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Directive and expressive speech acts in king's choice game chat: A cyberpragmatic analysis

ABSTRACT - This study examines the use of directive and expressive speech acts within the digital communication context of the mobile game King's Choice, with a particular focus on how players interact across alliance, team, and kingdom chats. The investigation is theoretically grounded in Searle's (1969) speech act theory-specifically his taxonomy of directive and expressive illocutionary acts-and Yus's (2001, 2011) framework of cyberpragmatics, which provides analytical tools for understanding how online communication is shaped by multimodality and platform-specific affordances. Employing a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study analyzes 38 excerpts extracted from naturalistic in-game chat logs. The analysis reveals that directive speech acts manifest in various forms, including requests, commands, suggestions, advice, warnings, and prohibitions. Pragmatically, these directives serve to coordinate collective strategies, delegate in-game responsibilities, and maintain group cohesion during competitive events. Expressive speech acts are identified as apologies, compliments, expressions of joy, disappointment, regret, anger, and hope. These expressives function centrally in managing emotional states and negotiating interpersonal relationships within the game's socially competitive environment. Notably, both speech act categories are frequently mediated by multimodal elements-such as emojis and stickers-which modulate illocutionary force and convey paralinguistic cues otherwise absent in text-based chat. This study extends extant research on platform-mediated communication by demonstrating how directive and expressive speech acts simultaneously fulfil strategic coordination and social bonding functions. In doing so, it highlights the interplay between linguistic pragmatics, multimodal affordances, and digitally situated interaction in contemporary gaming contexts.

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1. Introduction

Digital communication has become an essential part of human life in today's modern era. Technological developments not only affect how humans work or access information, but also change how humans communicate (Altun, 2023). One significant example of this shift can be seen in communication that occurs in online games, where players not only interact to complete missions but also engage in conversations, negotiations, and joint decision-making through in-game text messaging features. This proves that digital games have become part of today's lifestyle. Furthermore, in Indonesia, data reported by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology reveal a substantial increase in the number of game players, from 121.7 million in 2021 to 174.1 million in 2022. This data demonstrates the broad reach of digital games and their potential as a relevant communication medium for research in cyberpragmatics.

Along with the development of communication technology, a new branch of study in pragmatics has emerged, known as cyberpragmatics (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). This term was introduced by Francisco Yus (2011) to describe how digital contexts influence the form and meaning of language interactions. In digital communication, as in social media, online forums, and online games, meaning is shaped not only by words but also by the features of the digital media themselves, such as emojis, time lags, and the structure of the platform (Hafifah & Fatmawati, 2024). Therefore, cyberpragmatics focuses on how the speaker adjusts to speech styles, pragmatic strategies, and interpretation of meaning in a digital context.

In this context, digital games can be an interesting subject of pragmatics, because they show how meaning is formed and adjusted in a constantly changing virtual world (Taguchi, 2023). One example of a digital game that involves complex communication is King's Choice game. This game combines elements of strategy, story, and royal life, where players play the role of a king who must make various political, social, and personal decisions. Unlike purely competitive games, King's Choice demands complex, pragmatic negotiations such as choosing appropriate responses, discussing strategies, expressing agreement or disagreement, offering advice, and negotiating to achieve specific goals, which are essential for players to earn rewards or maintain their rankings. Through its in-game text features, players must strategically employ speech acts to navigate political and social alliances. These interactions offer a strategic lens through which to examine how speech acts facilitate group coordination and the management of interpersonal ties in a virtual environment. Consequently, this game serves as a rich cyberpragmatic site for analyzing how communicative goals and digital affordances shape the way players adapt meaning and speech acts in technology-based communication.

Previous research on speech acts in digital communication has shown that emotional expressions play a crucial role in building user engagement and responses (Asiah et al., 2024; Nafila & Ningsih, 2024), and these analyses often employ a cyberpragmatics approach to analyze interactions on social media (Azizah & Sudana, 2021; Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024; Hafifah & Fatmawati, 2024). Consequently, research on speech acts in digital games have emerged as a compelling site for pragmatic study, as they reflect sociocultural values and facilitate pragmatic learning (Anggraini et al., 2022; Chu, 2023; Lewier et al., 2020; Taguchi, 2023; Tang & Taguchi, 2020). Furthermore, this shift is amplified by the rise of multimodal communication, where the

role of emojis and stickers as significant sources of pragmatic meaning in online games is increasingly important (Herring & Ge-Stadnyk, 2024; Rahman & Aestetika, 2023; Yu et al., 2023).

Although many studies have examined speech acts in games and digital communication, there has been no research specifically examining expressive and directive speech acts in alliance-based games, such as King's Choice, that involve negotiation and feedback between players. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the forms of expressive and directive speech in text-based communication in the game King's Choice using Searle's speech theory and the cyberpragmatics approach. It also aims to uncover how players use these acts in negotiating meaning, giving feedback, and expressing emotions, as well as how text, emojis, and stickers contribute to pragmatic force. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of directive and expressive speech acts are used by players in the King's Choice game?
2. How do directive and expressive speech acts function in online interaction from a cyberpragmatics perspective?

Through an in-depth analysis of expressive and directive speech acts, this research is expected to provide new contributions to the study of pragmatics, particularly in understanding how communication strategies are formed in interaction-based digital environments such as games. Furthermore, the results of this research are also expected to provide benefits for educators and language researchers to utilize digital games as an alternative medium in teaching pragmatic competence, particularly in learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

2. Literature review

2.1. Speech act theory and its categories

According to Mayrita et al. (2023), humans perform various actions through language, and when an utterance is delivered, specific actions are also carried out, which are called speech acts. This theory is rooted in the thinking of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), as discussed in the book How to Do Things with Words, which highlights the shift from constative meaning to performative meaning in examining the validity of meaning based on the actions carried out by utterances when they are uttered. Besides, the core of Speech Act Theory lies in providing a framework for examining the deeper meaning of surface discourse and exploring the function of each utterance (Cook, 1992).

Furthermore, in pragmatic studies, speech acts are a fundamental concept that explains how utterances function not only as conveyors of information but also as actions that can influence others (Suriani, 2022). According to Austin Searle, speech acts are divided into three categories: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary is the existence of an utterance uttered in a certain grammatical form with a specific literal meaning. Meanwhile, illocutionary is the intention the speaker wants to convey through their utterance, such as requesting, ordering, proposing, promising, or stating (Siemud, 2018). Moreover, John Searle classifies illocutionary acts into five categories, namely: (1) Assertive, (2) Directive, (3)

Expressive, (4) Commissive, (5) Declarative. The last one is perlocutionary, which relates to the impact or effect an utterance has on the listener, which can change the listener's attitude, behavior, or feelings (Siemud, 2018).

2.2. Directive speech act

According to John Searle's (1979) speech act theory, directive utterances aim to encourage listeners to act directly or indirectly. The success of a directive utterance depends on whether the listener is willing to do what the speaker asks (Siemud, 2018). In pragmatic studies, the form and style of directive utterances can vary depending on the level of politeness, the strategies used, and the social relationship between the speaker and listener. In addition, situational context and cultural norms also influence how directive utterances are produced and interpreted (Levinson in Andrea & Ágnes, 2020). Thus, directive speech is not only about ordering or asking for something, but also involves communication strategies influenced by social, cultural, and relationship contexts between speakers. Searle (1979) divides directive speech acts into six types based on the characteristics and the strength of the action. These categories range from polite solicitations to authoritative commands, beginning with the request, which is used when someone wants to ask another person for help, an action, or something. In a request, the speaker conveys the expectation for the interlocutor to do something, however, in a polite and non-forcing manner. In contrast, a command represents a more forceful directive, used to issue direct orders. This type is stronger in tone and is usually issued by people in authority or in urgent situations. Furthermore, a suggestion is a directive speech act used to give an opinion or input to others, usually for their good. It is not coercive, and the person receiving it can choose to follow it. While similar in its helpful intent, advice is usually delivered with a stronger reason, such as experience or long-term benefits. The function of advice is to help others make wise decisions based on experience or moral considerations. Beyond guidance, a warning is used to inform someone of potential danger or dire consequences if they take action. Similarly, prohibition is a speech act that asks others not to do something. It is usually related to specific rules, safety, or norms.

2.3. Expressive speech act

In pragmatics, expressive speech acts are often found in social interactions to build closer personal relationships and strengthen social bonds between individuals (Siemud, 2018). On the other hand, expressive speech acts are highly context-dependent, as the same utterance can have different meanings depending on the situation, the social relationship between the speaker and the listener, and prevailing cultural norms. Therefore, understanding how expressions such as gratitude, apology, or praise are used in different contexts helps us recognize the cultural values, norms of politeness, and social dynamics that underlie everyday communication (Anggraini et al., 2022). In line with this, Searle (1979) divides expressive speech acts into several parts, each of which reflects different emotions and psychological states.

Searle (1979) divides expressive speech acts into several parts, each of which reflects different emotions and psychological states. This begins with apologizing, which is employed

when a speaker seeks to express regret for a mistake or an inconvenience caused. By apologizing, the speaker acknowledges their mistake and shows good faith in improving the relationship. In contrast, complimenting is used to offer praise for someone's appearance, achievements, or other positive traits. The function of this is to strengthen social relationships, provide emotional support, and increase the confidence of the interlocutor. Furthermore, expressing joy serves to show pleasure or happiness regarding a specific occurrence, while expressing disappointment is used to articulate dissatisfaction with a particular event or action. Similarly, expressing regret is used to convey sadness or concern for something that has already happened, whereas expressing anger communicates resentment or strong disapproval toward a person or situation. Finally, expressing hope allows the speaker to articulate a desire or optimistic outlook for something that has not yet occurred. By conveying Anger, the speaker shows strong disapproval or intense emotional reactions.

2.4. Cyberpragmatics

Francisco Yus first introduced cyberpragmatics in the early 2000s as a development of pragmatic studies that focused on digital communication. In his book, Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated Communication in Context (2001), Yus defines cyberpragmatics as a branch of pragmatics that analyzes how language is used, produced, and understood in internet-based communication. In its development, Yus (2011; 2021) emphasized that cyberpragmatics is an extension of conventional pragmatics to digital communication, which is full of multimodality. These include emojis, memes, hyperlinks, or multimedia symbols, which act as pragmatic substitutes for physical gestures or intonation (Ayuningsih et al., 2025). Furthermore, cyberpragmatics studies also consider platform affordances, namely the technical features provided by digital media that shape communication (Herring, 2007; Yus, 2011). Thus, cyberpragmatics studies encompass language games, visual cues, and platform affordances as integral elements in creating more dynamic and meaningful digital interactions.

In the context of cyberpragmatics, one of the phenomena that often appears in text-based communication is language games. According to Yus (2011, 2021), language games can be understood as an effort to bring text to life to feel closer to verbal conversations and build familiarity, humor, or emotional expression between users. This strategy is often seen in chat rooms, social media, and conversations in online games, which are characterized by deviations from the standard form of language but can still be understood by conversation participants. In addition, paralinguistic visual cues such as emojis, emoticons, stickers, and GIFs are also essential elements in digital communication that complement text messages. Thus, these elements are not just communication ornaments, but are an integral part of pragmatic strategies in digital interaction. These observations suggest that modern digital communication is increasingly multimodal, where visual and symbolic aspects are equally important as verbal language (Dresner & Herring, 2010).

2.5. Speech act in digital game

The emergence of interactive features in modern digital games has made player-to-player interaction a highly dynamic object of linguistic study. In line with this phenomenon, Anggraini et al. (2022) stated that the current popularity of video games makes them an interesting subject for linguistic research. This is because digital games are not simply entertainment media, but cultural objects that contain meanings and pragmatic ideas shaped by the player's experiences and environment (Karhulahti, 2020).

In a more specific context, Chu (2023) found that language in online games has performative power that can generate real actions and influence the psychological and social conditions of both speakers and listeners. This potential then has a positive impact on the field of education, where Taguchi (2023) explains that game-based language learning offers high motivation through feedback mechanisms and enjoyable repetitive practice. Overall, this research indicates that digital games are effective in helping learners understand the relationship between linguistic form and its function in direct communication. This finding is supported by Tang & Taguchi (2020), who demonstrated that interactive elements in games significantly support the mastery of social expressions in real-life situations.

Furthermore, studies of speech acts in digital games cannot be separated from the role of visual elements. Rahman & Aestetika (2023), in their research on the game Mobile Legends, found that stickers and emoticons were used as tools for strategic coordination, quick instructions, and emotional expression. This demonstrates that visual features in games play a crucial communicative role, equal to text-based speech acts in constructing meaning.

In order to examine communication in King's Choice, this study combines two primary theoretical foundations. The primary concept utilized to map the kinds of player utterances is Searle's (1979) division of directive and expressive speech acts. Additionally, examining these two categories of speech acts can help in understanding the development of communication tactics and the ways in which players express meaning in intelligent games (Anh, 2021). However, Yus's (2011, 2021) cyberpragmatic theory is used to further analyze how digital context, including the use of multimodal elements like stickers and emojis, affects the pragmatic force of a message that players send. This study is able to present a comprehensive picture of the linguistic tactics that players employ to negotiate social interactions and accomplish strategic objectives in dynamic gaming environments by combining these two theories.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design focused on an in-depth analysis of language use in digital communication, specifically in the King's Choice game message field. According to Creswell (2009), this approach captures the meanings given by individuals or groups to specific social situations. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a more detailed and contextual exploration of the meaning behind language use. Furthermore, this approach is particularly suitable when the topics discussed relate to

understanding meaning, expression, and social context, which cannot be measured solely numerically.

3.2. Data and data sources

This study uses written data in the form of transcripts of player interactions in the game King's Choice obtained through the in-game messaging feature. This feature was chosen as the primary data source because it offers a higher density of goal-oriented interactions and a much higher level of collaboration. Researchers collected data through participant observation, joining the same alliance and server, allowing for live, real-time recording of conversations. The collected data focused on text messages containing directive and expressive speech acts, as this study aimed to identify the types of speech acts. The selected messages were conversations that illustrate honest communication practices between players, such as giving commands, suggestions, expressing gratitude, and expressing emotions. Besides, the data was analyzed from a cyberpragmatic perspective to examine how directive and expressive speech acts function in online interactions. This analysis included attention to multimodal elements such as emojis and stickers that play a role in reinforcing the meaning of digital utterances. The selection of King's Choice as the data source is based on its alliance-based nature, which allows player interaction to take place strategically, collaboratively, and involves negotiations and feedback relevant to the study of digital pragmatics.

The participants observed in this study were active King's Choice players who interacted in the alliance chat feature during the data collection period. Because the researcher adopted the role of a participant observer, participants were not pre-selected but identified through their natural and spontaneous communicative activities within the game's social space. These players, who were mostly from nations like Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, and India, represented a multicultural and multilingual community. The majority of participants did not speak English as their primary language, yet it was used as a lingua franca for social interactions and strategic conversations in the in-game messages. No specific demographic data on age or gender was collected, as this study focused exclusively on the pragmatic power of linguistic interaction and maintaining the anonymity inherent in the digital gaming environment. Furthermore, there are two types of data sources in this study: primary data and secondary data. Primary data comes from original messages written by players in the King's Choice game, while secondary data consists of documentation, such as screenshots, observation notes, and theoretical references supporting the analysis, such as journals or articles discussing speech in digital contexts. Some messages from players in this game can be categorized as expressive and directive speech, especially in feedback and negotiation, when they are working together or resolving conflicts.

3.3. Data collection

In this study, the researcher chose the observation method as the primary data collection technique. Observation allows the researcher to directly observe and record interactions in the King's Choice game message column, which is the primary data source for this study. Sugiyono

(2017) states that observation is a data collection technique that directly observes objects at the research location. In this study, the researcher observed various forms of utterances, especially directive and expressive utterances, that appeared in the King's Choice player message column.

The initial step taken by the researcher was to observe the interactions that occurred in the message column, especially when players provided feedback and engaged in negotiation processes, both in the context of cooperation and conflict resolution. The researcher recorded and documented forms of utterances relevant to the research object by taking screenshots and transcribing the contents of the conversations into text. The next step was to reread the message transcripts and classify them into directive and expressive utterance types according to Searle's (1969) utterance theory to answer the first research question regarding the types of utterances used by the actors. The next stage was to analyze the data from a cyberpragmatic perspective to answer the second research question: how directive and expressive utterances function in online interactions.

To maintain the validity of the data, observations are made at various times of the day and night, as well as during event hours, so that the conversations obtained reasonably represent the player's communication patterns. Although the duration of the observation was quite long, the number of data analyzed was only 38 because the study used purposive sampling that emphasizes clarity of context and linguistic relevance; in each game session (1–2 hours), many conversations were light, repetitive, or fragmentary, so they had to be eliminated. Therefore, 38 citations were selected as the most contextual, pragmatically interpretable, and representative data of the linguistic phenomena studied.

3.4. Data analysis

The collected data were then analyzed using the analysis stages of Miles and Huberman (2020): data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. In the initial stage, the researcher conducted data reduction by sorting and selecting utterances containing expressive speech acts and directive speech acts from the King's Choice game message column. The data were then classified into tables according to the context of the utterance, the type of speech act, and the accompanying communication situation. In the next stage, the researcher analyzed the data descriptively and qualitatively by referring to John Searle's (1979) speech act theory and Yus' (2001, 2011) cyberpragmatics related to the form and context of speech act use. The analysis was carried out by describing the patterns of speech act use in communication between players in the game based on the social and cultural contexts underlying the interaction.

4. Findings

The object of this research is the words of the players in the King's Choice game conveyed through room chat (alliance chat, private chat, team event mission chat, and kingdom chat) when negotiating game strategies. Based on the problem formulation, this section presents findings regarding the types and functions of directive and expressive speech acts used by players in negotiations through game room chat. These findings are analyzed using Searle's (1979) speech act theory and Yus' (2001, 2011) cyberpragmatic perspective. Throughout the data

presentation and analysis, speakers are identified by their respective alliance tags, such as EXO, JJK, GLR, and MVR, etc. These tags represent organized player groups or alliances that shape the social structure of King's Choice. Understanding these affiliations is crucial for interpreting the direction of speech acts and interpersonal dynamics during strategic negotiations.

4.1. Types of directive speech acts in room chat in King's choice game

Based on the data presented in the preceding section, a total of 18 directive speech acts were identified across the six categories outlined in Searle's taxonomy. The distribution of these types is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Types of directive speech acts.

No	Directive Category	Frequency
1.	Request	5
2.	Command	2
3.	Suggestion	2
4.	Advice	7
5.	Warning	1
6.	Prohibition	1
	Total	18

Table 1 shows the distribution of directive speech acts identified in the data. Of the 18 occurrences, advice emerged as the most dominant subtype (7 data points), followed by requests (5 data points). This indicates that players predominantly used directive speech acts to provide strategic guidance and coordinate actions during in-game events. In line with Searle's (1979) classification, directive speech acts function to influence the hearer's actions. In this context, advice was frequently employed to enhance team coordination and increase the alliance's chances of success. In contrast, commands, warnings, and prohibitions appeared less frequently, as they were typically used in specific situations to prevent mistakes or emphasize urgency. Overall, these findings suggest that directive speech acts in King's Choice primarily serve a cooperative and strategic function rather than an authoritative one. The following section provides a more detailed explanation of each directive speech act subtype:

4.1.1. Request

Data 1

(EXO) Your Chezyn: "JJK said they want to go for top 1 on the chessboard."

(EXO) Your Chezyn: "Can they cut EXO's path? 😭 I was surprised, we were in P1 trying to cut in to lower our points."

(EXO) Your Chezyn: "A lot of people are offline, huh sis 😓 ?"

(EXO) Your Chezyn: "Is Bro Ken online?"

(JJK) Aerisa: Not sure, seems like many are offline 😔. I'll inform the others in Telegram first, okay 😆 ?

This conversation demonstrates directive speech acts in the form of requests, used to obtain information regarding game conditions and alliance member availability. These requests are characterized by the use of interrogative forms, such as "Can they cut EXO's path?" and "Is Bro Ken online?", which function to support coordination and strategic decision-making. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, these requests are accompanied by emojis such as 😭 (hard crying face) and 😓 (sad, sweaty face), which serves as a paralinguistic visual cue to signal the speaker's emotional state and enhance directive speech so that it does not appear forceful. Aerisa uses 😆 (emojis with smiling eyes) to reinforce her expression and keep the conversation light.

4.1.2. Command

Data 2

(EXO) Eric: "first day attack, 3rd strongest, 2nd strongest, strongest. Same with defense 😁."

(EXO) Last wish: "Don't forget to use your weak knights as defense 👌"

(EXO) Last wish:

This conversation demonstrates directive speech acts in the form of commands used to direct the actions of alliance members in implementing game strategies. These commands are characterized by the use of imperative structures and elliptical utterances, such as "first day attack, 3rd strongest, 2nd strongest, strongest. Same with defense" and "Don't forget to use your weak knights as defense," which function as technical instructions and guidelines for maintaining the effectiveness of the team's play in the early stages. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, these commands are accompanied by emojis. 😁(smile & emotion emoji) and gestural stickers that indicate a relaxed atmosphere, thus helping to convey instructions firmly but without appearing authoritarian. Thus, the command speech acts in this data function not only as technical instructions, but also as a means of maintaining smooth coordination and social relations between alliance members in the online gaming environment.

4.1.3. Suggestion

Data 3

(GLR) Erica: "Our defense on the siege of the undead is currently weak."

(GLR) Aerisa: "You can focus on only 1 troop to increase the level."

(GLR) Erica:

Based on Searle's (1969) classification of speech acts, Aerisa's utterance "You can focus only 1 troop to increase the level" is included in the directive speech act in the form of a suggestion, because it provides a recommendation without any element of coercion. The use of the modal "you can" is a form of gentle advice that indicates the existence of a choice or

alternative. In the context of online game conversations, this suggestion aims to help Erica improve the team's defense strategy while maintaining the harmony of the interaction. Meanwhile, from a cyberpragmatic perspective, Erica's response in the form of a woman sticker with a respectful expression can be categorized as a paralinguistic visual cue that functions to indicate acceptance and agreement with the suggestion given. Thus, these data indicate that the speech act of suggestion is used as a polite communication strategy to share solutions, and as a means to strengthen social relationships through paralinguistic visual cues in the form of stickers.

4.1.4. Advice

Data 4

(MVR) Chameli: "don't put troops in BDF, let them in. unless it's an urgent situation"

(MVR) Gita: "let the zombies enter the BDF line because the balloon troops have reached lv 10 which has different skills."

(MVR) daughter: "Ah, okay"

(MVR) daughter:

Chameli's statement, "Don't put troops in the BDF, let them in unless it's an urgent situation," is a category of advice. It functions as practical advice in strategic decision-making. This advice is given to organize defense strategies to avoid placing troops in the wrong part of the BDF line. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the use of specific terms such as BDF, ACEG, and balloon troops reflects the community language that functions as an internal code to maintain communication efficiency. Putri's response in the form of an informal text "ah okey" represents acceptance in the form of an informal text, while the gestural thumbs-up sticker acts as a paralinguistic visual cue that signifies acceptance and compliance with the advice given. Therefore, the speech act of advice in this data functions not only as a technical guide in the game, but also as a means of maintaining coordination and social cohesion between team members in the online gaming environment.

4.1.5. Warning

Data 5

(MVR) Aerisa: “Why did you kick the members of the alliance who were negotiating 👺 ?”

(LDE) HADES: "And how do you want to solve?"

(MVR) Aerisa: “Just letting you know, in case you didn't realize, we're not allowed to kick alliance members who are negotiating. … What you did will have negative consequences in the future….”

(LDE) HADES: “I don't care, I'm just here to play as much as I want 🤣”

(MVR) Aerisa: "Okay, if that's your wish. Just look at it later 🙄”

In the conversation above, Aerisa's statement, "We're not allowed to kick alliance members who are negotiating," is classified as a warning because she attempts to influence the other person's behavior by emphasizing the potential for negative consequences. Furthermore, Aerisa adds the threat of consequences, "What you did will have negative consequences in the future." In this way, the warning serves not only as criticism but also as a preventative measure to prevent similar actions from happening in the future. Furthermore, from a cyberpragmatic perspective, the use of emojis 😡 (angry emoji) reinforces the expression of anger and urgency of the message, while HADES responds with the emoji 🤣 (laughing emoji) indicates a mocking attitude and rejection of the existing rules. 😏 (arrogant emoji) in Aerisa's closing remarks functions as a subtle insinuation and threat, which strengthens the pragmatic power of the warning. Thus, the warning speech act in this data shows how a combination of normative language and paralinguistic visual cues is used to enforce rules and manage conflict in online game communication (Yus, 2011; 2021).

4.1.6. Prohibition

Data 6

(ASL) Chameli: ".... So we don't need to secure the center, just hold 2 ruins and 1 hall until the last day. It's the point system, you know? .... No need to play aggressively."

(ASL) Chameli: “SYSTEM”

(ASL) VOXIEE: “Kingkong moved. I misclicked, damn it.”

(ASL) VOXIEE: 

(ASL) Chameli: "Just pull back. If you don't want to follow the plan, better make your own alliance."

((ASL) Chameli: “If I DM him and he doesn't reply within 1 hour, I kick him out.”

(ASL) Aerisa: 

Chameli's utterances, such as "we don't need to secure the center" and "no need to play aggressively," are a group of prohibition sentences because they function as prohibitions to prevent alliance members from taking actions that are inconsistent with the collective strategy. This prohibition is reinforced by a socially sanctioning statement, "If you don't want to follow the plan, better make your own alliance," which emphasizes the leader's authority and the limits of members' compliance. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the prohibition function is reinforced by paralinguistic visual cues in the form of stickers. VOXIEE uses stickers of disgusted and annoyed women (emotion-based stickers) to express frustration due to technical errors, while Aerisa sends stickers of frightened women (gesture-based stickers) in response to Chameli's threats. Meanwhile, the use of the prosodic spelling "SYSTEM" serves as visual emphasis that adds to the pragmatic strength of the message. Thus, the prohibition speech act in

this data is not only instructive, but also acts as a tool of social control mediated by a combination of text, visual symbols, and digital communication conventions.

4.2. Expressive speech acts used feedback through room chat in the King's choice game

Based on the qualitative analysis of the chat excerpts, the following subsection presents the findings concerning expressive speech acts. Prior to examining the distribution of expressive types, it is instructive to first consider a representative example that illustrates how prohibition—a directive speech act—operates in conjunction with multimodal elements to exert social control. This example serves as a bridge between the preceding discussion of directive acts and the subsequent presentation of expressive acts in Table 2.

Table 2

Types of expressive speech acts.

No	Expressive Category	Frequency
1.	Apologize	7
2.	Complimenting	1
3.	Expressing Joy	1
4.	Expressing Disappointment	4
5.	Expressing Regret	3
6.	Expressing Anger	3
7.	Expressing Hope	1
	Total	20

Table 2 shows the distribution of expressive speech acts identified in the data. Of the 20 occurrences, apology emerged as the most dominant subtype (7 data points). This indicates that players frequently expressed apologies for mistakes, such as attacking the wrong target or being unable to actively participate in events. In line with Searle's (1979) classification, expressive speech acts reveal the speaker's psychological state toward a particular situation. In this context, apologies function as a mechanism to maintain solidarity, defuse tension, and preserve trust within the alliance. These findings suggest that expressive speech acts in King's Choice not only convey emotions but also play a crucial role in sustaining social cohesion in digital gaming communities. To examine the social and emotional functions of these expressions more closely, each subtype is explained and illustrated with examples below:

4.2.1. Apologize

Data 7

(EXO) Your Chezyn: Sorry sis 😭, you got kicked from the negotiation by Celo earlier, she said it was an accident. If you want, I can create a new negotiation and protect it.

(JJK) Aerisa: I already made one myself earlier. Maybe next time I can join your negotiation 😅.

(EXO) Your Chezyn: If anyone breaks the agreement again, let me know, sis.

(JJK) Aerisa: Okay, Chezz. I'll let you know for sure.

(JJK) Aerisa:

The phrase "Sorry sis" 😭, *you got kicked from the negotiation by Celo earlier...* " delivered by Your Chezyn is included in the expressive speech act of apology which is used to express regret and empathy for an incident that is detrimental to the interlocutor. The follow-up offer of "If you want, I can create a new negotiation and protect it." strengthens the impression of sincerity of the apology, because it does not only stop at verbal expression, but also offers a real solution. Viewed from a cyberpragmatic perspective, Chezyn's apology is enriched with emojis 😭 (crying & emotional emoji) signifying deep regret. Aeisa's response, a sticker of a woman with sparkling eyes holding her hands, falls under the emotion-based sticker category, indicating acceptance and appreciation for the apology. Thus, apologizing in this digital space shows how multimodal texts, emojis, and stickers function as a strategy for conflict mitigation, fostering solidarity, and affirming social intimacy between players.

4.2.2. Complimenting

Data 8

(MVR) darkjay_13: "now im only 2nd in poker. Will I gain points if you guys copy from my deck? I haven't tested this one yet"

(MVR) Chleopatra: "Second place is still strong! Btw I think you won't get extra points if we copy, but let's test it together?"

(MVR) La Catrina: “I tried using your deck earlier and it worked pretty well 😁! Not sure if it benefits you point-wise tho”

(MVR) Luna lovegood: “I don't think you gain anything unless it's shared through ranking or something. But your deck slaps”

(MVR) Emi Haganezuka: “That deck of yours helped me move up! Thanks 🥰, even if you don't get points, you still get respect”

Phrases like "Second place is still strong!", "it worked pretty well 😅*! ",* and "That deck of yours helped me move up! Thanks 🥰*, even if you don't get points, you still get respect "*is an expressive speech act in the form of praise. Praise in these conversations serves to express appreciation for another person's success while emphasizing that the efforts and strategies employed have positive value for the gaming community. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the use of gaming jargon such as deck, poker, and ranking reflects the internal language of the community, while emojis 😁 serves to mark satisfaction and happiness and 🥰 (smile & emotion emoji) serves to express gratitude and emotional closeness. In this way, complimenting in digital interactions serves a dual purpose: recognizing the technical contribution of the player while strengthening interpersonal bonds in the virtual space.

4.2.3. Expressing joy

Data 9

(MVR) Gita: Tia is good at playing cards now

(MVR) Gita:

(MVR) tiamo:

Gita's statement, "Tia is good at playing cards now," can be categorized as an expressive speech act expressing joy. This statement not only conveys recognition of Tiamo's abilities but also conveys joy and pride in her friend's progress. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, Gita's use of a sticker of a woman with sparkling eyes and clasped hands conveys admiration and joy. Tiamo's response with a sticker of a woman raising her hand confirms that he shares her feelings. So, it can be concluded that expressive joy reveals personal feelings and helps maintain social harmony in virtual space.

4.2.4. Expressing disappointment

Data 10

(MVR) Doraemon: I really don't like the Nibel Treasure Hunt event.

(MVR) Chameli: That's because you lowered the boss's HP, and I ended up taking the final hit🤣🤣.

(MVR) Doraemon: Ugh, this is exactly why I hate working so hard, only to let someone else get all the glory.

(MVR) Doraemon:

Doraemon's expressions "I really don't like the Nibel Treasure Hunt event." and "Ugh, this is exactly why I hate working so hard, only to let someone else get all the glory." are expressive speech acts in the form of expressions of disappointment. Doraemon's utterances reflect frustration due to the imbalance between effort and results obtained, where his contribution is not followed by equal rewards. These complaints are not directed personally, but are aimed at the game system. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, his expression of disappointment is reinforced through the use of a female sticker with an angry expression, which emphasizes frustration with the system's injustice. Thus, disappointment in these interactions serves a dual purpose: to express personal emotions while strengthening solidarity through humor and stickers as paralinguistic cues.

4.2.5. Expressing regret

Data 11

(FRB) Queen Catherine: “@knightzereus what's wrong with you 😡?! You keep returning to my birth! I woke up early to get a decent lair, not a stolen one. I even set an alarm to wake up early, and then you just stole it?! Why don't you try waking up early so you won't be a thief?! You're disgusting 💩 💩! YOU’RE LIKE CRAP AND GERMS!!!”

(FRB) knightzereus: “Wow, I didn't mean to steal it 😭, I didn't even know it was yours. I just saw it and took it, it was my fault. I won't do that anymore, I'm sorry 😭.”

Knightzereus said, "I didn't mean to steal it 😭, I didn't even know it was yours. I just saw it and took it, it was my fault. I won't do that anymore, I'm sorry 😭." is included in the expression of regret. Knightzereus's utterance explicitly acknowledges responsibility through the phrase "it was my fault" and is accompanied by a promise not to repeat the same action, thus functioning as an effort to restore social relations after the conflict. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, the use of emoticons 😭 serves to strengthen the emotional meaning of the regret expressed. The crying face emoji emphasizes regret and sadness, making it easier for the interlocutor to capture the emotional nuances of the message.

4.2.6. Expressing anger

Catherine's words on data 11“@knightzereus what's wrong with you 👺*?!*Even "YOU'RE LIKE CRAP AND GERMS!!!" can be categorized as an expressive speech act in the form of an expression of anger. Her utterance includes rhetorical questions, direct accusations, and crude metaphors, which emphasize the angry tone. The main function of this utterance is not to ask for an explanation or solution, but to channel her frustration over the loss of her nest (dragon's nest), which she believes has been stolen. Meanwhile, from a cyberpragmatic perspective, Catherine's anger is reinforced by the angry face emoji. 😡 and poop emoji 💩 💩, which visually emphasizes its emotional tone. The knightzereus' reply uses a crying 😭 emoji to express regret and ease tension. Lavina and Rexon used laughter 🤣 emojis to break the mood, while Sylvia added calm emojis 😌 to keep the conversation harmonious. The emojis used include facial expression emojis that clearly represent individual emotions.

4.2.7. Expressing hope

Data 13

(GLO) ONLYVLA: “Basically, the SP signal usually shows up after the zombie event, or sometimes after both cross events are over.”

(GLO) MEL SCHAFER: “Hope my SP reaches 350M. Damn.”

(GLO) MEL SCHAFER:

MEL SCHAFER’s statement, "Hope my SP reaches 350M. Damn." can be categorized as an expressive act expressing hope. This phrase expresses hope for a certain achievement in

the game: increasing SP to 350 million. The choice of the word "Damn" here is not an expression of anger, but rather to emphasize the intensity of enthusiasm and positive expectations. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, MEL SCHAFER sent a sticker of a woman with a radiant face holding both hands, indicating a form of enthusiasm and hope.

5. Discussion

This study aims to analyze the forms of expressive and directive speech acts that appear in text communication in the game King's Choice using Searle's utterance theory and a cyberpragmatic approach. Within Searle's (1979) speech act framework, the directive category functions to get the interlocutor to do something the speaker desires. Based on research data, directive speech acts in the King's Choice gaming community are dominated by commands, followed significantly by advice. The dominance of commands emerges as a logical consequence of game dynamics that require rapid strategic direction, especially during events or inter-alliance wars. In this context, commands have high illocutionary power because the effectiveness of a team's strategy relies heavily on collective adherence to the leader's or teammates' instructions to achieve competitive goals. Furthermore, the use of advice speech acts emerges as a crucial complement after instructions are given. Pragmatically, advice serves not only as technical guidance but also draws on moral considerations or the experience of senior players to help other players make wise decisions. This use of advice reflects efforts to build social cohesion and more humanistic coordination in the digital environment.

In contrast, other forms of directives, such as suggestions, warnings, and prohibitions, occur much less frequently. This is because these forms are typically situational and only appear in emergent situations or when anomalies occur in combat, such as preventing fatal errors or directing new members. Overall, the alliance's daily interactions emphasize persuasion and peer coordination. This finding aligns with Searle's (1979) theory on the classification of directive speech acts, where varying illocutionary force—from binding commands to optional suggestions—is used strategically to meet essential conditions for achieving collective goals while maintaining the balance of interpersonal relationships in cyberspace.

On the other hand, the most commonly used type of expressive speech act in this game is apologizing. This is closely related to the mismatch between in-game schedules and players' out-of-game routines. When members miss the events, respond late, or make mistakes such as attacking the wrong target, apologizing serves as a form of social accountability to maintain trust within the alliance. Other types of expressions, such as disappointment, anger, regret, and hope, tend to emerge primarily in contexts where competition and emotional investment are high. Expressions of disappointment and anger typically occur during inter-server conflicts or alliance-versus-alliance competitions, particularly when players lose points, face unexpected defeats, or experience miscoordination caused by teammates or rival alliances. In such situations, expressive speech acts serve as a channel for venting frustration while eliciting empathy from fellow members. This finding aligns with Searle's (1979) theory, which states that expressive speech acts aim to reveal the speaker's psychological state toward a situation specified in their

propositional content. In this context, apologies and anger fulfill the condition of sincerity, in that the speaker genuinely feels these emotions in response to in-game events.

In addition to the categorical findings above, this study identified a unique phenomenon in the form of a combination of directive and expressive speech acts in a series of interactions. For example, an angry player (expressive anger) still inserts strategic recommendations (directive advice) so that other members do not repeat their mistakes. Data such as this shows that speech acts in digital conversations do not always appear singly, but can be layered according to the speaker's communicative purpose. This data supports Searle's (1979) idea that a single utterance can contain multiple illocutionary functions, especially in spontaneous and contextual interactions such as online games.

The uniqueness of this data lies in the emotional contrast within a series of conversations, where anger expressed by one party is immediately responded to with regret expressed by the other party. This contrast is rarely found in other data because, typically, a single conversation contains only one dominant type of expression. Thus, this data demonstrates the diversity of expression strategies and emotional negotiation mechanisms in digital communication: anger expressed verbally and visually can be responded to with regret expressed in text-emoji form. Yus' (2011) Cyber pragmatics emphasizes that multimodality (text and emoji) is important in managing emotional conflict in virtual spaces.

Beyond the numerical dominance of certain speech act types, their distribution also reflects deeper socio-pragmatic patterns shaped by the game's mechanics and thematic framework. The dominance of commands over other directive subtypes results not only from the time-limited nature of immediate events but also from the game's hierarchical kingdom setting. Players implicitly orient themselves toward a vertical authority structure that mirrors the feudal world-building of King's Choice (Akin, 2023). Even without explicit rank enforcement, alliance members often treat high-powered or long-standing players as de facto leaders. This hierarchical orientation allows imperative forms to circulate smoothly without being perceived as face-threatening (Rahardi, 2020). In this sense, commands function as both efficient coordination tools and symbolic reflections of the game's structural hierarchy.

Meanwhile, the prominence of apology within expressive acts reflects what can be described as digital accountability. Because players must balance in-game events with offline responsibilities, absences or mistakes are relatively common in online gaming communities (Wang et al., 2024). An apology serves to reaffirm reliability, soothe potential frustration, and maintain group cohesion, a function that aligns with previous findings on expressive speech acts in digital interaction (Olshtain & Treger, 2023). This pattern confirms that alliance interaction values emotional maintenance as much as tactical efficiency. Maintaining relational harmony becomes as essential as executing strategy. Thus, expressive acts, especially apologies, play a stabilizing role in collective gameplay.

The data further show that players actively manage valence and interactional tone. Humor, light teasing, and playful stance markers, often conveyed through emojis such as 🤣, 🙃, or 😅, help diffuse tension during high-pressure events. This humor-based mitigation prevents escalation and softens the force of directives. A key pattern in the dataset is the presence

of layered speech acts, where multimodal cues modulate linguistic forms. Emojis and stickers act as prosodic markers that adjust an utterance's illocutionary force. These cues transform literal commands into more friendly prompts or amplify emotional expressions when necessary (Pérez-Sabater, 2019). At the same time, the emoji indexes emotional transparency, allowing the hearer to interpret the frustration as situational rather than personal. This emotional transparency softens potential face threats and prevents interpersonal conflict. Such layered meaning is characteristic of digital pragmatics in King's Choice (Yus, 2011).

These findings align with previous research highlighting the dominance of expressive and directive communication in digital communication. Hafifah and Fatmawati (2024) research on comments on the Kompas YouTube channel showed that emotional expression in digital spaces is heavily influenced by the discourse context and emotional closeness between users, similar to the pattern in King's Choice, where emoticons and stickers were used to emphasize emotions. Another study conducted by Asiah et al. (2024) in a WhatsApp language learning group also found that expressive forms such as apologies, praise, and motivation build emotional engagement, paralleling the functions of apologizing and expressing hope in this data. Furthermore, research by Nafila and Ningsih (2024) on the Indonesian General Elections Commission's (KPU RI) Instagram comment section showed that expressive discourse is a public medium for expressing political dissatisfaction, emphasizing that digital spaces play a crucial role in channeling collective emotions.

In terms of direction, the findings of this study are similar to those of Lewier et al. (2020) on traditional Maluku game songs, where the directions reflect the values of cooperation and coordination. In King's Choice, directions also serve to maintain strategic cohesion among players. This function is reinforced by Maryam (2020) research, which emphasizes that directions in the game are instructions or requests to support decision-making. Meanwhile, research by Anggraini et al. (2022) on the game Pamali and Chu (2023) on the game Fort-da shows that digital games can be pragmatic objects that emphasize the role of language in constructing actions, social conditions, and morality, something also seen in the emotional interactions between King's Choice players.

From a cyberpragmatics perspective (Yus, 2001), interactions in King's Choice demonstrate how players rely on text, emoticons, and stickers instead of non-verbal cues. The most common type of cyberpragmatics is the expression of emotions through emoticons (😭, 🤣, 😡) that emphasize tone of voice and visual reinforcement in the form of character stickers with facial expressions or body movements. Meanwhile, implicit cues such as irony or subtle sarcasm are less common, as most conversations are more oriented towards strategic goals. The relationship between cyberpragmatics and speech act theory is clear: emoticons and stickers enhance expressive illocutions (e.g., anger or regret), while short text patterns sharpen directive illocutions (e.g., commands or suggestions). Thus, this research shows how digital media modify the way speech is realized.

Based on these findings, the use of emoticons and stickers in King's Choice is not only a visual complement but also part of a communication strategy that supports speech. This pattern aligns with the findings of Yu et al. (2023), who showed that emojis can strengthen illocutionary

functions such as directives and expressiveness. In fact, Herring and Ge-Stadnyk (2024) emphasized that emojis can modify speech, stand alone as speech acts, and perform virtual actions. This phenomenon is also reflected when King's Choice players use stickers to provide quick instructions. In line with this, Rahman and Aestetika (2023), through a study on Mobile Legends, confirmed the role of combat emoticons in strategic coordination, parallel to the function of stickers and emoticons in King's Choice. Thus, the findings of this study not only demonstrate unique communication practices in King's Choice but also add to the empirical evidence that visual features in digital games have significant pragmatic functions.

The results of this study also reinforce Karhulahti (2020) notion that games are not only entertainment media but also cultural arenas with pragmatic meanings formed from players' experiences and interactions. The findings of Taguchi (2023) and Tang and Taguchi (2020) on game-based pragmatic learning further confirm that digital games can serve a concrete socio-linguistic function, where language forms are directly related to communicative actions and collaborative goals. Thus, this study contributes to broadening the understanding of speech in digital games, particularly through the complementary combination of expressive and directive speech acts.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the findings offer significant implications for educators and researchers in linguistics, positioning online games as an authentic vehicle for pragmatic learning, particularly in relation to negotiation, cooperation, conflict management, and emotional management in digital communication. The game environment provides real data, allowing students to learn how multimodal cues influence the interpretation of the illusion's power. For example, the combination of ALL-CAPS and an angry emoji can reinforce the illusion of reprimand. In contrast, the smile emoji can reduce the power of a command into a request or suggestion. Thus, games can be used as a practical laboratory for students to develop a digital pragmatic sensibility that is very relevant to contemporary communication needs. More specifically, this study has implications for cyberpragmatic theory, demonstrating that in digital communication, text alone is often insufficient to convey illocutionary force. The use of emojis and stickers serves as pragmatic scaffolding that clarifies the speaker's intensity. This supports Yus's (2011) theory regarding the importance of visual elements in reducing message ambiguity in virtual spaces that lack paralinguistic cues (such as tone of voice or real facial expressions).

However, this study also has several limitations. First, the data analyzed was limited to only 38 conversations, so variations in speech acts may not be representative of overall communication patterns in King's Choice. Second, this study focused only on two types of speech acts, namely directives and expressives, and therefore did not address other types, such as commissives, assertives, or declaratives, which may also be present in player interactions. Third, the research context was limited to conversations in alliance chat and specific events, so the results cannot necessarily be generalized to all communication features in the game.

Based on these limitations, the researchers recommend that future research analyze more data from various servers and other communication features within King's Choice. Furthermore, future research could broaden the focus by including other types of speech acts (e.g., commissives or declaratives) to create a more comprehensive mapping. Multimodal analysis

could also be considered by examining how text, emoticons, and stickers interact to shape meaning in digital conversations. Thus, pragmatic research on digital games can provide a more in-depth picture of players' communication strategies, emotional dynamics, and social practices in virtual spaces.

6. Conclusion

This research shows that directive and expressive speech acts in King's Choice gameplay have dual, complementary functions in digital communication. On the one hand, the use of directive speech acts—such as commands, suggestions, and technical instructions—is a crucial tool for keeping teams organized and providing tactical guidance in collectively developing game strategies. On the other hand, the use of expressive speech acts, such as expressions of praise, joy, and disappointment, serves as an emotional vehicle for fostering closer relationships. This function ensures that players remain connected as a solid community, going beyond mere competitive interactions between users. Furthermore, the success of both functions depends heavily on the multimodality available within the platform. From a cyberpragmatic perspective, digital elements such as text, emoticons, and stickers do not stand alone but are integrated with each other to shape and reinforce the meaning of speech. These visual features significantly influence how a message is conveyed and understood by the recipient, while also serving to mitigate the risk of misunderstanding in anonymous virtual spaces.

Academically, this study makes several significant contributions. First, it demonstrates that speech theory remains relevant when enriched with multimodal dimensions, particularly in digital communication that relies on more than just text. Second, it confirms that online games are a legitimate and linguistically rich research site because interactions within them are spontaneous, rich in social meaning, and closely tied to group strategies. Third, it demonstrates shifting patterns of authority and cooperation within digital communities: even in a kingdom-themed game, communication operates more egalitarianly through suggestions and negotiations, rather than through hierarchical commands. Overall, this study emphasizes that pragmatic phenomena, particularly directive and expressive speech acts, are dynamic and adaptable to new media, as is the interaction in King's Choice.

Declaration on the use of AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized several AI-assisted tools to support the writing process. Gemini AI and ChatGPT were employed to correct ambiguous sentences, improve irregular paragraph structures, provide structural guidance, generate initial ideas, and assist with paraphrasing content. For language enhancement, DeepL and Grammarly were used for translation and grammatical correction. Notwithstanding the use of these AI tools, the authors manually compiled the entire content of this manuscript and assume full responsibility for its originality and academic integrity.

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