
ANALYZING ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN F1 DRIVER CARLOS SAINZ'S INTERVIEW

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Abstract:

This study examines the use of illocutionary acts and impression management strategies in interviews with Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz. A qualitative descriptive method with content analysis was applied to interview videos collected from YouTube. The data were transcribed and analyzed using Searle's illocutionary act theory and Jones and Pittman's impression management framework. The findings show that assertive and expressive illocutionary acts dominate the data and are mainly associated with self-promotion and exemplification strategies. These strategies enable Carlos Sainz to construct a professional, competent, and emotionally balanced public image. This study contributes to pragmatics and sports communication by demonstrating how speech acts function as tools of impression management in professional athlete interviews.

Keywords: Illocutionary Acts, Impression Management, Carlos Sainz, Athlete Interviews, Sports Communication.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, professional athletes are no longer evaluated solely based on their performance on the field, but also on how they present themselves to the public. The rapid growth of digital media and social platforms has increased the visibility of athletes, making their words, attitudes, and communication styles constantly observed by fans, sponsors, and the media. As a result, athletes are expected to maintain a consistent and positive self-image to protect their

reputation and ensure career sustainability. Personal branding has therefore become a crucial strategy in professional sports, as it helps athletes build trust, influence public perception, and increase commercial value (Bredikhina et al., 2022).

Communication plays a key role in shaping an athlete's public image. Athletes are not only required to perform well but also to express their thoughts, emotions, and values effectively in interviews and media appearances. According to Doyle et al. (2022), athlete branding through media communication—particularly personal expression and performance-related narratives—significantly influences how fans engage and form perceptions. When athletes' self-presentation aligns with public expectations, it strengthens loyalty and professional relationships. This indicates that communication is not merely spontaneous but functions as a strategic tool in image construction.

From a linguistic perspective, speech acts are central to understanding how communication functions beyond delivering information. Speech acts represent intentional verbal actions that perform specific functions, such as expressing confidence, responsibility, or appreciation. Wijana (2021) emphasizes that speech acts are deliberately produced to influence how listeners interpret messages and respond to them. In high-pressure environments such as Formula 1, where media exposure is intense, every utterance carries potential consequences. A single statement can strengthen public trust or, conversely, damage an athlete's reputation.

This is particularly relevant to illocutionary speech acts, which focus on the speaker's intention behind an utterance. In professional sports interviews, statements such as expressing optimism, acknowledging mistakes, or appreciating team efforts function as strategic actions rather than neutral information. For example, an utterance like “We will come back stronger” serves to reassure fans and stakeholders while projecting resilience and professionalism. Such expressions contribute directly to how athletes construct their self-image in the public eye. The strategic use of language is closely related to the concept of impression management. Goffman (1959) defines impression management as an individual's conscious effort to control how others perceive them. In Formula 1, a sport characterized by global media coverage and continuous storytelling, impression management becomes essential. Drivers are expected to maintain a stable and positive image not only through performance but also through carefully managed communication. Media platforms such as interviews, documentaries, and podcasts play a major role in shaping these narratives. Soble and Lowes (2024) note that storytelling in Formula 1 media helps humanize drivers and strengthens emotional connections with fans.

Compared to other motorsport categories, Formula 1 has a higher level of media intensity and structured communication, including mandatory press conferences and official interviews. One notable platform is the *Beyond the Grid* podcast, which offers in-depth conversations and personal reflections from drivers. This format allows drivers to express their identity more openly, making it a valuable source for analyzing how language is used to construct public image. Bradley (2021) reports that Formula 1's expansion into digital media, including podcasts and streaming platforms, has attracted a younger and more diverse audience, increasing the importance of strategic communication.

Previous studies related to speech acts in Formula 1 have mainly focused on technical communication during races. Darus and Joharry (2023), for example, analyzed Charles Leclerc's team radio communications to examine how speech acts function under time pressure. While their study provides valuable insights into race-related communication, it does not explore how speech acts are used in media contexts to build self-image and public trust. More broadly, research on illocutionary speech acts and impression management has largely focused on political discourse, classroom interactions, or everyday conversations, leaving professional motorsports, especially Formula 1 relatively underexplored.

This gap highlights the scientific novelty of the present study. Unlike previous research, this study examines illocutionary speech acts within media interviews, focusing on how language is strategically used to construct self-image and maintain public trust. By combining speech act theory and impression management, this research offers an interdisciplinary approach that bridges linguistics and communication studies in the context of professional sports.

Carlos Sainz was selected as the subject of this study due to his strong reputation for professional communication. As a Formula 1 driver representing Ferrari, Sainz operates under intense media scrutiny and high expectations. Palermo and Delaine (2023) argue that Formula 1 drivers must align their public communication with team values and sponsor expectations. Moreover, Sainz's appointment as a director of the Grand Prix Drivers' Association (GPDA) in 2025 reflects the trust placed in his communication skills and leadership. His role as a spokesperson further strengthens the relevance of analyzing his speech acts.

Based on the discussion above, the research problem of this study is how illocutionary speech acts are used by a Formula 1 driver to construct self-image and build public trust in media interviews. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts used by Carlos Sainz in the *Beyond the Grid* podcast and to examine how these speech acts contribute to impression management and self-image construction.

manifested in the form of a previous literature review (state of the art) followed by a statement of the scientific novelty of the article.

Citations should be written using a bodynote format such as (Uwuigbe & Ajibolade, 2013), (Wang, 2016), (Muttakin et al., 2015) and relevant to the bibliography/bibliography (recommended using the Mendeley Application).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design with a content analysis orientation to investigate the use of illocutionary acts and impression management strategies in interviews conducted with Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting meaning embedded in naturally occurring verbal data rather than measuring variables statistically. The study seeks to understand how language is strategically employed to construct self-image in media communication, particularly within professional sports contexts.

The methodological orientation of this research is qualitative content analysis. Content analysis allows the researcher to systematically examine verbal data by identifying patterns, categories, and meanings within spoken discourse. This approach is suitable for analyzing interview transcripts because it enables an in-depth interpretation of linguistic features while maintaining sensitivity to context. The analysis is guided by two theoretical frameworks: Searle's (1976) theory of illocutionary acts and Jones and Pittman's (1982) impression management strategies. These frameworks function as analytical lenses for categorizing utterances and interpreting their communicative purposes.

The sampling technique applied in this study is purposive sampling. The data were intentionally selected based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly interviews that provide rich verbal data and reflect Carlos Sainz's public communication across different stages of his career. The primary data consist of eight interview videos featuring Carlos Sainz, published between 2015 and 2025. These interviews include podcast episodes, post-race interviews, and official team media content that are publicly accessible via YouTube.

The selected videos were chosen based on several criteria: (1) the interviews contain extended verbal responses rather than short soundbites, (2) the content reflects professional self-presentation and media interaction, and (3) the interviews represent different phases of Sainz's career to allow for a broader observation of communicative patterns. From these videos, a total of 136 utterances were identified as the units of analysis.

Data collection was conducted using a documentation technique. The researcher retrieved the interview videos from official and credible YouTube channels related to Formula 1 media. Each video was carefully watched and transcribed verbatim to produce accurate written records of Carlos Sainz's utterances. To ensure transcription accuracy, the researcher repeatedly replayed the recordings and cross-checked the transcripts with the original audio. The transcripts served as the primary data source for analysis. Secondary data, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies related to pragmatics,

speech acts, and impression management, were used to support the theoretical framework and interpretation of findings.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. First, the interview transcripts were organized by labeling each utterance based on the interview source and date. The data were then read repeatedly to ensure familiarity and to identify emerging patterns. The analysis was theory-driven. Each utterance was categorized according to Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The same utterances were subsequently analyzed using Jones and Pittman's (1982) impression management strategies, namely self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification, supplication, and intimidation. All coding was conducted by the researcher to maintain consistency across the data. After the coding process, the data were grouped to examine the relationship between illocutionary acts and impression management strategies. The identified patterns were then interpreted to explain how Carlos Sainz uses language to construct and maintain his public image in interview settings.

The analysis was conducted using standard digital tools. Video data were accessed via a personal computer using Google Chrome as the web browser. Transcription and data organization were performed using Microsoft Word, while coding and categorization were managed manually through tables. No specialized qualitative analysis software was used, as the dataset size allowed for detailed manual analysis. The hardware used included a Windows-based laptop and headphones to ensure clarity during transcription.

This methodological framework ensures transparency and replicability, allowing future researchers to apply similar procedures when analyzing speech acts and impression management strategies in media interviews within sports or other professional domains.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This study examines the use of illocutionary acts and impression management strategies in interviews conducted with Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz. Based on the qualitative content analysis of 136 selected utterances, the findings reveal that Sainz strategically employs various types of illocutionary acts to construct and maintain a professional, competent, and relatable public image. These illocutionary acts are closely connected to specific impression management strategies, indicating a deliberate use of language in media interviews.

Illocutionary Acts in Carlos Sainz's Interviews

The analysis shows that assertive illocutionary acts are the most frequently used type across the data. These acts are commonly realized through statements in which Carlos Sainz provides information, explanations, evaluations, and reflections

regarding his performance, team dynamics, and career decisions. By using assertive acts, Sainz positions himself as a knowledgeable and reliable professional, reinforcing his credibility as an elite athlete. This finding aligns with Searle's (1976) view that assertives function to represent the speaker's belief about the truth of a proposition. Expressive illocutionary acts also appear prominently in the data. These acts are used to convey emotions such as gratitude, pride, disappointment, and humility. Expressive acts allow Sainz to present himself as emotionally aware and grounded, particularly when responding to challenging situations such as race setbacks or team transitions. The frequent use of expressives contributes to a more humanized public image, which is essential in contemporary sports media where athletes are expected to demonstrate emotional authenticity.

In contrast, directive and commissive illocutionary acts occur less frequently. Directive acts are mainly used when Sainz indirectly suggests improvements or acknowledges team efforts rather than issuing direct commands. This reflects the collaborative nature of Formula 1 and avoids projecting an authoritarian image. Commissive acts, such as expressing commitment to future goals or team loyalty, are used selectively to signal dedication without overpromising. Declarative **acts** are the least frequent, as interviews rarely provide contexts where Sainz has the institutional authority to enact change through speech alone.

Impression Management Strategies

The findings indicate that self-promotion is the most dominant impression management strategy used by Carlos Sainz. This strategy is primarily realized through assertive illocutionary acts in which he highlights his skills, work ethic, adaptability, and performance consistency. However, the self-promotion observed in the data is often subtle and carefully framed to avoid arrogance. Rather than explicitly praising himself, Sainz frequently contextualizes his achievements within team efforts or learning processes, which strengthens his professional image while maintaining modesty.

Exemplification is another prominent strategy identified in the analysis. Through expressive and assertive acts, Sainz portrays himself as disciplined, responsible, and committed to continuous improvement. This strategy is particularly evident when he discusses preparation, mindset, and long-term career development. Exemplification allows him to project moral integrity and professionalism, qualities that are highly valued in elite sports. Ingratiation appears moderately across the data, often in the form of expressing appreciation toward teammates, engineers, and fans. These utterances help foster a likable and cooperative image, reinforcing positive social relationships within and beyond the team environment. In contrast, supplication is rarely used and typically appears when Sainz acknowledges limitations or external challenges, such as technical issues or unexpected race conditions. This limited use prevents him from appearing weak while still allowing space for vulnerability.

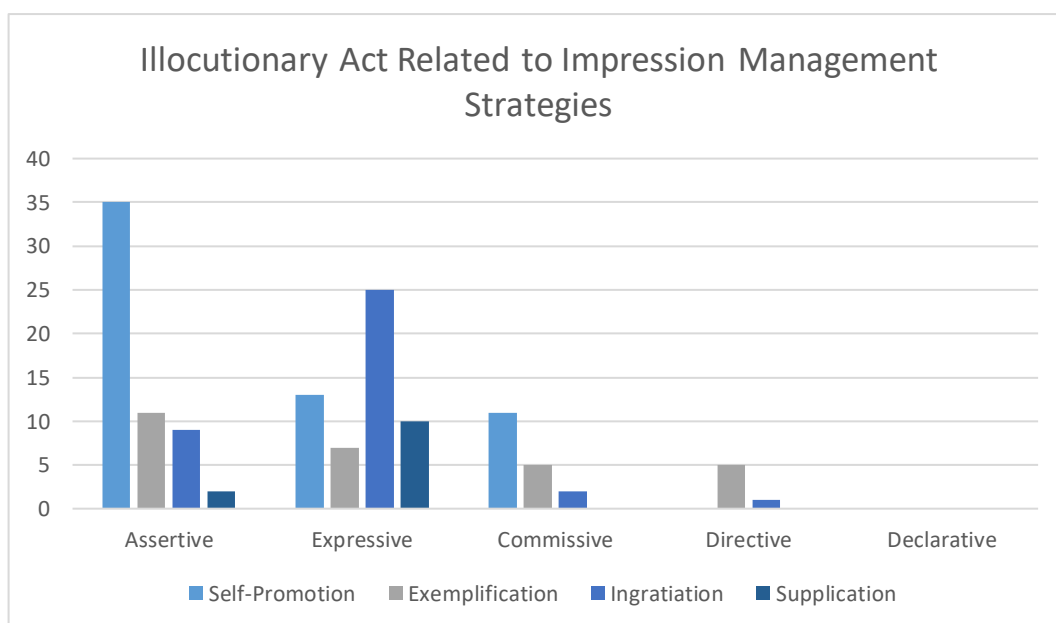
Notably, intimidation is almost entirely absent from the data. This absence suggests that Sainz avoids aggressive or dominant self-presentation, which may be perceived negatively in interview settings. Instead, his communication style emphasizes professionalism, respect, and emotional control.

Relationship Between Illocutionary Acts and Impression Management

The findings demonstrate a strong relationship between specific types of illocutionary acts and impression management strategies. Assertive acts are closely associated with self-promotion and exemplification, enabling Sainz to assert competence while projecting ethical values. Expressive acts are primarily linked to ingratiation and exemplification, contributing to a relatable and emotionally balanced image. The selective use of commissive acts supports self-promotion by signaling commitment without creating unrealistic expectations.

These patterns suggest that Carlos Sainz’s public communication is not spontaneous but strategically constructed. His language use reflects an awareness of media dynamics and audience expectations, indicating that impression management in professional athlete interviews operates through carefully chosen speech acts rather than explicit image claims.

Table 1: Illocutionary act related to Impression Management Strategies



DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that Carlos Sainz predominantly uses assertive and expressive illocutionary acts in interview settings. This supports Searle’s (1976) view that illocutionary acts function as intentional actions used to

convey beliefs, evaluations, and emotional states. Through assertive acts, Sainz presents himself as knowledgeable and professional, while expressive acts allow him to display humility and emotional awareness.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on athlete communication, which suggest that athletes often rely on informative and reflective speech to maintain credibility in media interactions (Bull & Shambrook, 2004; Fairclough, 1995). The frequent use of expressive acts also aligns with Goffman's (1959) concept of self-presentation, where speakers adjust their communication to meet audience expectations.

Regarding impression management, self-promotion emerges as the most dominant strategy, mainly realized through assertive illocutionary acts. This finding supports Jones and Pittman's (1982) framework, which identifies self-promotion as a common strategy in professional contexts. However, the self-promotion observed in this study is generally indirect, reflecting previous findings that athletes tend to balance competence with modesty to maintain a positive public image (Bolino et al., 2008). Exemplification is also evident when Sainz emphasizes discipline and responsibility, supporting earlier research that highlights the importance of moral and professional values in athlete branding (Lebel & Danylchuk, 2012). Overall, the results of this study are consistent with existing theories in pragmatics and impression management, showing that illocutionary acts and impression management strategies work together in shaping an athlete's public image.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the use of illocutionary acts and impression management strategies in interviews conducted with Formula 1 driver Carlos Sainz. The research objectives were achieved by systematically identifying and categorizing 136 utterances using Searle's (1976) theory of illocutionary acts and Jones and Pittman's (1982) impression management framework.

The findings reveal that assertive and expressive illocutionary acts dominate Sainz's interview discourse, reflecting his effort to present himself as competent, professional, and emotionally grounded. These illocutionary acts are closely associated with self-promotion and exemplification strategies, indicating that language functions as a key tool in constructing and maintaining a positive public image. The selective and minimal use of supplication, along with the absence of intimidation, further highlights a communication style that prioritizes professionalism and social acceptability.

In conclusion, this research demonstrates that impression management in professional athlete interviews is achieved through strategic linguistic choices rather than explicit self-claims. By integrating pragmatic analysis with impression management theory, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how athletes use language to shape public perception. The findings also offer insights for future research on sports communication, media discourse, and identity construction in professional contexts.

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