



A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF DECLARATIVE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN CHRISTIAN CONDOLENCE DISCOURSE ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMSⁱ

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Abstract:

This paper examines the pragmatic analysis of declarative illocutionary acts in Christian condolence discourse on social media platforms, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp. Drawing on Speech Act Theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics, the paper explores how declarative acts function within digitally mediated religious communication. Using qualitative netnographic data drawn from naturally occurring interactions among Christian faithful, the paper identifies key patterns in declarative illocutionary acts such as absolution from God and expression of concern. The findings reveal that declarative condolence utterances function as faith-driven affirmations that construct spiritual realities, provide emotional comfort, and reinforce communal beliefs. These utterances are shaped by shared theological assumptions and contextual factors. The study contributes to sociopragmatic research by highlighting the intersection of religion, language, and digital communication.

Keywords: pragmatics, declarative illocutionary acts, condolence discourse, social media, Christian communication

Résumé :

Cet article examine les fonctions pragmatiques des actes illocutoires déclaratifs dans le discours de condoléances chrétien sur les réseaux sociaux, en particulier Facebook et WhatsApp. S'appuyant sur la théorie des actes de langage et la linguistique fonctionnelle systémique, cette étude explore la manière dont les énoncés déclaratifs fonctionnent dans la communication religieuse médiatisée par le numérique. À l'aide d'une approche netnographique qualitative, des

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données ont été recueillies à partir de messages de condoléances spontanés publiés par des utilisateurs chrétiens entre 2022 et 2024. L'analyse révèle que les actes illocutoires déclaratifs construisent des réalités spirituelles, affirment la miséricorde divine, apportent un réconfort émotionnel et renforcent l'identité religieuse communautaire. Ces énoncés sont façonnés par des croyances théologiques partagées et des normes socioculturelles régissant les pratiques de deuil chrétiennes. Cette étude contribue à la recherche sociopragmatique en mettant en évidence l'intersection entre religion, langage et communication numérique dans l'expression contemporaine du deuil.

Mots-clés : pragmatique ; théorie des actes de langage ; actes illocutoires déclaratifs ; discours de condoléances chrétiennes ; communication sur les réseaux sociaux ; netnographie

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and religion is fundamentally linked through their roles in social interactions. In contemporary society, the emergence of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have transformed the way people communicate, particularly in expressing speech acts like condolence. Within Christian communities, condolence discourse is not merely an expression of sympathy but also a manifestation of faith, solidarity, and theological belief. This article focuses specifically on the declarative illocutionary acts embedded in Christian condolence discourse on social media. Unlike expressive acts which reveal psychological states, declarative acts function to bring about a change in the perceived spiritual status of the deceased or the bereaved. These utterances take the form of affirmations of divine mercy, declarations of eternal rest, and pronouncements of spiritual transformation.

Despite the increasing use of social media in religious communication, there is limited pragmatic research focusing on declarative illocutionary acts in Christian condolence discourse. Most existing studies emphasise expressive acts of condolence in secular domain, leaving religious domain underexplored. Yet, declarative utterances in religious context play a crucial role in constructing meaning, reinforcing belief systems, and providing spiritual reassurance.

2. Literature Review

Condolence speech acts constitute a researched domain within pragmatics, encompassing cultural, religious, and digital dimensions that shape their realisation and interpretation. This review synthesises key studies to contextualise declarative illocutionary acts in Christian condolence discourse on social media platforms.

Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) examined 678 Facebook comments responding to a Jordanian actor's obituary, delineating seven strategies such as prayers for divine mercy and Quranic recitations—proto-declarative assertions of forgiveness rooted in Islamic theology. Their findings illuminate religion's pervasive influence on digital condolences but remain confined to Muslim contexts, underscoring a lacuna in Christian equivalents like declarations of eternal rest.

Cross-cultural analyses further reveal variability: Elwood (2004) contrasted English and Japanese discourse completion tasks (DCTs) for bereavement scenarios, identifying strategies including sympathy expression and assistance offers, modulated by loss type and cultural norms. Similarly, Behnam, Hamed, and Asli (2012) compared Persian and English condolences, noting Persian brevity and religious directness against English elaboration, a pattern resonant with assertive Christian declarations of divine consolation.

In African settings, Bayo (2021) analysed Facebook responses to Tanzanian President Magufuli's death, prioritising pleas for God's mercy alongside grief and scriptural citations, bridging Islamic and Christian usages. Egenti and Mmadike (2016) documented Igbo funeral discourse in Nigeria, where utterances target the bereaved, deceased, and divine, fulfilling expressive, consolatory, and legacy-affirming roles—precursors to multi-addressee declaratives in online Christian interactions.

Digital pragmatics emerge in Barahimi and Shariati (2021), who found Instagram condolences terse and formulaic, increased by paralinguistic elements, reflecting platform affordances. Trosborg (1995) highlighted condolences ritualised, context-bound nature, while Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) emphasized sociopragmatic norms in face-threatening acts, informing bald-on-record politeness in communal online grief.

Al-Ameen (2017) demonstrated Arabic Muslim formulas' dual condolence-reminder functions, in contrast to Christian eschatological assertions (e.g., eternal life references). Nodoushan (2007) framed speech acts as *Wittgensteinian* language games governed by community rules, apt for analysing shared Christian interpretive conventions.

Notwithstanding these contributions, existent literature predominantly addresses Islamic or offline condolences via elicited data, neglecting spontaneous Christian declaratives on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. The present study addresses this gap through netnographic analysis of 100 screenshots (2022-2024).

3. Aim, Objectives and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to analyse the pragmatic functions of declarative illocutionary acts in Christian condolence discourse on social media.

The objectives are:

- To identify declarative illocutionary acts in condolence messages.
- To analyse their pragmatic functions.
- To examine the role of religious expressions in shaping these acts.
- To explore their sociopragmatic impact.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What types of declarative illocutionary acts are used in Christian condolence discourse on social media?
- What pragmatic functions do these declarative acts perform?
- How do religious expressions shape the realization of declarative illocutionary acts?
- What sociopragmatic roles do these acts play within online Christian communities?

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) alongside Halliday's (1994) Systemic Functional Linguistics to elucidate declaratives' pragmatic force in digital religious discourse.

Austin (1962) defines declaratives as performatives that alter reality via felicity conditions, such as institutional authority; Searle refines them as commitments to truth that effect change, e.g., declaring forgiveness. Declarative illocutionary acts are those that bring about a change in the state of affairs through utterance. In Christian condolence discourse, such acts are realised through statements that affirm spiritual realities, such as eternal rest or divine acceptance.

A Declarative illocutionary act brings about an immediate change in the condition of an object simply by the statement itself, as soon as it is uttered. It is important to note that, according to the felicity conditions regarding the truth and falsity of an utterance, the commenter performing the declarative illocutionary act holds a special institutional role within the context that qualifies them to make such a declaration for it to be considered appropriate. Declarative illocutionary acts are intended to create new circumstances. Included in this category of speech are acts that aim to impress, decide, cancel, prohibit, grant, permit, classify, lift, forgive, excommunicate, declare war, christen, or dismiss someone from their employment, among others.

Declarative condoling acts involve explicit pronouncements of spiritual status, often framed as certainties of faith. Such utterances function as verbal affirmations that transform perception into belief.

5. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach using netnography (Kozinets, 2020). The data consist of naturally occurring condolence messages collected from selected Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups of Pentecostal, Protestant and Catholic churches.

A total of 100 screenshots were purposively sampled based on relevance to condolence discourse. Ethical considerations were observed by anonymising participants and avoiding identifiable personal data.

The data were transcribed, coded, and analysed according to illocutionary force and pragmatic function. Declarative acts were categorised based on their addressees (God, deceased, bereaved, and community). The analysis also integrates insights from Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly interpersonal meaning, to explain how language constructs social and spiritual relations.

5.1 Analysis and Discussion

5.1.1 Declarative Illocutionary Act of Absolution from God

Declarative acts of absolution are prominent in Christian condolence discourse. These utterances declare the spiritual status of the deceased, often affirming that the deceased has been received by God.

Examples include:

C1: *May the Lord receive his soul.*

This utterance exemplifies a declarative illocutionary act framed through a directive structure. While the use of “may” suggests a request, the pragmatic force goes beyond supplication to construct a spiritual reality in which the deceased is already being received by God. The commenter positions themselves within a shared Christian belief system where divine mercy is presumed accessible. The utterance performs a dual function: it intercedes on behalf of the deceased and simultaneously reassures the community of the deceased’s acceptance into divine presence. The declarative force is therefore rooted in faith rather than institutional authority, transforming a prayer into a performative affirmation of salvation.

Here, the respondents seek God’s mercy for the deceased, asking for Him to receive the soul of the departed. The Declarative illocutionary act is evident in the use of the hedge “may,” as the respondent intercedes on behalf of the deceased.

C2: *May Almighty God answer his prayers as he continues to intercede for us all in Jesus’ mighty name amen.*

This repetition of a prayer for intercession appears in a Facebook comment thread, aligning with earlier comments and following the structured devotional tone characteristic of Christian condolence discussions.

This comment extends the declarative function by attributing ongoing agency to the deceased, presenting him as an intercessor. Pragmatically, it constructs a posthumous identity where the deceased remains spiritually active. The utterance does not merely request divine response; it declares a theological reality in which the dead participate in the spiritual life of the living. This reflects a belief in the communion of saints and reinforces communal continuity beyond death. The declarative force lies in affirming both divine responsiveness and the elevated spiritual status of the deceased.

Besides, in this reaction, the commenter reveals that the deceased is also interceding for other Christians. While a dead body cannot act, it is believed that, in certain instances, the deceased intercedes for the living before God. According to the commenter, the deceased is a saint who can assist the community with intercessions. His reaction calls on God to answer not only the prayers of the bereaved but also those of the deceased. In other words, the deceased is praying for their own prayer to be answered. The commenters participate in a devotional exchange typical of Catholic, responding publicly to a death announcement by asking the deceased to intercede for the living.

C3: May the good Lord receive his soul and present it to God the Most High.

This utterance appears in a Facebook comment thread, where the death of a religious figure is announced. The commenter petitions God directly to receive the deceased soul and elevate it to divine presence. It is situated in a public, faith-based mourning environment. It is a liturgical final commendation prayer for the dead during funerals in Catholic Church. This reaction is the sermon during which every catholic follower is praying for the deceased and is asking for God's mercy. This is the response to "saints of God, come to his/her aid! Come to meet him/her, angels of the Lord!".

It constructs a hierarchical spiritual process where the deceased is mediated through divine channels. The declarative force is intensified by the ceremonial tone, transforming the statement into a ritual act performed within a digital space. The commenter aligns with established doctrinal beliefs about purification and divine presentation, thereby reinforcing the theological framework that governs interpretations of death.

C4: May his soul rest in peace IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

Here, the phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ" functions as a performative legitimiser, reinforcing the authority of the utterance. The statement declares a condition of peace for the deceased, treating it as a realisable and almost immediate spiritual state. The invocation of Jesus' name indexes divine authority, shifting the utterance from a hopeful wish to a confident declaration grounded in faith.

C5: May the Lord welcome you into his eternal Paradise in the mighty name of JESUS CHRIST. Amen !

This utterance directly addresses the deceased, constructing an imagined transition into heaven. The declarative act reframes death as entry into a divine realm, emphasising continuity rather than loss. The commenter symbolically accompanies the deceased into paradise through language, thereby reducing the perceived rupture caused by death.

C6: God be with you Father Lord Jesus give us the grace to make it to Heaven at last in Jesus' name.

This example expands the scope from the deceased to the living community. The declarative act not only affirms divine presence but also projects a collective aspiration toward salvation. It situates death as a reminder of shared destiny, reinforcing communal faith and moral alignment.

C7: May the angels lead him into Paradise. Now that he has passed from this life, forgive him and grant pardon if he offended You by any negative thoughts, words or action or by failing to fulfill his duties ... We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This utterance reflects strong intertextuality with liturgical prayers. It constructs a vivid spiritual journey guided by angels, transforming death into a sacred transition. The declarative force lies in its narrative quality, which provides a structured and comforting image of the afterlife.

C4 to C7 are posted in a Facebook comment section responding to a death announcement. They invoke Christ's name to frame the deceased's rest in peace, aligning with collective devotional practices visible to a broader online community. The comments situate grief within a ritualised framework of Christian intercessory prayer. Their narrative forms situate the comment within public acts of mourning and intercession that follow established Christian liturgical conventions.

Expressions such as "in the mighty name of Jesus Christ," "We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ," and "in the name of Jesus Christ" serve as adjacency pairs in Christian liturgy. They act as declarations by the respondents. The word "Amen," used in response, signifies agreement and affirmation. The phrase "in the name of Jesus Christ" is believed to provide divine backing for the requests made during prayers, reflecting the importance of invoking the name of Jesus for effectiveness in Christian supplications.

These utterances function as declarations of faith rather than mere wishes. Although they appear syntactically as directives, pragmatically they operate as declaratives because they affirm a spiritual reality. Also, the use of expressions such as "in the name of Jesus Christ" and "Amen" reinforces the declarative force by invoking divine authority. These expressions serve as markers of certainty and communal agreement.

5.1.2 Declarative Illocutionary Acts Addressed to the Bereaved

Declarative acts are also directed toward the bereaved family. These include statements such as:

C8: May his soul rejoice with the Lord. May the Holy Spirit console and restore Pastor Marcello Tunasi and his children. #blanchetunasi May your soul rest in perfect

This utterance appears in a Facebook comment thread under a public tribute post announcing the passing of Mama Blanche Tunasi. It appears alongside numerous prayers and hashtags from church members, relatives, and friends who knew her personally. The commenter directly addresses Pastor Marcello Tunasi and his children, invoking the Holy Spirit for consolation and restoration.

The utterance illustrates a declarative illocutionary act directed toward the bereaved, in which the commenter invokes the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of emotional and spiritual restoration. Although structured as a prayer through the modal "may," the utterance pragmatically constructs a future state in which consolation and restoration are expected outcomes. The naming of Pastor Marcello Tunasi and his children personalises the condolence while simultaneously situating it within a broader public and communal context. The reference to the Holy Spirit reflects a deeply rooted Christian belief in divine comfort, transforming the utterance into more than a sympathetic expression; it becomes a faith-driven declaration that repositions grief within a framework of divine healing and continuity.

Addressed to the bereaved, this utterance declares a future state of emotional and spiritual restoration. The Holy Spirit is positioned as an active agent of healing, and the statement projects comfort as an inevitable outcome. The declarative act thus functions as emotional reassurance grounded in theology.

*C9: May the Lord wipe away the tears from your eyes. **Be strong, the God of the living and the dead is with you.***

This comment appears in a WhatsApp status reply responding to a personal bereavement update shared by a contact. It directs encouragement to the mourner, urging strength amid loss, in a semi-private space for close connections. Surrounding replies include similar short messages of faith and comfort from mutual acquaintances.

This utterance combines declarative and directive elements to construct both emotional reassurance and spiritual certainty. The first clause, drawing on biblical imagery, projects a future condition in which sorrow is removed through divine intervention. The second clause, “Be strong,” introduces an explicit directive, yet it is reinforced by the declarative assertion that God is present with the bereaved. The phrase “God of the living and the dead” expands the theological scope, affirming divine sovereignty over both life and death. Pragmatically, the utterance functions to stabilise the emotional state of the mourner by embedding personal grief within a larger cosmological order governed by God.

C8-C9 serve as encouraging messages to the bereaved families going through a difficult time. The commenters use biblical expressions to sympathise with those in mourning. These utterances declare a new emotional and spiritual state for the bereaved, positioning them within a framework of divine comfort and support.

5.1.3 Declarative Illocutionary Acts Addressed to the Deceased

Some declarative acts directly address the deceased. The following are examples of declarative acts addressed to the deceased.

*C10: Rest in peace, beautiful **bride of Christ!** You joined our **Lord in His passion in this holy week, may He raise you to life everlasting on Easter Sunday. Amen***

This utterance is situated in a Facebook comment thread linked to a death announcement during Holy Week. It connects the deceased’s passing to Christ’s passion and hopes for resurrection on Easter, blending liturgy with grief. Other comments in the thread feature prayers, amens, and reflections on eternal life from believers.

In this case, the respondent addresses the deceased with a wish for safe rest. The term “bride” typically refers to a woman who has just been married. In this context, it signifies one who is prepared for a union with Christ, the bridegroom. The commenter interprets the deceased, regardless of gender, as part of the “bride of Christ,” indicating that they are prepared for a wedding with Him. The commenter prays for God’s mercy for the resurrection of the deceased on this significant day.

This utterance exemplifies a richly symbolic declarative act addressed to the deceased. The metaphor “bride of Christ” elevates the deceased into a sacred identity, framing death as a moment of union with the divine rather than separation. The reference to Easter introduces a powerful intertextual link to the resurrection narrative, situating the individual’s death within the broader Christian story of death and renewal. The declarative force of the utterance lies in its ability to transform the meaning of death into one of hope, continuity, and eventual resurrection, thereby offering both spiritual reassurance and theological coherence.

C11: *Blessed memory great father*

This tribute is part of a Facebook comments section under a post recalling the deceased’s warm smiles and impact. The thread includes affectionate memories and expressions of love from followers and community members.

The phrase “blessed memory” is an honorific used in Christian tradition to refer to a deceased person, particularly one who was well-respected and faithful. It serves as a way to honour their memory with reverence and respect. The addition of “great father” further reinforces the social and moral identity of the deceased, emphasising respect and reverence. Pragmatically, the utterance constructs a positive legacy, ensuring that the deceased remains present within the collective memory of the community.

This concise expression functions as an honorific declaration. It constructs the deceased’s legacy as sacred and enduring. Despite its brevity, the utterance performs a powerful identity-affirming function, preserving the deceased’s social and spiritual value.

5.1.4 Declarative Illocutionary Act of Expression of Concern

Another major category is the declarative expression of concern.

C12: *May the Lord strengthen you in the face of this difficult trial. Life is a cross. Let us trust in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This condolence is posted as a Facebook comment responding to news of bereavement affecting a Pastor. This utterance integrates theological reflection with emotional support, functioning both as a declarative act and as a form of moral instruction. The first clause projects divine strengthening as an anticipated reality, while the second clause, “Life is a cross,” frames suffering as an inherent and meaningful aspect of Christian existence. By invoking the symbolism of the cross, the utterance aligns personal grief with the suffering of Christ, thereby normalising and sacralising the experience of loss. The declarative force lies in its ability to reinterpret suffering as purposeful and spiritually significant.

C13: *May the Lord Jesus Christ deign to strengthen you.*

This short intercessory message appears as a Facebook comment following the death of a priest. This concise utterance exemplifies formulaic condolence language that is both culturally

recognisable and pragmatically effective. The use of “deign” introduces a tone of humility, acknowledging divine superiority while still expecting a divine assistance. The declarative force is embedded in the certainty that strength will be granted, making the utterance both a petition and an affirmation of faith.

C14: *May the Lord strengthen you daddy we love you very much.*

This message is shared within a WhatsApp group where relational closeness is foregrounded. In fact, a pastor lost his child and one of his fellow members is sympathising with him. The use of “daddy” and “we love you” indicates familial or intimate spiritual kinship. This utterance blends declarative prayer with expressions of personal affection. The term “daddy” signals a relationship of spiritual or familial closeness, while “we love you very much” reinforces emotional solidarity. The declarative act functions on two levels: it invokes divine strength and simultaneously affirms human support, creating a multidimensional framework of consolation.

C15: *My sympathies go out to the Adventist movement in Haiti and especially to his family and friends at CMAH.*

This condolence is posted as a Facebook comment extending sympathy to a religious institution and its members. It adopts an institutional (*Adventist movement*) tone rather than a personal one. This utterance marks a shift from strictly prayer-oriented declarative expressions to a more institutional and community-focused form of condolence. While it does not explicitly invoke divine authority, it still performs a declarative illocutionary act by publicly acknowledging loss and positioning it within a broader religious and transnational community. The reference to the “Adventist movement in Haiti” expands the scope of mourning beyond immediate relations, constructing grief as a collective and shared experience. Pragmatically, the utterance functions to reinforce solidarity across geographical and institutional boundaries, highlighting how digital platforms enable the extension of communal empathy. The declarative force lies in its recognition of loss at both personal and institutional levels, thereby legitimising the grief of a wider audience.

C16: *May God soothe hearts, heal the broken-hearted, relieve the oppressed in the mighty name of Jesus Christ.*

This prayerful condolence appears in a Facebook comment invoking divine healing and relief during the loss of a Full Gospel Mission leader. The comment contributes to a chain of prayer-oriented responses. It sacralises the comment thread as a virtual prayer space.

This utterance intensifies the declarative function through the accumulation of multiple verbs that target different dimensions of suffering. The parallel structure— “soothe,” “heal,” and “relieve”—constructs a comprehensive vision of divine intervention that addresses emotional, psychological, and social pain. The inclusion of “in the mighty name of Jesus Christ” serves as a performative reinforcement, invoking divine authority to validate the expected

outcomes. Although framed as a prayer, the utterance pragmatically operates as a declaration of holistic healing, projecting the restoration of the bereaved as a spiritually guaranteed process. Its rhetorical structure amplifies its perlocutionary effect, offering both reassurance and a sense of completeness in divine care.

C17: May the good Lord give you the strength and consolation you need

This Facebook comment offers generalised consolation focused on divine strength and comfort following an announcement of a fellow Christian who lost her mother. The comment aligns with communal norms of faith-based sympathy. Compared to other comments, its role is additive rather than dialogic.

This example represents a conventional and formulaic expression of Christian condolence, characterised by simplicity and clarity. Despite its brevity, the utterance carries a strong declarative force, as it projects strength and consolation as attainable and forthcoming realities. The phrase “you need” personalises the message, acknowledging the specific emotional demands of the bereaved while maintaining a general applicability. Pragmatically, such formulaic expressions play an important role in sustaining communal norms of support, allowing participants to engage in mourning practices even with minimal linguistic elaboration. The effectiveness of the utterance lies in its familiarity and its alignment with shared expectations of faith-based comfort.

C18: May the HOLY SPIRIT console and strengthen you in this ordeal in the name of JESUS CHRIST

This condolence is expressed in a Facebook comment emphasizing the Holy Spirit as Comforter during the death of the pastor’s father from “CMCI”. This utterance demonstrates the use of capitalisation as a pragmatic strategy to intensify meaning and emphasise sacred elements. By foregrounding “HOLY SPIRIT” and “JESUS CHRIST,” the commenter visually and symbolically highlights the divine agents responsible for comfort and strength. The utterance constructs grief as an “ordeal,” thereby acknowledging its severity while simultaneously projecting divine intervention as the solution. The declarative force is reinforced by the invocation formula “in the name of Jesus Christ,” which functions as a marker of authority and legitimacy within Christian discourse. As such, the utterance operates as both a prayer and a confident affirmation of divine presence and action.

The capitalization of “HOLY SPIRIT” adds emphasis, marking the utterance as highly sacred. The declarative act intensifies the perceived power of divine intervention.

C19: May the Lord strengthen you man of God

This Facebook comment addresses the bereaved pastor as “man of God,” highlighting clerical identity. This utterance integrates condolence with recognition of religious identity and hierarchy. The address term “man of God” signals respect for the bereaved’s spiritual status,

positioning him as a religious leader within the community. Pragmatically, the utterance performs a dual function: it offers comfort while simultaneously reinforcing the social and spiritual role of the addressee. The declarative act thus extends beyond emotional support to include the maintenance of communal structure and respect. By acknowledging the bereaved's identity, the commenter aligns the expression of sympathy with broader cultural norms of honour and recognition.

This utterance acknowledges the bereaved's religious status. It combines condolence with recognition of spiritual authority, reinforcing hierarchical relationships within the community.

C20: May the Holy Spirit strengthen you Pastor Marcello in the name of Jesus.

This message appears as a Facebook comment directly naming a Pastor. Invocation of the Holy Spirit situates comfort within divine agency. In this utterance, the explicit naming of "Pastor Marcello" personalises the condolence while maintaining its public and communal dimension. The invocation of the Holy Spirit situates the expression within a Pentecostal framework, where divine empowerment is central. The phrase "in the name of Jesus" again functions as a performative reinforcement, emphasising the legitimacy and expected efficacy of the declaration. Pragmatically, the utterance bridges individual grief and collective awareness, allowing the community to participate in the mourning process while addressing the bereaved directly. The declarative force lies in projecting divine strength as both necessary and assured.

C21: Daddy, may God strengthen you, may he give you the strength to endure this ordeal.

This condolence is shared in a WhatsApp group following the death of an Apostle wife. This utterance foregrounds relational intimacy through the use of "Daddy," a term that conveys both familial and spiritual closeness. The repetition of "may God strengthen you" intensifies the declarative force, emphasizing endurance as a key response to grief. The phrase "this ordeal" acknowledges the severity of the situation, while the projection of divine strength constructs resilience as divinely enabled. Pragmatically, the utterance combines emotional warmth with theological reassurance, creating a supportive environment that reinforces both personal and communal bonds.

This example reinforces emotional closeness and dependency. The declarative act supports endurance, projecting resilience as divinely enabled.

C22: May God sustain, strengthen and comfort His servant.

*Wonderful Holy Spirit in the **Name of Jesus Christ**... where our words are insufficient to encourage Papa@ Pastor Marcello Tunasi, we are certain that you have the right words...because in the past... You have shown him your goodness, mercy and love... Courage to all the family... and to the EMCI TV family.*

This extended prayer appears as a Facebook comment functioning as collective intercession. It was written during the death of a Pastor's wife. It addresses the Holy Spirit

extensively, acknowledging human inadequacy in grief. The message blends lament, petition, and encouragement. Public posting transforms the thread into a communal prayer altar. Mentions of family and EMCI TV expand the mourning community.

This extended utterance transforms the condolence into a full performative prayer, characterized by elaboration, repetition, and direct address to the Holy Spirit. It acknowledges the limitations of human language in expressing comfort, while asserting divine sufficiency as the ultimate source of consolation. The declarative force is amplified through its collective orientation, as it extends support not only to the immediate bereaved but also to the wider family and community. The reference to past divine actions (“you have shown him your goodness”) reinforces faith in continued intervention, constructing a narrative of ongoing divine care. Pragmatically, the utterance functions as a communal act of intercession, turning the digital space into a site of shared spiritual engagement.

This elaborate utterance transforms the comment into a full prayer performance. It acknowledges the limits of human language while asserting divine sufficiency. The declarative force lies in its collective orientation, extending comfort to multiple groups.

C23: May the Holy Spirit strengthen you mightily in the glorious name of JESUS CHRIST. REST IN PEACE BLANCHE.

This condolence appears as a Facebook comment combining intercession for the bereaved with a rest-in-peace declaration for Mama Blanche. It invokes the Holy Spirit as the agent of strength, reflecting Pentecostal theology. This utterance is notable for its dual orientation, addressing both the bereaved and the deceased within a single expression. The first clause invokes divine strength for the living, while the second clause declares eternal peace for the deceased. The capitalisation of “JESUS CHRIST” and “REST IN PEACE BLANCHE” serves to intensify the emotional and spiritual impact of the message. Pragmatically, this combination reflects the multifunctional nature of condolence discourse, where multiple communicative goals are achieved simultaneously. The declarative force lies in constructing both comfort and closure within a unified expression.

This utterance combines two declarative targets: the bereaved and the deceased. It simultaneously constructs emotional support and spiritual rest, demonstrating the multifunctionality of condolence discourse.

C24: May the Lord strengthen you in this painful ordeal.

This Facebook comment was written to a mother from the community of Baptist church during the death of her two- years old baby. This concise utterance acknowledges the depth of suffering while projecting divine support as the primary means of coping. The phrase “painful ordeal” validates the emotional experience of the bereaved, ensuring that the expression does not minimize the gravity of the loss. At the same time, the invocation of divine strength reframes the situation within a theological perspective, offering a pathway toward endurance.

Pragmatically, the utterance balances empathy and reassurance, functioning as a stabilizing force in the mourning process.

This concise statement acknowledges suffering while projecting divine support. Its declarative force lies in validating pain and offering a structured response to it.

C25: May the Lord comfort them and teach us to count our days wisely, so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

This Facebook comment links bereavement to reflection on human mortality. It draws on wisdom tradition to frame loss meaningfully. This utterance extends the scope of condolence beyond immediate emotional support to include moral and existential reflection. By invoking the idea of “counting our days wisely,” the commenter situates the experience of loss within a broader contemplation of human mortality and the value of life. The declarative act thus performs a dual function: it offers comfort to the bereaved while encouraging the community to derive meaning and wisdom from the event. Pragmatically, the utterance transforms grief into a moment of collective introspection, linking individual loss to universal human concerns and spiritual growth.

This utterance extends beyond condolence into moral reflection. It transforms grief into a moment of existential awareness, encouraging wisdom and spiritual growth. All the above comments serve as declarative condolence messages expressing concern. They are filled with encouragement for the challenges that the bereaved are facing. These messages provide comfort and strength to lift them up when they need an extra dose of joy. During hard times that leave them feeling weak or exhausted, these condolence messages can heal and fortify souls. They are crucial for instilling courage and for taking on the challenges that lie ahead.

These utterances function to transform the emotional state of the bereaved by invoking divine intervention.

6. Discussion of Findings

In Christian condolence practices, declarative illocutionary acts involving absolution from God focus on offering forgiveness, comfort, and the assurance of God’s grace and mercy. These comments and posts are typically framed as declarations of divine forgiveness, directed towards God, the bereaved family, or the deceased. The intent of these utterances is to convey spiritual peace, provide forgiveness, and affirm the Christian belief in divine mercy during times of grief. Declarative illocutionary acts inherently make definitive statements about the bereavement and the social media users’ relationship with God, providing comfort.

The analysis reveals several key functions of declarative illocutionary acts. These acts offer multi-layered effects: spiritual reassurance (e.g., forgiveness transcends death), emotional healing (framing loss as “transition”), communal bonding via liturgical formulas and faith reinforcement by strengthening religious identity. Brevity and repetition (e.g., “Amen”) amplify perlocutionary impact, compensating for absent nonverbal cues.

Declarative illocutionary acts in Christian condolence discourse are deeply rooted in theological beliefs. They go beyond linguistic expressions to function as performative acts that construct spiritual realities.

These acts are shaped by context, including the relationship between participants, the platform used, and the shared religious framework. The digital environment allows these declarations to be publicly shared, creating a collective space of mourning and faith expression. Moreover, declarative illocutionary acts of absolution in Christian condolence messages play a pivotal role in providing comfort, peace, and closure during times of loss. Whether directed towards God, the bereaved family, or the deceased, these utterances emphasise divine mercy, forgiveness, and the Christian hope for eternal peace. By making definitive statements about God's forgiveness and grace, these speech acts reinforce essential aspects of Christian theology, such as the possibility of absolution for all and the eternal peace promised by God.

Declarative illocutionary acts of expression of concern addressed to the bereaved family in Christian condolence messages serve a multi-faceted purpose: they offer emotional comfort, spiritual reassurance, and communion in grief. These utterances acknowledge the pain of loss, affirm the validity of the family's sorrow, and remind the bereaved of God's love and mercy. They also foster a sense of connection, both with the commenter and the broader Christian community, encouraging the family to trust in God's grace and find solace in their faith.

Through these declarative illocutionary acts, the Christian community provides not only condolences but also emotional and spiritual healing. The use of comforting language, references to God's peace and strength, and the communal tone all work together to support the grieving family. By affirming the spiritual foundation of hope, these expressions help the bereaved family move through their mourning process with a sense of peace, trust, and reliance on God's comfort.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that declarative illocutionary acts play a central role in Christian condolence discourse on social media. Declarative acts in Christian condolence discourse pragmatically transform grief into hope, uniquely filling gaps in prior research. They function as powerful tools for expressing faith, providing comfort, and constructing meaning in times of grief. By focusing on declarative acts, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the sociopragmatic dimensions of religious language in digital communication.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article. The research was conducted independently, and no financial, institutional, or personal relationships influenced the design, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the study.

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