization are some of the most commonly used techniques in motivational discourse. Motivational speech formats include a variety of styles and formats such as commencement and keynote addresses, publications on motivation, presentations on the subject, pep talks, and coaching techniques including trainings, workshops and consultations.

Numerous fields including psychology, education, business, communication and several branches of linguistics have conducted extensive research on motivational discourse. It is used in education to encourage learners to accomplish their academic goals. In business, the goal is to inspire employees to achieve their best and deliver high levels of efficiency among other things.

Motivational discourse efficacy and future possibilities remain largely unknown despite its widespread use. Linguists and psychologists are still researching the different variables that increase the effectiveness of motivational discourse such as an individual's level of motivation, the format of the discourse used and the context in which it is presented.

The aim of the present research is to determine how language might be used by speakers to inspire their audience as well as what kinds of strategies and approaches they use to increase the impact of the phrases they use. The commencement speech by Mark Zuckerberg for Harvard graduates in 2017 served as factual material for the research. Mark Zuckerberg is an American entrepreneur and the co-founder of Facebook, one of the largest social media platforms in the world. From an early age, Zuckerberg has shown a keen interest in computers and programming. He later attended Harvard University where he and his fellow students founded Facebook in 2004.

Mark Zuckerberg delivered his famous Harvard speech in 2017 in which he addressed the university's graduating class. The speech is distinguished by its formality, use of rhetorical devices, personal and other successful people's stories and a strong sense of optimism and idealism. These elements help to engage the audience and stress essential topics while also making Zuckerberg more relatable.

The paper is organized as follows: First, we discuss the origin of motivation as an extricable part of a person's well-being from a psychological point of view. There is no unanimously accepted definition of motivational discourse among psychologists and linguists. We define motivational discourse as a verbal and nonverbal influence on the person to positively change their attitudes, actions and behavior. Next, we consider speech act theory as a vital tool for shaping constructive motivational discourse. We use discourse analysis to examine Zuckerberg's commencement speech guided by Searle's taxonomy of illocutionary acts. The results show the speech act categories that are most frequently used in motivational discourse. Discourse analysis helps us reveal the main linguistic patterns used in motivational speeches. In this study, we aim to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the pragmatic strategies employed by speakers to motivate their audience to achieve desired outcomes?
2. What are the linguistic devices applied in motivational discourse to make the speech more impactful and powerful?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining Motivation

Semantically, motivation is defined as enthusiasm for doing something, willingness to do something or something that causes such willingness. According to [Home \(2023\)](#) and [\(Merriam-Webster, n.d\)](#), motivation is described as a driving force, incentive or influence. It can also refer to a strong desire to do something or a willingness to accomplish something.

Motivation is defined as "the impetus that gives purpose or direction to behavior and operates in humans at a conscious or unconscious level" within the framework of psychology [\(APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d\)](#). This broader understanding sets the stage for theories like self-determination theory which implies that people get motivated by their innate needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness [\(Ryan & Deci, 2017\)](#). The theory has been employed in various spheres like education, healthcare and sports to understand how to promote individuals' intrinsic motivation and well-being. Achievement goal theory is another approach that proposes that people possess various goals that manage their behavior and influence their achievements [\(Elliot & Church, 1997\)](#). Motivational psychology provides valuable insights into how individuals are motivated and how motivation may be fostered to promote positive outcomes in various contexts.

Numerous studies are conducted in the context of teaching methodology with the goal of identifying strategies for raising students' motivation for learning. Thus, a study conducted among Pakistani students showed the positive impact of motivational speakers on influencing the learning attitude of students and their academic performance. The researchers concluded that in order to achieve this goal, teachers must determine each student's preferred method of learning, paying particular attention to those who show shyness or low participation [\(Khan, Iftikhar, & Ali, 2021\)](#). According to [Alsaifi's \(2019\)](#) research, classroom observation is an innovative teaching technique that develops students' motivation and autonomy and helps them attain the best learning outcomes. According to the survey responses in the experiment conducted by [Tien and Ngoc \(2022\)](#), the teacher is considered to be the most important motivation factor for the students to improve their academic performance. [Ramzan, Oteir, Khan, Al-Otaibi, and Malik \(2023\)](#) dwelled upon the four types of internal motivation (immediate achievement, learning situation, intrinsic interest and personal development) and concluded that improving the learning situation in English classrooms can improve the quality of English learning and teaching and increase the level of motivation [\(Ramzan et al., 2023\)](#).

2.2. Defining Motivational Discourse

People are motivated by discourse which is used in almost every aspect of human activity because of its complexity and connections to other sciences. The French philosopher Foucault created the ideological foundation for the discourse that emerged in the second part of the 20th century. The scholar defines discourse as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" [\(Foucault, 1972\)](#).

The communicative function of any motivational discourse is entirely based on persuasion techniques widely researched in the theory of persuasion discourse which focuses on how language and communication can be used to influence people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. One of the key concepts in persuasion discourse is the Elaboration Likelihood Model which suggests that people process persuasive information through a central or peripheral channel based on their motivation and degree of participation [\(Petty & Cacioppo, 1986\)](#). This model explains the effectiveness of diverse persuasive techniques such as the use of fear appeals, social proof and emotional appeals. The

social identity theory which posits that people's identification with social groupings influences their attitudes and behaviour towards other groups is another important theory in persuasion discourse (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The concept has been applied in many other fields including marketing and political campaigns in order to better understand how to appeal to people's preferences and provide favourable attitudes and behaviours towards certain things. Persuasive discourse explains how language may be used to influence people's attitudes and behaviors as well as how persuasion strategies can be tailored to specific audiences and settings.

We use the term "motivational discourse" to define it as a verbal and non-verbal influence on the person to positively change their attitudes, actions and behaviour.

There are very few studies devoted to the exploration of the peculiarities of motivational discourse within the framework of pragmalinguistics. Sherwani (2020) researched motivational speeches by famous American speakers. The analysis dealt with the influence of positive thinking and discourse on cognition and viewed it as a combination of positive discourse and cognitive analysis. Sherwani (2020) focused on techniques including narrative, framing and hyperbole and came to the conclusion that sharing successful stories had an impact on motivational speeches. The discourse of narrative can touch people's cognition to change their attitudes and beliefs and change their actions and behaviors. Moreover, public speakers use hyperbole to beautify language and rhetoric, persuade and attract the audience's attention, and emphasize an idea or a concept. Public speakers use and develop mind-changing speeches through the use of discourse framing, repetition and parallelism.

In her research, Kryknitska (2020) sought to identify the language portrait of a motivational speaker. The researcher categorized the key sections of motivational speeches using structural analysis. The opening, the body of the speech and the ending are the compositional elements of motivational speeches. The syntactic analysis revealed that simple and full sentences (interrogative, imperative and exclamatory) and parallel constructions are employed in speeches; grammar markers include infinitives, modals, conditionals, superlative adjectives and pronouns. Thus, the language portrait of a motivational speaker is based on self-confidence, assuring vocabulary, playful phrases, humor, storytelling techniques, quotes, words of expansive, inspiring and uplifting emotions, metaphorical language, rhetorical techniques, logical coherence, precision and completeness.

The study conducted by Nistiti (2021) was based on a motivating speech by Muniba Mazari Baloch, a famous Pakistani personality. It tackled three research topics, focusing on analyzing the types of presuppositions included in Mazari's speech, identifying the specific presuppositions linked with the confessional discourse function and evaluating the audience's reaction to her confessions. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method that included pragmatic presupposition and confessional discourse analysis. The results showed that Mazari's speech has a variety of pragmatic presuppositions, including existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual. Her confessional discourse serves therapeutic, didactic and interrogatory purposes. Nistiti (2021) underlines the importance of motivational assertion as a result of the combination of these theories.

Recent research on a Ted Talk by Lídia Machová on language learning aimed at analyzing the most commonly used speech acts in motivational speeches (Priambada, Senowarsito, & Sodiq, 2021). The authors employed Searle's classification of speech acts. The researchers found out that the speaker mostly used five types of speech acts in her motivational speech which are representative or assertive, directive, declarative, expressive and commissive with the help of descriptive qualitative analysis. Assertive speech acts prove to be the most dominant, constituting a significant portion of Machová's motivational discourse accounting for 64 utterances or 62.8% of the whole speech.

This research provides insight into the concept of motivating people more through motivational speeches, motivational discourse such as language components and pragmatic strategies and the influence motivational speeches have on people's cognitive processes. Further exploration of this field will pave the way for the research and application of motivational discourse in diverse social contexts ranging from public speaking to teaching methodology to improve students' academic performance.

2.3. Speech Act Theory within the Framework of Motivational Discourse

Motivational discourse is intertwined with speech act theory which is based on the idea that words trigger some actions rather than simply convey or transfer information. Austin (1962) presents the concept of speech act theory distinguishing between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. The classification is based on performatives and their illocutionary force which carries out purposeful communicative activities. Thus, in addition to the locutionary dimension (meaning of the utterance), there is an illocutionary dimension (performance of the utterance) that is inextricably linked to the utterance and conveys the main message. It means that the addressor communicates to the addressee more than he actually expresses by words, counting on their common background information, 'together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer' (Searle, 1979). Illocutionary acts initiate certain acts or functions which are considered the perlocutionary dimension of the utterance. In general, perlocutionary acts are very difficult to identify as it is sometimes impossible to reveal what the speaker intends to say, how he or she wants to influence the addressee and to what extent the addressee bears the impact of what has been said.

Austin's taxonomy was later developed and enriched by Searle (1979) who differentiates between representatives or assertives (asserting, concluding and claiming), directives (ordering, commanding, and requesting), commissives (promising, vowing and pledging), expressives (thanking, apologizing and congratulating) and declarations (Searle, 1979). In this research paper, when analyzing speech acts, we adhere to Searle's typology of illocutionary acts as it contributes to a comprehensive analysis of motivational discourse.

3. METHODS

The study is performed through the application of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a research approach that examines language use in social contexts. It implies studying the way language is employed by people to communicate meaning, mould social interactions and construct identities and relationships.

Linguistic studies are gradually broadening their research scope to include cognitive, social, psychological, cultural and other factors. Linguists increasingly acknowledge that language research should not be limited to simple sentence and grammar analysis but should instead focus on the structures, tactics and processes of cognitively and socially situated text and speech of real language users (Van & Teun, 2011). Therefore, discourse analysis serves as a valuable tool for exploring a broad spectrum of communication phenomena including everyday interactions, conversations, speeches related to diverse spheres of human life, media texts etc. The American linguist Harris distinguishes two interconnected issues related to discourse analysis: "The first is the problem of continuing descriptive linguistics beyond the limits of a single sentence at a time. The other is the question of correlating 'culture' and language (i.e. non-linguistic and linguistic behavior)" (Harris, 1952). Thus, it can be implied that discourse analysis is more concerned with the social and cultural aspects of language use than with grammatical or semantic features.

Discourse analysis is an effective method for the current study of exploring the main strategies used in motivational discourse as we can learn more about the ways in which language can be used to question and alter people's authority and ideology as well as the extent to which this can have an impact in certain situations. It helps us to identify regular patterns and types of speech acts applied in motivational discourse to construct meaningful messages that positively impact people's behaviour and attitudes towards various phenomena that contribute to the achievement of their goals.

The data for the research is taken from the motivational speech by Mark Zuckerberg for Harvard graduates in 2017. The speech under consideration is entitled 'Mark Zuckerberg's commencement address at Harvard' and is taken from the Harvard Gazette (Gazetteterrymurphy, 2023). It lasts 32.35 minutes and contains 3566 words.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. An Overall Description of Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard 2017 Commencement Speech

A commencement speech is delivered at a graduation ceremony to congratulate and say goodbye to the graduating class. A famous figure, such as a notable alumnus, politician or successful businessman is usually invited to share their views and wisdom with the graduating students. Commencement speeches are frequently exciting and motivating to encourage graduates to pursue their aspirations, have a positive influence on the world and embrace the difficulties and opportunities that await them. They inspire, guide and motivate graduates, thus preparing them for the next level of their lives.

It can be said that Mark Zuckerberg's 2017 Harvard address symbolises one of the most important motivating performances of the twenty-first century due to his well-known and captivating personality as well as the motivational strategies, tools and techniques he employed.

The overall tone of the speech is strongly optimistic and idealistic which is characteristic of speeches given during graduations. Some of the major ideas that Zuckerberg emphasises are having a purpose in life, not being afraid to take chances and fail, encouraging a sense of community and cooperating to achieve a common goal, being creative, inventive and adaptable, creating a more just society, and being sympathetic and understanding. The speaker also highlights the importance of education and the role of technology in the process of connecting people. Zuckerberg's speech is a summary of all the ups and downs of his life, the success he is enjoying now as well as his vision of the future for the next generation.

Zuckerberg's speech is planned and well-structured with an exact enumeration of the ways and approaches that he aims to point out with the help of discourse markers such as first, second, third etc.

The speech has a high level of formality as is characteristic of speeches given at academic events. The whole speech is full of complex sentences and sophisticated vocabulary. Zuckerberg uses idiomatic expressions to reinforce the message of what he intends to bring home such as *I was blown away, to fill a void, it tore our company apart*, etc.

Zuckerberg employs rhetorical devices, particularly repetition to reinforce the intended message and make himself understood. In the following example (1), he uses the pronoun 'anyone' at the beginning of three consecutive sentences to emphasize the idea of not being afraid to be blamed or criticized. Language-wise, the passage contains parallel structures, a pattern where a similar lexical or grammatical structure is used in successive phrases and sentences. The passage also contains hyperbole expressed by the phrase 'it's impossible to know everything upfront' where Mark exaggerates the difficulty of fully imagining the difficulties that await one in the future.

(1) *Anyone* working on a big vision will get called crazy even if you end up right. *Anyone* working on a complex problem will get blamed for not fully understanding the challenge even though *it's impossible to know everything upfront*. *Anyone* taking initiative will get criticized for moving too fast because there's always someone who wants to slow you down.

Metaphor is another tool that Zuckerberg uses to make his speech more influential and emphasize key points. In the following passage (2), he compares the concept of universal basic income to a cushion that provides a sense of security to those who take risks and pursue innovation and creativity.

(2) But I know lots of people who haven't pursued dreams because they didn't have a cushion to fall back on if they failed. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things.

Another comparison has to do with the concepts that in Zuckerberg's view are like tangible objects that can be challenged and won. In the sentence, one can also find antithesis – a contrast of opposing things in which the speaker contrasts the fight between physical and intellectual phenomena (3).

(3) This is not a *battle* of nations, it's a *battle* of *ideas*.

4.2. The Discourse Analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's Commencement Speech

The discourse analysis of Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard commencement speech has revealed the following strategies of motivation:

4.2.1. Praising

Zuckerberg starts his presentation with the expressive speech act by praising Harvard University describing it as the best in the world and accepting the fact that he stood in front of the people who managed to graduate from the university – an achievement that he could never make (4). The illocutionary act of this statement is to make the graduates understand what Harvard graduates would be able to accomplish if Zuckerberg, a dropout from Harvard was able to achieve such heights. This expressive speech act helps boost graduates' self-esteem and motivates them to keep striving for excellence. Moreover, the speaker underlines his strong attachment to his wife using the superlative degree of the adjective 'important' and its meaning potential is amplified by the application of the rhetorical device of syntactic parallelism. In the example below (5), this pattern (*the most important person, the most important thing*) creates rhythm and a sense of symmetry that emphasizes the uttered idea. Zuckerberg switches the conversation to a more personal level by addressing his wife, highlighting the fact that he would never have met his true love had it not been for Harvard. The purpose of this speech act is to make the graduates believe that Harvard will enable them to strive for success not only in their business plans but also in their personal lives.

(4) Graduates of the *greatest* university in the world, I'm honored to be with you today because, let's face it; you accomplished something I never could.

(5) But without Facemash, I wouldn't have met Priscilla and she's *the most important person* in my life, so you could say it was *the most important thing* I built in my time here.

4.2.2. Expressing Gratitude

Zuckerberg expresses gratitude towards his parents and family for their support and for inspiring him to pursue his passion for computer science. He also extends gratitude to the Harvard community for shaping him and providing him with opportunities to learn and grow. The perlocutionary act of this utterance is to create a sense of relatability as most people can relate to having someone who has supported and encouraged them in their journey as well as by thanking Harvard, Zuckerberg aims at recruiting other young people especially his followers to join the Harvard community (6).

(6) We've all started lifelong friendships here and some of us even have families. That's why I'm so grateful for this place. Thanks, Harvard.

4.2.3. Humour

Presenting oneself as ending up in funny situations is another technique employed by the speaker for creating a relaxed atmosphere and showing that he is an average man who can find himself in humorous situations. Zuckerberg uses self-deprecating humor to lighten the mood and make the audience feel more at ease. This strategy facilitates engaging with the audience and developing rapport making it easier to inspire and motivate them to attain their objectives (7). Furthermore, Zuckerberg describes his performance in a humorous way to 'cover' the fact of being a Harvard dropout (8), thus, by belittling himself, he shows the graduates that he is accessible to everyone which serves as the illocutionary act of these assertive utterances.

(7) I was late, so I threw on a t-shirt and didn't realize until afterwards that it was inside out and backwards with my tag sticking out the front. I couldn't figure out why no one would talk to me except one guy, KX Jin (Kang-Xing Jin, one of Facebook's oldest employees and Mark Zuckerberg's friend from their Harvard days), he just went with it.

(8) If I get through this speech, it'll be the first time I actually finish something at Harvard.

4.2.4. Identification with the Audience/Inclusion Strategy

This strategy is basically realized through personal pronouns *we* and *us* which due to the great variability of the semantic content, become an efficient means of influence on the listeners as they convey the meaning of generalization pointing to the fact that the speaker is one of them, he took the same path like them, tried hard and succeeded. Moreover, the listeners are millennials like him and they are needed to change the world (9,10,11,12).

(9) I'm an unlikely speaker not just because I dropped out, but because *we're* technically in the same generation. *We* walked this yard less than a decade apart studied the same ideas and slept through the same Ec10 lectures.

(10) *We're* millennials. *We'll* try to do that instinctively.

(11) Purpose is the sense that *we* are part of something bigger than ourselves that we are needed and that we have something better ahead to work for.

(12) Change starts local. Even global changes start small with people like *us*.

Zuckerberg applies the strategy of identification with the audience with the help of the adverb *together*. By using this adverb, the speaker shows that he is there and ready to help them, he has all the planned projects of the future and encourages the audience to join him (13,14,15).

(13) We may have taken different paths to get here especially if you came all the way from the Quad but today I want to share what I've learned about our generation and the world we're building *together*.

(14) It's up to us to create it so we can all keep moving forward *together*.

(15) Our generation will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks. But we have the potential to do so much more *together*.

The illocutionary act of these assertive words uttered by Zuckerberg is to convey the implicit meaning of being one of the members of society, an average person who is equal to them and the audience has the same capabilities and opportunities as he does and he is working hard with them and is ready to help them in any endeavor that will make the world a much better place to live.

4.2.5. Direct Instruction

In most cases, this strategy is realized through the generalizing personal pronoun *you* whose referent is unknown. This pronoun's inherent property is ambiguity which means that it can be addressed to one person or many people. In this case, when there is a specific instruction to do something performed by the pronoun *you*, the listener or listeners feel motivated and somewhat obligated to take action (16,17).

(16) I know a lot of you will have your own stories just like this. A change in the world that seems so clear you're sure someone else will do it. But they won't. *You* will.

(17) But it's not enough to have purpose yourself. *You* have to create a sense of purpose for others.

Zuckerberg also directly addresses his audience thus making them pay attention and feel obligated to follow his advice (18,19).

(18) And that, *Class of 2017*, is why you should be nice to people.

(19) *Class of 2017*, you are graduating into a world that needs purpose. It's up to you to create it.

4.2.6. Indirect Instruction

Rhetorical questions come in handy here as Zuckerberg employs them to present the listeners with potential future projects and achievements, implicitly inviting them to join him (20).

(20) *So what are we waiting for?* It's time for our generation-defining public works. *How about stopping climate change before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved in manufacturing and installing solar panels? How about curing all diseases and asking volunteers to track their health data and share their genomes? How about modernizing democracy so everyone can vote online and personalizing education so everyone can learn?*

In both cases of instruction, the directive speech act is applied and the illocutionary force is a call to action to make the world a far better place to live. It denotes a potent desire to induce and encourage others to actively contribute to establishing a more just, sustainable and peaceful society. It highlights the significance of both individual and collective accountability, inspiring people to make certain efforts to bring about change and advance the welfare of society as a whole.

4.2.7. Storytelling

In speeches, storytelling is an interesting technique for effective communication. A well-told story enables the speaker to fascinate the audience, making complicated topics easier to learn and retain. Stories can elicit emotions, which can assist in connecting the listener to the message given. The following passage is Zuckerberg's reflection on his first steps into the technological world namely the launch of Facebook describing it as an unusual journey for a young person full of incredible ideas. The use of the verb 'remember' in parallel structure emphasizes the idea that the events he recalled were quite significant for Zuckerberg. The same structure of syntactic parallelism only this time with the personal pronoun 'we' follows in the next sentences underlining the fact that the speaker wanted to change the world but did not believe that they were the ones who would connect the whole world. Moreover, pointing out the events that took place on that very day with exact places and names makes Zuckerberg's speech more impactful and, thus, humanizes him (21).

(21) *I remember* the night I launched Facebook from my little dorm in Kirkland House. I went to Noch's with my friend KX. *I remember* telling him I was excited to connect the Harvard community but one day someone would connect the whole world. The thing is it never even occurred to me that someone might be us. *We* were just college kids. *We* didn't know anything about that. There were all these big technology companies with resources. I just assumed one of them would do it but this idea was so clear to us that all people want to connect. So, *we* just kept moving forward day by day.

The research indicates that Zuckerberg frequently employs parallel structures in successive sentences to enhance the impact of his speeches. This is a common feature of Zuckerberg's narrative style. For example, in the following passage (22), he employs conditionals in consecutive sentences which reinforces the major message of not only having purpose but also being lucky.

(22) We all know we don't succeed just by having a good idea or working hard. We succeed by being lucky too. If I had to support my family growing up instead of having time to code, if I didn't know I'd be fine if Facebook didn't work out, I wouldn't be standing here today. If we're honest, we all know how much luck we've had.

Incorporating anecdotes and relevant experiences into a speech can contribute to developing a connection with the audience, increasing the likelihood that they will listen carefully and engage with the speaker. In the following passage, (23) Zuckerberg emphasizes the importance of having a purpose and every individual's contribution to the achievement of the purpose. He starts the sentence with a clear meaning that everyone should have a purpose. This sentence is followed by an anecdote where the key meaning is in the janitor's response. The janitor's answer is straight and concise at the same time; it contains a good portion of pride that the person feels doing even a little job of cleaning.

(23) The challenge for our generation is creating a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

One of my favorite stories is when John F. Kennedy visited the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) space center. He saw a janitor carrying a broom and he walked over and asked what he was doing. The janitor responded, "Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon".

In another passage (24), Zuckerberg emphasizes the significance of cultivating an entrepreneurial culture that encourages the rapid testing of new ideas. He presents personal examples of their experiments with various projects, such as games, chat systems, study tools and music players. This demonstrates that Zuckerberg did not succeed on his first try but rather went through trial and error before finding success. He also gives examples of

famous people who endured rejection and failure before becoming successful such as JK Rowling (Joanne Kathleen Rowling is the author of Harry Potter, a seven-volume phantasy series) and Beyonce. These instances highlight the significance of perseverance and a willingness to fail.

The word 'thrives' implies that such a culture is not only good but is also required for success. The phrase 'freedom to fail' is used in the final sentence to summarize the main meaning of the passage. According to the speaker, the greatest triumphs come from taking risks and not being afraid to fail. The use of the superlative degree of the adjective 'great' makes the speech more inspirational (24).

(24) Now, an entrepreneurial culture *thrives* when it's easy to try lots of new ideas. Facebook wasn't the first thing I built. I also built games, chat systems, study tools and music players. I'm not alone. JK Rowling got rejected 12 times before publishing Harry Potter. Even Beyonce had to make hundreds of songs to get Halo. *The greatest successes* come from having the freedom to fail.

Through storytelling, speakers create a memorable and influential message that leaves a long-lasting impression on the audience thus making them act and follow their passion and purpose.

Within the framework of speech act theory storytelling can be considered an assertive speech act that involves intentional communication to convey certain meanings of never giving up, assisting each other, building healthy societies, having a purpose in life and pursuing it by all means.

4.2.8. Recognition and Acknowledgment of Others' Success

Highlighting the accomplishments of others reinforced by their physical presence during the speech serves as a powerful tool for Zuckerberg as due to this strategy the speaker helps the audience push themselves beyond their limits. In this way, as in the case of storytelling, Zuckerberg employs assertive speech acts and provides tangible evidence that seemingly unattainable goals are indeed possible to achieve by sharing the accomplishments of those who have taken risks and gone the extra mile (25).

(25) But I know we can rebuild our communities and start new ones because many of you already are. I met Agnes Igoye, who's graduating today. Where are you, Agnes? She spent her childhood navigating conflict zones in Uganda, and now she trains thousands of law enforcement officers to keep communities safe. I met Kayla Oakley and Niha Jain who are graduating today, too. Stand up. Kayla and Niha started a non-profit that connects people suffering from illnesses with people in their communities willing to help. I met David Razu Aznar who graduated from the Kennedy School today. David, stand up. He's a former city councilor who successfully led the battle to make Mexico City the first Latin American city to pass marriage equality — even before San Francisco. This is my story too.

5. CONCLUSION

The exploration of effective communication techniques and communication components which has always been at the core of the pragmalinguistic approach to various types of discourse aligns with motivational discourse. Motivational discourse serves as a powerful and effective tool to inspire and motivate people to attain their goals via the use of various language techniques and is likely to continue to play an important role in inspiring and motivating individuals in the future. Motivational discourse is defined as a verbal and non-verbal influence on the person to positively change their attitudes, actions and behaviour. Researchers in psychology and linguistics have focused on the use of motivational discourse in a range of fields, including business, sports, sociology, psychology and education. Many questions remain unsolved related to the elements that influence the impact of motivational discourse despite its extensive use. The present research identified the regular pragmalinguistic patterns employed in motivational discourse to form meaningful messages that positively impact people's behaviour and attitudes towards various phenomena. The current study gave useful insights into the pragmatic and linguistic tactics

employed by speakers to energize their audience to achieve their goals by applying Mark Zuckerberg's Harvard speech as an example. We have come to the following conclusions:

- The examination of Mark Zuckerberg's commencement address demonstrates the effectiveness of such strategies as praise, gratitude, humor, audience identification or inclusion strategy, storytelling and recognition of others' success.
- Praise: Throughout his speech, Zuckerberg praises the Harvard graduates for their accomplishments, underlining the hard work demanded to achieve their aims.
- Gratitude: Zuckerberg thanks everyone who assisted him in achieving his goals, including the university, his family and his friends. This technique emphasizes the importance of gratitude in achieving success and encourages graduates to recognize and appreciate the help they have received throughout their lives.
- Humour: Zuckerberg also employs humour as a motivational tool and this strategy makes it easier to engage with the audience and motivate them to aspire to a better life.
- Audience identification: Zuckerberg contrasts his own experiences with those of the graduates', emphasizing the common challenges and obstacles they face. This approach fosters empathy and connection with the audience, allowing them to see themselves in his story and be inspired to pursue their own goals.
- Storytelling: In Zuckerberg's speech, storytelling is used as a powerful motivational tactic. He discusses his journey and he uses his and others' experience, including successes and failures, to demonstrate the importance of tenacity and resilience in achieving success. This technique inspires and motivates graduates to overcome personal challenges and hardships.
- Recognition of others' success: Zuckerberg provides tangible evidence that seemingly unattainable goals are indeed achievable, and this is fulfilled through a recognition strategy by acknowledging others' success who have taken risks and gone the extra mile.
- Within the framework of speech act theory, we can state that expressive, assertive and directive speech acts are prevalent in motivational discourse and it is based on the idea that these interactions are successful at influencing the interlocutors' behavior and attitudes favorably. Motivational speakers aim to inspire and motivate their audience by expressing emotions, projecting confidence and giving explicit instructions. These speech acts have the power to arouse feelings, promote self-belief, and offer helpful advice. They help people change themselves, become more motivated and have better attitudes towards their goals. The employment of expressive, assertive, and directive speech acts in motivational discourse supports an effective and persuasive communication style fostering an atmosphere that is favorable to positive transformation and personal growth.

As motivational discourse evolves, more research will be required to fully comprehend its potential, usefulness, and ways to develop strategies to make it more effective. This research can serve as a background for studying various formats of motivational discourse to understand other techniques and strategies that are used to influence people's attitudes and behaviour. It can further contribute to the studies unfolding in the fields of linguistics, applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics as it helps us understand how meaning is shaped and communicative goals are achieved.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of the English Language N2, Yerevan State University, Armenia has granted approval for this study on 30 August 2023 (Ref. No. 1/4).

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Alsahli, F. S. (2019). Moderating influence of classroom observation on the relationship between motivation, learner autonomy and learning outcomes among Saudi EFL learners. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 8(3), 123–134. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.23.2019.83.123.134>
- APA Dictionary of Psychology. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.apa.org/%20>
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elliot, A. J., & Church, M. A. (1997). A hierarchical model of approach and avoidance achievement motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72(1), 218–232. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.72.1.218>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge: And the discourse on language. Transl. from the French by A M. Sheridan Smith*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Gazetteterrymurphy. (2023). *Mark Zuckerberg's commencement address at Harvard*. *Harvard Gazette*. Retrieved from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2017/05/mark-zuckerbergs-speech-as-written-for-harvards-class-of-2017/>
- Harris, Z. S. (1952). Discourse analysis. *Language*, 28(1), 1-30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/409987>
- Home. (2023). *Cambridge university press & assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/>
- Khan, Z. I., Iftikhar, A., & Ali, G. (2021). Role of motivational speech in influencing learning attitude of Pakistani students. *Journal of Mass Communication Department, Dept of Mass Communication, University of Karachi*, 25(25), 1-27.
- Kryknitska, I. (2020). Language portrait of motivational speaker. *Euromentor Journal, Bucharest*, 9(3), 1-85.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London and New York: Longman.
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Dictionary by Merriam-Webster*. In *Merriam-Webster*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Nistiti, N. U. (2021). Philosophy of language: Pragmatic presupposition in motivational speech within discourse and its relevance of motivation in teaching learning process to reach goals. *Prosody*, 15(2), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.21107/prosodi.v15i2.12185>
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 19, 123-205. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601\(08\)60214-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60214-2)
- Priambada, T., Senowarsito, & Sodiq, J. (2021). *Analysis of speech acts in the motivational speech “Ted talks: The secret of learning a new language*. Paper presented at the Proceeding of English Teaching, Literature and Linguistics (Eternal).
- Ramzan, M., Oteir, I., Khan, M. A., Al-Otaibi, A., & Malik, S. (2023). English learning motivation of ESL learners from ethnic, gender, and cultural perspectives in sustainable development goals. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 12(3), 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v12i3.4840>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. New York: Guilford Publications.
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expression and meaning studies in the theory of speech acts*. England: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherwani, K. A. (2020). A cognitive positive discourse analysis of English motivational speeches. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 29(9s), 4078-4091.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior in: S. Worchel, & W. G. Austin (eds.). *Psychology of intergroup relations*. In (pp. 7-24). Nelson-Hall: Top of Form.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Tien, T. B., & Ngoc, N. T. M. (2022). EFL student learning motivation: A study of classroom-specific factors. *International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 11(2), 71–84. <https://doi.org/10.55493/5019.v11i2.4509>
- Van, D., & Teun, A. (2011). *Discourse studies: A multidisciplinary introduction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.