Article

Governance in the Digital Sphere: A Speech Act Analysis of Presidential State of the Nation Addresses

Mark Stephen N. Ybañez[1], Maricel P. Punzalan[2], Ivy F. Amante[2], Gay Emelyn L. Lariosa [2], Jennifer V. Castillano [2], and Rovy M. Banguis [2]

[1]National Transmission Corporation, [2]College of Arts and Sciences, Mindanao State University-Buug

Correspondence: markstephen074@gmail.com

Abstract

As technology continues to shape the modern world, political speeches are no longer confined to podiums but are shared and have far-reaching consequences in the online world. This research analyzes the language of Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) to understand the speech acts within them and to show how political power is exercised through language in digitally mediated contexts. It is based on speech act theory and employs a qualitative-descriptive design, analyzing the SONAs to identify communicative functions and patterns of language use to reveal linguistic governance. The analysis brought to light seven speech acts: Assertive, Directive, Commissive, Expressive, Declarative, Quotational, and Poetic. Assertive Acts were most prevalent during the 2019 SONA with a total of 68 occurrences, followed by other forms of lesser prominence such as Commissive (n=33), Directive (n=21), Expressive (n=20), with even lower counts of Declarative (n=3), Quotational (n=4), and Poetic (n=1). Observing the 2020 SONA also shows prominence of Assertive Acts (n=84). Notable were also instances of Directive (n=40), and other lesser forms such as Commissive (n=15), Expressive (n=16), Declarative (n=6), Quotational (n=1), and Poetic (n=1). The prominence of both assertive and directive types indicates the president's focus on performative governance: commanding political power, enforcing state narratives and shaping public feelings through speeches. Given that these addresses are issued and consumed extensively online, their rhetorical techniques enhance digital governance through steering public discourse and the interpretation of policies, creating a collective regard towards them. This highlights the importance of speech acts in analyzing political language as a tool for governing within the digitally connected public sphere

Keywords: digital sphere, governance, political speeches, speech act analysis, state of the nation address

Introduction

Language transcends beyond the function of a vehicle for transmitting messages because it may also be used to mold society, disseminate beliefs, and impose power. In politics, language is a weapon for gaining control, managing government functions, and exercising authority (Devanadera & Alieto, 2019). The speech act theory, which comes from pragmatics, is a solid framework for looking into the impact of an utterance, such as stating, commanding, promising, and expressing, in relation to politics (Subramanian et al., 2019).

In recent years, discourse surrounding politics has evolved due to online communities transforming political dialogue into a digital public sphere. Presidential addresses were once confined to formal venues; nevertheless, they are now frequently disseminated on social media, facilitating rapid analysis, reinterpretation, and engagement. The digital realm facilitates political discourse and the exchange of innovative ideas (Bossetta, 2019; Reuters, 2025).

The Philippines is one of the most notable examples of this phenomenon's global impact. Political offline to online transitions, in relation to hostility and Duterte's SONAs, have resulted in increased animosity and violence. President Duterte gave the 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation addresses. He sparked impassioned and divisive debates during his SONAs, transcending social media and mainstream media, where discussions about democracy, governance, policy, and other pertinent issues were rampant (Wikipedia, 2019; 2020; Reuters, 2025).

The shifts in public perception, especially regarding government reform or pandemic response legislation, have been profound. With regard to public discourse, opinion, legislative action, and political dialogue, all seemed to fall under the influence of Duterte's infrastructure, public health, and order narratives (Wikipedia, 2019; 2020). When discussing the emerging phenomenon of disinformation and digital governance, the Philippines deserves recognition as an active participant. While crossing borders, things such as language must be handled with care (Reuters, 2025; Wikipedia, Fake news, 2025).

This study explores the speech acts embedded in the Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte's 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) to reveal how political language performs acts of governance in both traditional and online public arenas. Grounded in John Searle's speech-act theory and complemented by qualitative discourse analysis, the project first sorts the utterances in those speeches according to their primary communicative function. It then asks which categories-locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary- dominate and how they collaborate to claim authority, rally supporters, and frame key policy narratives to the voting and viewing

public. By directing attention to the digitally circulated texts, the inquiry fills a significant gap in the literature; earlier work has shown Duterte's lyricism and ideology, yet has paid limited attention to speech acts that, once posted online, circulate far beyond the plenary hall (Devanadera & Alieto, 2019; Calvo, 2024). Ultimately, the findings should serve linguists, political scientists, media educators, and civic stakeholders, deepening their collective understanding of how democratic discourse functions in an era shaped by digital politics.

Speech Act Theory in the Digital Sphere

Speech Act Theory argues that people do more with words than describe the world; they also assert, command, promise, question, and perform other actions whenever they speak or write (discourse analyzer, 2024). Unlike truth-conditional models that equate meaning with facts about states of affairs, this approach centers on what the speaker intends in a given situation and the effects intended meaning produces for the audience. This insight is especially valuable when analysts study political talk. Searle (1969; 2015) extended the idea by distinguishing five core act types-representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations-each marked by a distinct illocutionary force, a particular direction of fit between word and world, and specified sincerity conditions, so that researchers can map speaker plans and listener reactions with greater precision (Acheoah, 2017). By grouping utterances under these headings, scholars gain a more precise vocabulary for exploring how politicians signal authority, sway constituencies, position opponents, or express emotions, and tracing those signals' ripple effects through public conversation.

Early work examined speech acts primarily in detached texts. However, later researchers, especially Clark (1996), emphasized that words come alive only when they enter the joint activity of social interaction and that insight now guides many studies of digital dialogue. In settings like Facebook and Twitter, for example, the hardware and software affordances not only permit speech but also constrain, amplify, or distort it; keyboards shape length and rarity of edits, algorithms regulate visibility, emojis convey tone, and retweets turn private pledges into public commitments, so the medium actively co-authors meaning alongside the human users (Jegede, 2024).

Digital platforms have amplified the strategic use of speech acts in contemporary politics. Online discourse now serves as a stage where elected officials engineer metaphors, pointed deixis, and other rhetorical moves to project identity, bond with digital publics, and guide shifting moods (Xu, 2015; Dimaculangan, 2018). President Duterte's online State of the Nation address, for example, fuses formal text with spontaneous Tagalog-English ad-libs, targeting both elite viewers and everyday

voters; that blend exemplifies a governance style made possible by social media (Dimaculangan, 2018). Research also indicates that speech acts work differently online: requests, apologies, and compliments become more or less formal depending on whether they appear in a public feed or a private message, so politicians tailor wording to each platform's etiquette (Jegede, 2024). Viewed through this lens of digital pragmatics, the language of politics is not fixed but calibrated both for audience and for the performative logic that each forum invites.

Discourse Analysis in the Digital Sphere of Political Communication

Political discourse analysis is now essential for exploring governance's rhetorical and ideological undercurrents, particularly in online environments. Once a speech is posted, its meaning is collectively co-crafted as viewers respond, remix, and debate the content across competing platforms.

In the Philippines, Remorosa (2018) drew on critical discourse techniques to study thirty speeches by President Rodrigo Duterte, sampling material from archived records and real-time feeds. She tracked pronoun shifts, transitivity patterns, and changing verb tenses, finding that these choices quietly bolster authority and perform leadership on-screen and in public life. Ancho and colleagues 2020 echo this insight, arguing that presidential language is crafted to trigger quick emotional bonds among varied listener groups. The digital arena, where each address is reposted and reframed, forces every rhetorical turn to speak at once to specialists, casual voters, and activists, heightening the stakes of clarity, persuasion, and call to action.

President Rodrigo Duterte consistently mixes formal English, everyday Tagalog, and on-the-spot asides in his online posts and videos, a linguistic blend intended to reach Filipinos of all backgrounds (Dimaculangan, 2018). This code-switching illustrates how digital speech acts are crafted with specific audiences and browsing habits in mind. However, delivering and receiving words through screens adds fresh layers of difficulty. Therefore, Subramanian, Cohn, and Baldwin (2019) urge researchers to build richer statistical models of speech-act patterns, showing that such computational tools can sharpen our grasp of online rhetoric. Their findings lend weight to annotation schemes that track speaker intent, target publics, and the peculiar traits of each platform.

The technical structure of social media itself magnifies every political word. Bossetta (2018) points out that platform features file utterances for later access, let algorithms lift them to the top of feeds, and expose them to new frames of meaning so that leaders can curate both content and digital persona. In this environment, performative governance thrives because a single phrase can express policy while

influencing mood and granting authority—online forums further pressure speakers to adjust on the fly. Ilyas and Khushi (2012) noticed this early when they studied Facebook status updates, observing that even informal posts carry context-sensitive functions, a lesson now vital for examining formal political talk found elsewhere on the internet.

A close reading of Duterte's 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Addresses shows that each speech acts as a tool for announcing policy and a stage for digital governance. These insights deepen our grasp of how linguistic choices build political authority and how that authority is performed online in today's democratic settings.

Methodology

This study took a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the digital spread and rhetorical form of President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) from 2019 to 2020. Recognizing that political speech now circulates far beyond the original stage, the analysis looks at how performative language works in these addresses when broadcast live, stored in online archives, and reshaped by users across social media platforms.

The two State of the Nation Addresses chosen for this study were picked because they are recent, widely available online, and speak directly to the current political climate. The 2019 and 2020 speeches mark the middle and later parts of President Rodrigo Duterte's term and were delivered at moments when public interest and media scrutiny were unusually high. Uploads on YouTube, shares on Facebook, and postings on official government pages meant that millions of citizens engaged with the texts in real time, creating a rich field to observe how political speech moves and changes in digital space. Therefore, the investigation confines itself to these two episodes rather than attempting a larger quantitative roll-up of all SONAs. This limitation honors its purpose of offering careful, scene-by-scene qualitative reading instead of surface-level counting. The addresses also occur at key crossroads in Duterte's rule, so their language nicely illustrates continuity and change in the administration's message. At the same time, their heavy online circulation turns them into ready-made laboratories for watching performative talk at work. Concentrating on just these high-profile files keeps the project manageable. However, it still roots the conclusions in the pressing political conversation that unfolded on Philippine social media during the pandemic and after, thus marrying timeliness with methodological discipline.

Because the dataset is small, it is possible to analyze each instance in detail, revealing how speech acts, audience response, and online sharing interact clearly and theoretically consistently.

This study centered on Speech Act Theory, first outlined by Searle in 1969 and later adapted to digital settings by Ilyas and Khushi in 2012. Using that lens, the authors sorted President Duterte's comments into five main acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The goal was to look beyond grammar and ask what each act was meant to achieve and how it was received online.

The researchers conducted a content analysis of the full transcripts for the 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Address (SONA) to answer these questions. They gathered the texts from official government websites and trusted news outlets to ensure reliability. Each address was read several times, with special attention given to lines that matched the speech-act categories. A detailed coding sheet was then used to record the findings, helping the team track, compare, and interpret how each line functioned.

In the interest of scholarly rigor, the investigation adhered to core ethical tenets such as confidentiality, non-maleficence, and justice. Although the materials were publicly accessible, precautions were taken to prevent misrepresentation or excessively partisan readings. Throughout the analysis, the team engaged in critical reflexivity, balancing theory, method, and situational context in every interpretative step. By producing rich, detailed descriptions and coding each speech act according to its pragmatic role, the authors rendered qualitative findings illuminating Duterte's rhetorical arsenal in online politics. The report foregrounded credibility, neutrality, and consistency, thus advancing the understanding of how linguistic choices enact political authority in the digital public sphere.

Results

Table 1 presents the frequency and classification of speech acts in President Rodrigo Duterte's State of the Nation Addresses for 2019 and 2020. Available on YouTube, Facebook, and official government pages, these videos are rich evidence of how he performs and mediates political authority in today's online public sphere (Bossetta, 2018). Guided by Speech Act Theory, the study maps the illocutionary force of his remarks. It shows that his language does more than inform-it commands; it commits, expresses, and steadily molds public perception within the framework of digital governance (Searle, 2015).

Table 1. Frequency and Categorization of Speech Acts

Speech Act	2019 SONA	2020 SONA	Total	Percentage
Assertive	68	84	152	48.562%
Directive	21	40	61	19.490%
Commissive	33	15	48	15.335%
Expressive	20	16	36	11.502%
Declarative	3	6	9	2.875%
Quotations	4	1	5	1.597%
Poetic Verse	1	1	2	0.639%
Total	**150**	**163**	**313**	**100%**

The analysis reveals that assertive speech acts dominated both years, rising from forty-seven occurrences in 2019 to eighty-four in 2020. Such frequency highlights the President's steady commitment to factual statements and straightforward wording-an approach that builds transparency and credibility in an online arena that never stops watching (Dimaculangan, 2018). The number of directives moves also grew, climbing from twenty-three in 2019 to forty in 2020, marking a signature authoritative tone used to issue orders, make pleas, or otherwise steer the public dialogue-oriented (Remorosa, 2018).

Promissory acts, denoting explicit future commitments, declined, dropping from twenty-seven instances in 2019 to only fifteen in 2020. By contrast, expressive gestures, neutral expressions, and emotive remarks increased from nine to sixteen, signaling that affect remains important for captivating in-person crowds and social media viewers (Remorosa, 2018). Declarative moves-quotations and even poetry-appeared rarely, suggesting that the president's addresses valued practical governance over ceremonial flourish or literary craft.

In online politics, a tweet or post does not fade once published; it lingers, replays, is questioned, and remixed by others (Subramanian, Cohn, & Baldwin, 2019). President Duterte's frequent use of bold demands and commands thus appears less spontaneous and more like an effort to steer the story and secure the legitimacy of his policies in the crowded digital space (Bossetta, 2018). Because of this, the patterns shown in Table 1 help clarify how such utterances work as fundamental governance tools when politics happens online.

Assertive Act

The passage demonstrates how President Duterte's State of the Nation Address relies heavily on Assertive Acts, especially the act of reporting, as a core rhetorical move. When he says, "*Over 4.3 million poor families benefited from the Pantawid Pamilya . . . Public utility drivers were assisted through the Pantawid Pasada Program,*" he offers a

straightforward account of major social-welfare projects, including those in education, health care, and cash subsidies. Through this style of assertive speech, he informs viewers, reinforces a sense of achievement, and claims legitimacy for the administration's actions. These assertions do more than describe; they also perform an essential governance function. In the traditional setting of a live delivery before Congress, such statements meet a constitutional obligation of public accountability. Once delivered online, however, streamed in real time and shared on countless feeds, the same assertions acquire a far-reaching, almost theatrical effect.

Political leaders use language to shape public talk, build official stories, and build credibility when criticism mounts (Bossetta, 2018; Searle, 2015). The phrase, there are complaints that some drivers did not receive any assistance at all, followed quickly by, "*I have directed the DSWD and DILG to look into this*," reveals a fine blend of Assertive and Directive speech acts, showing both responsiveness to citizens and a careful grip on the narrative.

Across these settings, political talk does more than report what is happening; it frames experience, steers public feeling, and marks the speaker as the one in charge. Online, each comment, like, and retweet magnifies the effect, turning top-down announcements into fast-moving, collective dialogue that redefines governance communication (Subramanian, Cohn, & Baldwin, 2019). The excerpt illustrates this dynamic: Duterte pairs factual updates with forward-looking command, presenting himself as an informant and an active policy architect in the eyes of a wired electorate.

Directive Act

When President Duterte tells his secretaries to "*develop an integrated program and implementation mechanism to ensure that the government fully utilizes these TV frequencies through the facilities of PTV4 for the utmost benefit of the Filipino people,*" he is issuing a direction. Scholars of language, especially those drawn to Speech Act Theory, would classify this as a Directive Speech Act because the wording aims to get someone to do something (Searle, 2015). In practical terms, the phrase is a command that brings three cabinet heads together, urging them to pool resources and work fast. By doing so, the President shows who is in charge and kick-starts a cross-agency effort meant to improve public broadcasting. In the formal setting of a State of the Nation Address, where lawmakers and top officials sit in full view, the directive acts like a performative promise-it tells the audience a plan and simultaneously makes the plan begin. The reach is much larger than the room because the event is later streamed, shared, and saved on sites like YouTube, Facebook, and major news pages.

Modern citizens can listen to a presidential order, watch how it is implemented, respond on social media, and then pass judgment on its success or failure across multiple digital channels (Bossetta, 2018).

Inside the executive office, such speech acts serve a dual purpose. They issue commands and, simultaneously, signal a willing openness: Look, we are transparent and listening. When Duterte urged using PTV4's online platforms to broaden public access to official broadcasts, he appealed to two of the loudest slogans in twenty-first-century governance: digital inclusion and service to the people. By doing so, he aimed to kick-start inter-agency collaboration and project an administration that keeps up with technology, thereby tightening its grip on power while inviting citizens to trust it (Subramanian, Cohn, & Baldwin, 2019).

Therefore, orders like this do more than move bureaucrats in both offline town halls and online feeds. They publicly reassert the state's promise to protect the public good through open, easy-to-reach information channels.

Commissive Act

The statement, "*Tell us now if you cannot improve on it because I will work by December. I have two years. The next two years will be spent improving this country's telecommunications without you. I will find a way. I will talk to Congress and find a way to do it*," offers a clear example of a commissive speech act. In it, President Duterte is pledging to shore up the nation's telecommunications system, whether or not private companies join the effort. Speech Act Theory classifies this as a commissive because the speaker signals an intention to carry out a task in the future (Searle, 2015). Such utterances go beyond flourish; they matter for governance because they demonstrate executive will and carve out a policy path. Traditionally, proclamations made during the State of the Nation Address (SONA) aim to reassure lawmakers and interest groups, showing that the President is set to move authoritatively. However, in the digital age, when the SONA is streamed live, clipped into news banners, and passed around social feeds, the force of these commissive acts travels much farther.

Once transmitted through these channels, the promise is no longer an isolated statement; it invites ongoing scrutiny, debate, and the demand for accountability (Bossetta, 2018).

Duterte's commitment operates like a performative utterance with clear institutional weight. By framing himself as the restless catalyst of reform, he communicates urgency and open dissatisfaction with current arrangements, while subtly corralling lawmakers into a shared responsibility for enacting change. When the utterance crosses screens worldwide, it pushes the mechanics of governance

beyond committee rooms and press conferences into everyday public conversation. Subramamian et al. (2019) remind us that politics online is dialectical. A commissive promise, therefore, is archived, remixed, counter-archived, and perennially rated by citizens, journalists, and rival authorities. Duterte's rhetoric thus operates not just as a signal of intent; it is a constituent element of government. It frames the policy agenda, props legislative momentum, and steers popular judgment. Across old and new media, therefore, words alone become tools of leadership, molds of accountability, and currencies of sustained authority.

Expressive Act

In the passage from President Rodrigo Duterte's Third State of the Nation Address, two kinds of speech acts- an expressive and a commissive- combine to reveal his frustration and publicly commit him to acting on it. Expressive speech reveals emotion, while commissive speech pledges the speaker to a future course of action. In ordinary terms, the President combines a complaint about slow cellular service with a direct pledge to hold the companies accountable, using a tone that leaves little doubt about his intent.

Duterte's words begin with a conversational, almost exasperated, preamble: "*Alam mo itong... I will be straight, suggesting impatience rather than formal rhetoric. He quickly names the two dominant telecom firms, Smart and Globe, and recalls that, year after year, their only reply has been the party cannot be reached.*" Anger colors his voice when he asks, "*nasaan pala pumunta yung y** na yon?*" Presumably, he means the unidentified technician or executive whose absence has delayed service improvements.

After that rhetorical question, the tone shifts. He reminds listeners that the Philippines is a sovereign republic and warns the companies that the patience of the Filipino people is reaching its limit. He says he will voice the public demand for reliable communications, implying that he sees himself as the country's spokesperson in this drama. Finally, he closes with a thinly veiled threat: You might not want what I intend to do with you. The qualifying might not soften the statement, but it does not erase its force.

The speaker begins by reminding listeners that the Philippines is a sovereign republic, a point that carries legal and moral weight. He then declares that public patience is nearly exhausted and offers himself as the voice of that collective anger. This rhetorical move consolidates his authority and links him personally to everyday frustrations. His choice of vernacular expletives, far from isolating educated audiences, actually deepens credibility because it echoes the register many Filipinos use in private (Remorosa, 2018). Duterte, therefore, performs two distinct speech acts

at once: an expressive one, where he visibly channels citizens' annoyance with erratic internet service, and a commissive one, where he warns the providers, that failure will invite unwanted consequences. He becomes a self-appointed guarantor of national sovereignty, ready to escalate from words to policy if the carriers do not meet basic service standards.

According to Searle (2015), commissive acts bind the speaker to undertake something in the future. Duterte uses that binding force here as a warning and a political declaration.

In the conventional setting of the SONA, this commitment reinforces the image of a President willing to confront corporate weak spots. Nevertheless, the effect grows sharper once the address is streamed live, sliced into clips, and reposted. Viewers are then drawn into comments, shareable memes, and threaded debates that swirl across Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok, each adding volume to the original speech act (Bossetta, 2018). Online, performative utterances thus do two jobs: they assert authority and, at the same time, temper the public's moods through the rhythms of praise and outrage. As Subramanian, Cohn, and Baldwin (2019) point out, digital political talk unfolds in the spotlight of feeds, where statements that express emotion also make promises and push policy forward. In that setting, Duterte's remark is a pumped-up shout and a governance lever, showing how words in print and pixels can summon loyalty, hold power accountable, and spin a national story.

Declarative Act

President Rodrigo Duterte's crisp remark *"Buhay muna, bago ang lahat"*, a Tagalog phrase that translates as *"Life first, before everything else"*, signals that public safety must outrank any other concern a nation may face. Though only four words long, the line carries much political and social weight and thus operates as a Declarative Speech Act. According to Speech Act Theory, such formulaic statements are not mere descriptions; they enact change simply by being spoken (Searle, 2015). With that assertion, Duterte places the protection of human life at the center of policy, a move that becomes especially urgent in extraordinary moments like the COVID-19 pandemic. Its performative force registers simultaneously in both the familiar halls of government and the sprawling online arena. Inside the formal setting of the State of the Nation Address, the statement reorders priorities and publicly renews the executive's moral bond with citizens. By putting survival above economic growth or partisan gain, the President announces a policy pivot and shows a willingness to shoulder ultimate responsibility. Stated before lawmakers and carried live on national

television, the line affirms his authority and sets a clear, binding standard for the administration.

Once transmitted across social feeds—Facebook livestreams, YouTube shorts, Twitter strings—a single pronouncement acquires extraordinary momentum. It morphs into a viral tagline, a makeshift scorecard, and a standard by which observers measure every subsequent move made by the speaker. Bossetta (2018) reminds us that digital political speech no longer expires when the microphone is switched off; it becomes searchable, remixable, and subject to reinterpretation by countless users. Consequently, Duterte's claim operates beyond the ceremonial bounds of a Cabinet meeting: it doubles as a badge of online authority and a justification for specific policies. Such a discursive strategy lays bare the calculated marriage of feeling, governance, and personal leadership. Subramanian, Cohn, and Baldwin (2019) contend that speech acts streamed through screens are now engineered to stir emotion and invite public interaction simultaneously. By declaring "Buhay muna, bago ang lahat," the President nets a wave of national sympathy and an implicit defense of his agenda, imagining himself as the nation's guardian while realigning official priorities with popular sentiment.

Taken together, the statement does more than inform; it reshapes the government's to-do list, signals the president's direction, and rallies citizens around a common purpose, showing that today, words spoken online carry as much weight in crafting policy as they do in shaping the image of those in power.

Quotation

In his 2020 State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Rodrigo Duterte cited a powerful statement from former President Ramon Magsaysay, saying:

"We need men of integrity and faith like Rizal and del Pilar, men of action like Bonifacio, men of inflexible patriotism like Mabini. We need their zeal, self-reliance, capacity for work, devotion to service, and ability to lose themselves in the common cause of building a nation. If we allow greed, self-interest, and ambition to rule us, then as stated by one prominent physician, we will be left with nothing better than the lesser evil instead of the greater good."

Quotation- understood as the practice of citing phrases that one did not originate- operates simultaneously as a rhetorical flourish and a political maneuver. When Duterte invokes Magsaysay, he borrows the older statesman's credibility and subtly announces that he will pursue similar populist principles. In this setting, the

borrowed line functions as an indirect Declarative Act, revealing his hopes for the nation even though he does not spell them out in his vocabulary.

In formal political discourse, citing a former president is usually a way to prompt audiences to think deeply and to restate core national values. When a current leader mentions an esteemed predecessor during a prime-time speech, the move subtly links contemporary policy to a lineage of revered statesmanship, thereby fostering continuity, national pride, and respect for institutions (Searle 2015). Online, though, the impact multiplies almost instantly. The moment the clip is streamed on Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, it morphs into a digital artifact-one that can be clipped, captioned, and remixed by users around the globe. Bossetta (2018) points out that in the networked environment, the exchange is not one-way; interactive audiences, nudged by algorithms, redistribute memorable phrases to circles the original speaker never imagined. A single, well-timed salute to patriotism can thus travel far, spark public debate, and set implicit benchmarks for how officials should behave.

By plainly crediting the saying to Magsaysay, Duterte ties himself to that older president's goodwill, a classic move speakers have long used in face-to-face rallies and online posts. With the reference in place, he can gently call out problems like graft and personal gain while still looking like the patriot who puts national cohesion and public service first. Subramanian, Cohn, and Baldwin (2019) remind us that when words travel online, they keep acting long after they are first spoken, showing up in new conversations and slowly shaping how people judge a leader's story as months or years roll by. Quoting Magsaysay lets Duterte's team stitch past ideals to present politics, borrow his seen-as-good character, and push their message far and wide across screens and feeds.

Poetic Verse

In his 2020 State of the Nation Address, President Rodrigo Duterte delivered a poignant statement:

"Life that is lost is lost forever. Courses that are not substantial can be supplemented. Education that is delayed can be recovered."

This excerpt exemplifies what linguists call an Expressive Speech Act; the speaker is not merely imparting facts but also sharing a heartfelt opinion about the value of life and the country's condition in a crisis. The President openly acknowledges that death cannot be undone, yet pairs that somber truth with reassurance that education and other public services may be restored. In effect, he mourns the loss of

individuals while simultaneously planting hope and reminding listeners of the nation's resilience. Searle (2015) points out that expressive acts reveal feelings such as sorrow, gratitude, or encouragement, which is why they matter so much when leaders speak during emergencies. Situated in the familiar arena of the SONA, this remark helps to humanize the overall performance of governance by showing that officials also grieve. Empathy frequently lends legitimacy to difficult decisions, especially in turbulent times, and the President's formal delivery signals to citizens which priorities are moral and practical.

Online, a political message acquires new layers of meaning and a larger audience. Once uploaded to YouTube, tweeted, or reposted on a messenger group, a leader's words stop being private and enter an almost constant, looping public conversation. As Bossetta (2018) observes, digital political talk behaves less like a monologue and more like interactive content open to immediate comment, remix, and mood boost. Likes, shares, and trending hashtags can turn an expression of grief or hope into a rallying cry, a point of friction, or simply the following item in a scrolling feed. During a global pandemic, such emotionally charged nuggets perform a dual task: they inform citizens and help steady the psychic ground underneath them. Subramanian, Cohn, and Baldwin (2019) argue that communicators in these crowded arenas must weave together credibility and feeling if they hope to be heard. Expressive gestures thus help govern by steering public mood, framing stories of endurance, and quietly renewing trust in leaders even when the crowd is noisy and split. In this light, a few carefully chosen words can familiarly wield authority while sounding like a peer-to-peer reassurance delivered through a smartphone.

Discussions

Drawing on Searle's Speech Act Theory and grounded in qualitative discourse analysis, this study investigates how President Rodrigo Duterte's 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) communicate political meaning. The examination shows that language in these addresses works as a strategic tool for governing. Each type of speech act-making claims, issuing directions, asking questions, and the rest-has its part in building a portrait of leadership, shaping public opinion, and projecting institutional authority, both in the halls of Congress and on the digital platforms where the speeches are streamed, reshared, and contested.

Assertive acts emerge as the dominant mode on these occasions. Because assertives tie the speaker to the truth of what is said, they routinely serve to report on accomplishments, highlight national problems, and outline policy paths. By citing gains in health care or detailing highway projects, Duterte positions himself as the

chief reference point for state data. In the face-to-face setting, such utterances echo the constitutional principle of accountability. Online, though, they take on a life of their own; they circulate in headlines, become targets for fact-checkers, and are recut into memes, often turning into measures of the support or criticism a policy or a leader can attract (Bossetta, 2018; Searle, 2015).

Duterte frequently relied on Directive Acts to issue orders, appeals, and clear instructions to government offices and ordinary citizens. Calls for the death penalty or orders for the National Bureau of Investigation to investigate specific crimes were designed to translate executive intent into immediate bureaucratic movement. In a conventional setting, these commands would generate a formal follow-up. However, the digital age multiplies their reach, pushing them through livestreams, social media posts, and newspaper headlines that citizens analyze in real time (Subramanian, Cohn, & Baldwin, 2019). The public and monitoring organizations gain both a yardstick for evaluation and a new avenue for exerting pressure on the state. The performative character of the orders thus collides with external supervision, deepening the institutional demand for action.

Commissive Acts of the Duterte presidency show the power of performative language even more plainly, as they promise future courses of action in high-stakes, emotionally vivid framing. Threats against corrupt officials or vows to eradicate crime bind the Executive in a way that technical speech does not, publicly sketching the boundary between resolve and indecision. Once such proclamations are recited before cameras and swiftly uploaded online, they become ad hoc standards of political accountability, inviting spectators to measure the distance between intention and outcome. Because digital platforms never fully erase the record, each promise casts a long shadow of expectation that the President must either honor or explain away, thereby structuring the rhythm of subsequent policy and the ongoing dialogue between ruler and ruled.

Expressive acts show how the President emotionally tunes in to his audience. Duterte usually opens a speech with greetings, thanks, and feelings that range from anger to genuine approval. These remarks make him seem more human and try to establish a quick, heartfelt link with ordinary listeners. Online, such emotional starters are easy to cut, share, and spread across platforms, where the mood of a clip often matters more than the facts in it (Remorosa, 2018).

Declarative acts appear less often yet carry heavy institutional weight. They include pronouncements that change things simply by being stated, for example, a new policy line or an order that shifts how agencies work. Within governance, such words can create fresh precedents or give formal status to plans that had sat in draft.

Once spoken, they settle into the public record and national conversation, lodging themselves in digital archives, press releases, and subsequent congressional debates.

Duterte also turns to quotations as a rhetorical tool, often invoking historical leaders like President Ramon Magsaysay. By doing so, he adds moral heft to his words and positions himself within a lineage most Filipinos respect. The citation acts like an indirect speech act; it illustrates an argument while quietly endorsing the values of the cited source. These pulled quotes circulate online, shaping the public's symbolic picture of how his administration sees governance (Ilyas & Khushi, 2012).

Poetic verses appear less often, yet when they do, they show the President's knack for metaphor and emotion. Short, lyrical thoughts on life, loss, or nationhood create a rhythmic pause that softens or sharpens his main point. Once posted online, such lines quickly morph into memes and captions, spreading their emotional weight far beyond the original audience.

The analysis shows that Duterte's speaking style sits squarely between traditional government practice and the lively arena of online cultural exchange. His utterances operate on two levels: they give orders, rally supporters, convey feelings, and at the same time sketch the moral discussion the country is having with itself. In a world where messages spread almost instantly, his words move well past the official podium; they echo through posts, replies, shares, and hashtags, turning language into an ongoing instrument of leadership and public scrutiny.

Conclusions

This study finds that President Rodrigo Duterte built his 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Addresses around two dominant speech acts-Assertive and Directive-almost as if using a playbook that privileges authority and command. Assertive speech did the work of reporting what the government had done and claiming specific facts. In contrast, Directive speech showcased the President giving orders and expecting agencies to comply, acting as governing tools in formal legislative halls and fast-moving online spaces. The occasional appearance of Commissive, Expressive, Declarative, Quotation, and Poetic acts only reminds us that promise, feeling, symbolism, and appeals to history are always lurking in the background of his address. In summary, these utterances did more than inform; they reached the crowd, stirred emotion, reinforced the weight of the office, and shaped what people talked about the moment the words were spoken. By reading political speech through speech-act theory and pairing it with an analysis of digital channels, the project explains how language becomes a rulebook for governing in today's online world. In practical terms, it plugs a hole in Filipino linguistics, charts how a President talks, and hands future

scholars a fresh map to follow as media platforms keep changing. Future work could compare different presidencies to see how rhetoric has changed, examine how online audiences react in real time, or pair text and image analysis to show how words and visuals create the feel of authority.

References

[1] Acheoah, E. (2017). Illocutionary and sincerity conditions in speech act theory. Journal of Pragmatics, 114, 13–26.

[2] Ancho, I. V., Calimbahin, C. D., Rivera, M. J., & Tina, R. F. (2020). Education and the nation-state: An analysis of Philippine presidential speeches. Journal of Critical Inquiry, 9(1), 10–20.

[3] Bossetta, M. (2018). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. election. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 95(2), 471–496. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699018763307

[4] Bossetta, M. (2019). The digital architectures of social media: Comparing political campaigning on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat in the 2016 U.S. election. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/abs/1905.07856

[5] Calvo, C. (2024). Voices of governance: A critical discourse analysis of President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's political speeches. Frontline Social Sciences and History Journal, 4(7), 11–19.

[6] Clark, H. H. (1996). Using language. Cambridge University Press.

[7] Devanadera, A. C., & Alieto, E. (2019). Speech act analysis of Duterte's commemorative speeches. Scientific International, 31(3), 513–520.

[8] Dimaculangan, A. (2018). The language of PDU30: A discourse analysis of selected speeches of President Rodrigo Duterte. Asian EFL Journal Research Articles, 20(12.2), 220–273.

[9] discourseanalyzer. (2024). Speech Act Theory in discourse analysis. https://discourseanalyzer.com

[10] Ilyas, M., & Khushi, Q. (2012). Facebook status updates: A speech act analysis. Academic Research International, 3(2), 500–507.

[11] Jegede, O. O. (2024). Speech acts in the digital sphere: A corpus-based exploration of social media interaction. Corpus-Based Studies across Humanities, 2(2), 359–383.

[12] Remorosa, C. A. (2018). President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's political speeches: A critical discourse analysis. Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 6(1), 98–114.

[13] Reuters. (2025, April 11). Fake accounts drove praise of Duterte and now target the Philippine election. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com

[14] Searle, J. R. (2015). Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language (J. R. Searle, Ed.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1969)

[15] Subramanian, S., Cohn, T., & Baldwin, T. (2019). Target-based speech act classification in political campaign text. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/abs/1905.07856

[16] Wikipedia. (2019, March 22). 2019 State of the Nation Address (Philippines). Retrieved June 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_State_of_the_Nation_Address_(Philippines)

[17] Wikipedia. (2020, July 27). 2020 State of the Nation Address (Philippines). Retrieved June 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2020_State_of_the_Nation_Address_(Philippines)

[18] Wikipedia. (2025, June). Fake news in the Philippines. Retrieved June 2025, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fake_news_in_the_Philippines

[19] Xu, L. (2015). Metaphor and politics: The persuasive power of political metaphors. Journal of Political Linguistics, 8(3), 45–62.