



## THE EXPRESSIVE SPEECH ACTS IN KAMALA HARRIS` VICTORY SPEECH: A STUDY OF MULTICULTURAL VALUES

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the types of expressive speech acts used by Kamala Harri in her victory speech as the first black female vice president in American history. Her personality as a Jamaican-American-Indian woman has attracted public attention, especially after the Black Lives Matter campaign. The five types of expressive speech acts in this study are based on Searle (1976). This speech act then refers to the words used to express the speaker's feelings towards the situation, such as apologizing, thanking, deploring, and welcoming. The method used in this research is a qualitative method that involves collecting and analyzing non-numerical data. The data of this study were taken from the transcript of Kamala's victory speech retrieved from the website of the Washington Post. The results show there are 20 sentences used as the expressive speech act which reflect cultural values she owned as a Jamaican-Indian woman. These include greetings, gratitude, sadness, praise, happiness, and attention. Attentive speech includes speech acts of appreciation, willingness (hope), encouragement, the pride that shows solidarity. Behind these expressive speech acts, Harris implies a great intention to embrace multicultural values and empower the entire black community, especially women, and fight racism in the United States. Through her victory speech, Harris embodied multicultural values which imply her pride toward her ethnic roots and that she celebrates unity among diversities in the country of United States. Besides, the expressive speech acts reflect the social functions in leading a country.*

**Subject Area:** Socio-Pragmatics

**Keywords:** expressive speech act, multicultural values, Kamala Harris` victory speech

### 1 Introduction

Language holds a very crucial role in human life. To communicate in a community, people require two types of language, spoken and written. During communication, people not just express some propositions, but might also some kinds of actions such as ordering, warning, regarding, etc. By these, other participants in a talk will be able to figure out something uttered by the speakers. The expressions of ideas are not only to give the information but also to make someone do something. The meaning of the language used by people has an intention not only meaning. There is a meaning behind that. This can be seen in the victory speech delivered by Kamala Harris as the first woman as a vice president of the USA. Through her speech, she expressed various ideas and information, she expressed her feeling with various words to appreciate the American people who have voted her as a vice President, she thanks and convinces all people to keep spirit hand in hand to make America great.

American people identify the victory speech as a medium to communicate between the president and vice president at the moment after winning a general election. Through this, they deliver their gratitude, visions, or any kind of hope toward the country and its people. Kamala Harris, as the first black female vice president-elect in American history also had the chance. As an Asian-

American, she inspires all people around the world, especially women to contribute more to the country. She has proved that there is no border between men and women. All are equal and that equality is existence. That is why her victory speech is interesting to be analyzed, particularly in terms of expressive speech acts, their forms, and the intention in her speech. Not only by her speech but people were also impressed by her appearance. Multicultural values are knotted by both her speech and her appearance on that day.

The writers are interested to analyze this topic because the election of Kamala Harris as the first black female vice president of the United States inspires people, not only Americans, especially women that there is no boundary in dreams, even diversities. Through her victory speech, Harris conveys deep messages and values. Her expressive speech acts and multicultural values are very inspiring and valuable. According to Austin (1962), people can act through language, do things through words and get others to do things for us through our words. In doing a speech, a speaker may convey actions while making utterances. Then, Searle (1979) divided speech acts into five types: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. For example, when we say that the weather is hot, it is not just information then. Instead, it demands actions to take a glass of water, turn on the air conditioner or open the window to get fresher air. It explains that by their sentence a speaker may mean more than their words. Expressive speech, particularly, consists of some types, such as gratitude, reply of gratitude, congratulatory, greeting, apology, happiness, and insult. So, in this victory speech, there are many interesting utterances found and classified as expressive speech acts, including the intention and multicultural values behind that. As a result, the writers will describe and explain the expressive speech acts used by Kamala Harris in her victory speech; the function of each expressive speech act and the intentions behind that; and the multicultural values that appeared in the victory speech.

## 2 Literature Review

The study of speech acts has been carried out by many researchers (Utami, 2021; Yanti, 2020). However, the studies on women's speech acts are still rare. Therefore, Kamala Harris as the first female vice president of the United States is very interesting to study her speech acts, especially in types of expressive. This study will relate to the scope of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. As we all know, sociolinguistics studies the use of language in society, in this case, refers to American society, while pragmatics deals with the study of meaning based on contexts, a study of intention, including politeness principles, some matters in the taking of turns of conversation, organization of a text, presupposition, and implicature.

One of the most popular theories about pragmatics is about utterances and speech acts and also implicature in speech acts (Cutting, 2002, Grice, 1975, Cuming, 2005). The utterances delivered by Kamala Harris not only has a meaning but also an intention. A study of intention refers to pragmatics, not semantics (Griffiths, 2006). Furthermore, pragmatics is an important branch of linguistics that studies human communication and social interaction, including interpersonal communication, and intercultural communication. (Strauss and Feiz, 2014). Yule (1996) explained more than speech act is the action performed by producing an utterance. In addition, Searle (1979) categorized it into five as assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declaration. He also added that the illocutionary is used to express the psychological state, especially in the sincerity condition about a phenomenon. It means that the purpose of involving expressive speech act by a speaker is to convey his psychological states in the certain condition which indicated by related context.

Through this type of expression, Kamala Harris delivers her feelings and attitudes. She creates history as the first female, Black, and also the first South Asian to hold the office. Thus, diversity as her cultural background directs to multicultural, because culture is human's roots. On the other hand, Koentjaraningrat (2000) stated that cultural value can be explained as the development of certain values in society that leads to harmony and balance. It is considered as the determination of a nation's development because culture affects personal behavior, such as human-nature and individual

relationships, as well as what he wants and does not (Warsito, 2012:99). And through her victory speech, Harris tries to convey the realization.

There are seven elements of cultural values which are explained by Koentjaraningrat (in Siska, 2016:195). Those are language, art, religious system, technology system, occupation, social organization, and science system. These values are the universal cultural values that always exist in the community. Since Kamala Harris is a Black American and Indian American, based on this theory, we also try to interpolate the cultural features that Kamala Harris got from her mother's native country, India. Thus, multicultural values will be conveyed.

### 2.1 An Overview of Cultural Values

Socially, values, customs, and culture are often used interchangeably, each value is actually becoming a different part of the bigger picture. Through research, Schwartz (2014) analyzed certain countries related to the values held by their society. Based on the research, he found seven different types of values, they are (a) embeddedness that refers to the status quo; avoiding inclinations of individuals that might disturb the traditional order, (b) harmony means protection of the environment, the world at peace, (c) egalitarianism is commitment refers to transcendence of selfish interests; helpfulness, social justice, and the world at peace; equality. (d) intellectual Autonomy refers to creativity, and curiosity; (e) affective autonomy, stimulation, excitement, (f) mastery is an active effort to modify one's surroundings and get ahead of other people; (g) hierarchy covers legitimacy of the hierarchical role and resource allocation. These values can be reflected through behavior and utterances or speeches. Therefore, based on the theory, the multicultural values in Kamala Harris' victory speech, particularly through her expressive speech acts can be elaborated. This certainly cannot be separated from the contexts that influence every utterance.

## 3 Methodology

In conducting this research, the writers used descriptive qualitative research, which means research without any calculating and numbering (Moleong, 1990:2). We choose this method because it is purposed to identify the expressive speech acts and multicultural values within the speech.

The object of this research is Kamala Harris' speech victory (The Washington Post, 2020). The script and the picture are taken from the official website of the Washington Post, an official media based in the United State of America. The techniques of collecting data are: first, reading the speech script on the Washington Post, then transcribing the speech acts that belong to expressive form, and lastly, observing multicultural values in the speech and on Harris' appearance while delivering the speech. The techniques of analyzing data are by identifying the expressive speech acts in a whole speech, describing and analyzing the intention and form of expressive speech act by using Searle's speech act theory, describing and analyzing the multicultural values in her victory speech and on her appearance while delivering the speech, and then lasted by concluding the data analysis.

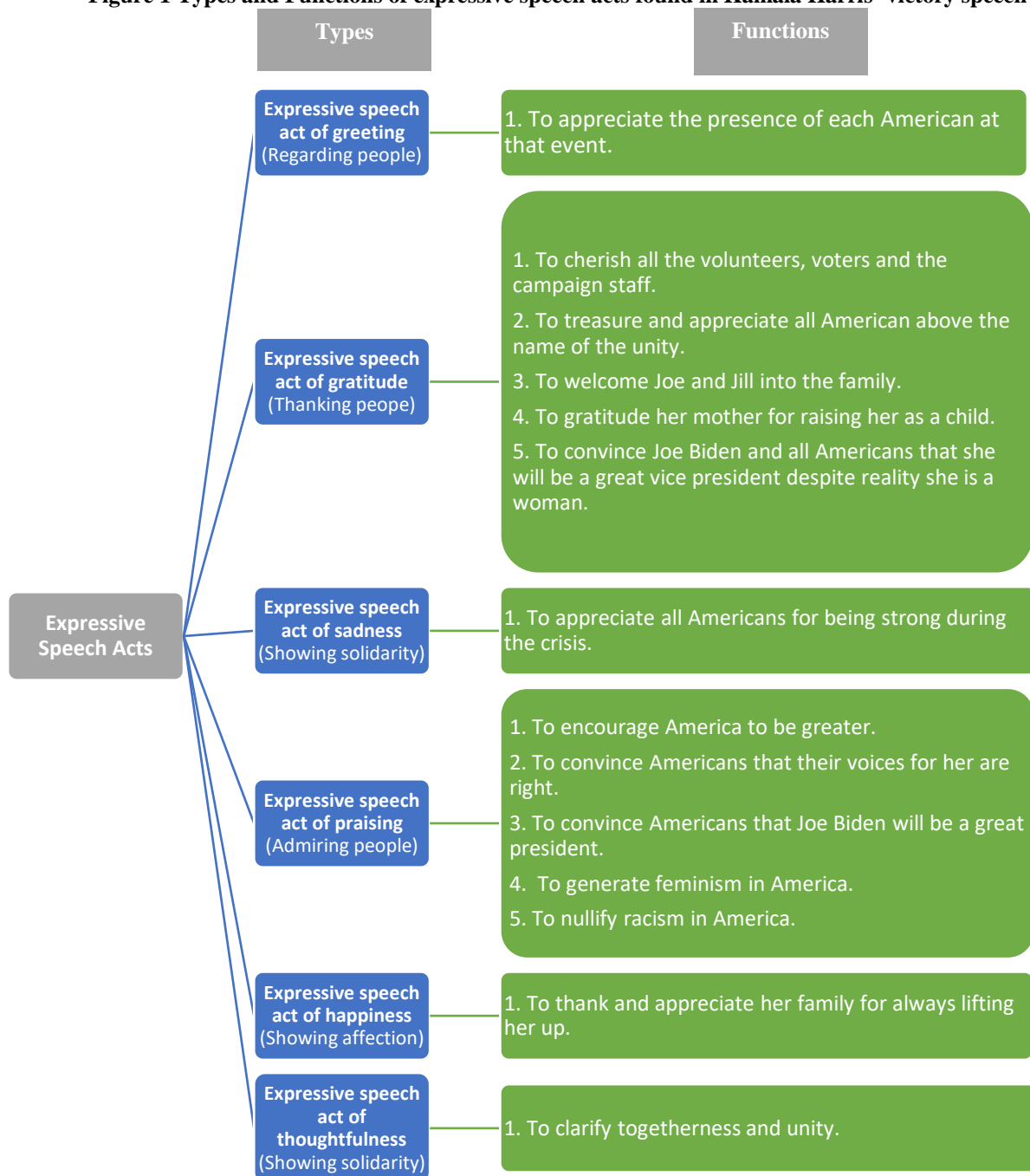
## 4 Results and Discussion

The results from the data analysis show that based on the linguistics form, we can differentiate two kinds of data, the utterances refer to sentences and phrases. It is found 20 data in form of expressive speech acts of greeting, gratitude, sadness, praise, happiness and also expressive speech act of thoughtfulness, it is conducted by the aims of regarding people, thanking people, showing solidarity, showing affection, and praising people. Behind those illocutionary speech acts, we found that there is the deep intention of giving voice to generate equality and battle racism in the United States of America and shows that people from various races and tribes have equal rights to amazing the world.

Through her speech victory, Kamala Harris implies the multicultural values to clarify that she is rightfully proud of her roots and ethnicity and she celebrates the unity amid diversity in the United States of America. Not only by words but multicultural values are also implied by her appearance. Her white outfit illustrates a history of women's rights across races, classes, and genders, while the

hairstyle she used depicted a history of self-expression in line with the social and political revolution based in Black communities. Based on the objectives of the data, we try to make and arrange several findings as seen in Figure 1. This figure shows a general description of the types and functions of Harris` victory speech.

Figure 1 Types and Functions of expressive speech acts found in Kamala Harris` victory speech



Based on figure 1, it can be summarized that there are six types of expressive speech acts embraced by Kamala Harris in her victory speech. They are found in types of greeting, gratitude, expressing sadness, praising, happiness, and thoughtfulness. In this case, each of the types stands with its sense based on the context.

The expressive speech act of greeting is delivered to regard people of the event. It is indicated by the utterances “good evening”. And the sense of this statement is to appreciate the presence of the people at that time.

The expressive speech act of gratitude. It is commonly used to thank people in certain moments. But in her victory speech, Harris intends to cherish all the volunteers, voters, and the campaign staff, to treasure and appreciate all Americans above the name of the unity, to welcome Joe and Jill into the family, to gratitude her mother for raising her as a child, and also to convince Joe Biden and all Americans that she will be a great vice president despite reality she is a woman. It is indicated by her utterances such as “*our nation owes you a debt of gratitude as you have protected the integrity of our democracy*”.

The expressive speech acts express a strong feeling of sadness and thoughtfulness to show solidarity, Kamala Harris expressed her feeling of sadness to appreciate all Americans for being strong during the crisis. As it is seen in her utterance “*I know times have been challenging, especially the last several months, the grief, sorrow, and pain, the worries, and the struggles.*”

On the other hand, expression of thoughtfulness is delivered in case of clarifying togetherness and unity among the people of America. It is indicated by the statement “*Tonight, I reflect on their struggle, their determination and the strength of their vision to see what can be unburdened by what has been, I stand on their shoulders.*”

Then, the expressive speech act of praising is delivered to admire people which contributed to the victory. But deep down inside, it is delivered to encourage America to be greater, to convince Americans that their voices for her are right, to convince Americans that Joe Biden will be a great president, to generate feminism in America, and to nullify racism in America. The examples are “*you voted, you delivered a clear message*” and “*Asian, White, Latina, and Native American women throughout our nation’s history who have paved the way for this moment tonight*”.

Last but not least, the expressive speech acts of happiness are used to show affection toward her beloved people. As found in the statement “*To my husband Doug, our children Cole and Ella, my sister Maya, and our whole family, I love you all.*” it is intended to thank and appreciate the family for all of their sacrifices.

#### 4.1 Types of Expressive Speech Acts in Kamala Harris Speech Victory

From the brief explanation, there are six types of speech acts found in Kamala Harris` victory speech. They are formed in phrases and sentences. First is the expressive speech acts of greeting in form of regarding people. We can see it from the sentence “good evening”. The second one is the expressive speech act of gratitude such as “thank you for bringing more people” and “our nation owes you a debt of gratitude”. Both of them are uttered to thank people. The third is the expressive speech acts of sadness in terms of showing solidarity. This type can be seen from “I know times have been challenging, ...the grief, sorrow, and pain, the worries and the struggles”. Fourth is the expressive speech acts of praising in terms of admiring people, as “A person whose own experience of loss gives him a sense of purpose that will help us”. The next one is the expressive speech acts of happiness in terms of showing affection. It can be found in the sentence “I love you”. And, last but not least is the expressive speech acts of thoughtfulness in terms of showing solidarity, such as “Tonight, I reflect on their struggle”.

We discover the amount of 20 phrases and sentences that belong to the expressive type of speech acts. All of them are indicate feelings, attitudes, and also Harris` psychological statement. It means that the expressive speech acts of greeting, gratitude, sadness, praise, happiness, and also expressive speech act of thoughtfulness can be conveyed through the words we usually use in certain moments.

#### 4.2 Functions of the Expressive Speech Acts and the Intentions behind Utterances

Through her speech victory, Kamala Harris expresses her psychological feelings for she wins the political contest as the first black female vice president-elect in American history. The functions and the intentions of expressive speech acts can be explained in the following paragraphs.

##### a. The Expressive speech acts of greeting

Through the expressive speech acts of greeting like “good evening”, Harris is functioning this sentence to regard people, and behind it, this utterance is actually intended to appreciate the presence of Americans for her at the event.

b. The expressive speech acts of gratitude

Harris` expressive speech acts of gratitude are delivered in for of thanking. It is reflected by the words “thank you for bringing more people than ever” which intended to cherish all the volunteers and the campaign staff or “our nation owes you a debt of gratitude” treasures and values all Americans above the name of unity.

c. The expressive speech acts of sadness

The expressive speech acts of sadness are uttered through the words “I know times have been challenging..., the grief, sorrow, and pain, the worries, and the struggles.” The function is to show a sense of solidarity and intended to appreciate all Americans for being strong during the crisis.

d. The expressive speech acts of praising

The acts of praising such as “But we`ve also witnessed your courage” and “For 4 years, you marched and organized for equality and justice” are intended to encourage Americans to be greater, while “you delivered a clear message” and “Joe is a healer, an uniter, tested and steady hand” are intended to convince Americans that their decision to choose Joe Biden as president is absolutely right.

e. The expressive speech acts of happiness

One function of the expressive speech acts of happiness found in Harris` victory speech is to show affection. The utterance is “I love you all” which is intended to thank her family for always lifting her up.

f. The expressive speech acts of thoughtfulness

It is can be found in “Tonight, I reflect on their struggle” which functioned to show solidarity. But, this utterance is intended to clarify togetherness in the group.

The data show that the high frequency of Kamala Harris` expressive speech acts are aimed to express her gratitude and praises towards God and people who have supported her during the campaign until the election day and who have made her become she is now.

As an amazing black woman in American History, Kamala Harris has a deep flotation of emotion deep down inside of her. Because of those reasons, her victory speech is not as superficial as it has spoken. The speech is the expression of love and gracefulness in deep meaning. So, here are the deep intentions behind each of the expressive speech acts:

Looking back to shootings tragedy toward black people and also the Black Lives Matter campaign in the United States, the election of Harris as the first black female vice president in American history is shocking, not only for Americans but also people around the world.

From the data above, we can conclude that in her speech victory, Harris not only emphasizes her gratitude and praises but also the deep intention to generate equality and social justice in the country which implies that people from various races, tribes, or even gender get the same chances and opportunities to shine and brighten up the world we living.

### 1.3 Multicultural Values behind the Victory Speech

The multicultural values in Kamala Harris` victory speech can be briefly seen through the figure 2 and the explanations are in the paragraphs that follow.

Figure 2 Multicultural values reflected in Kamala Harris` victory speech

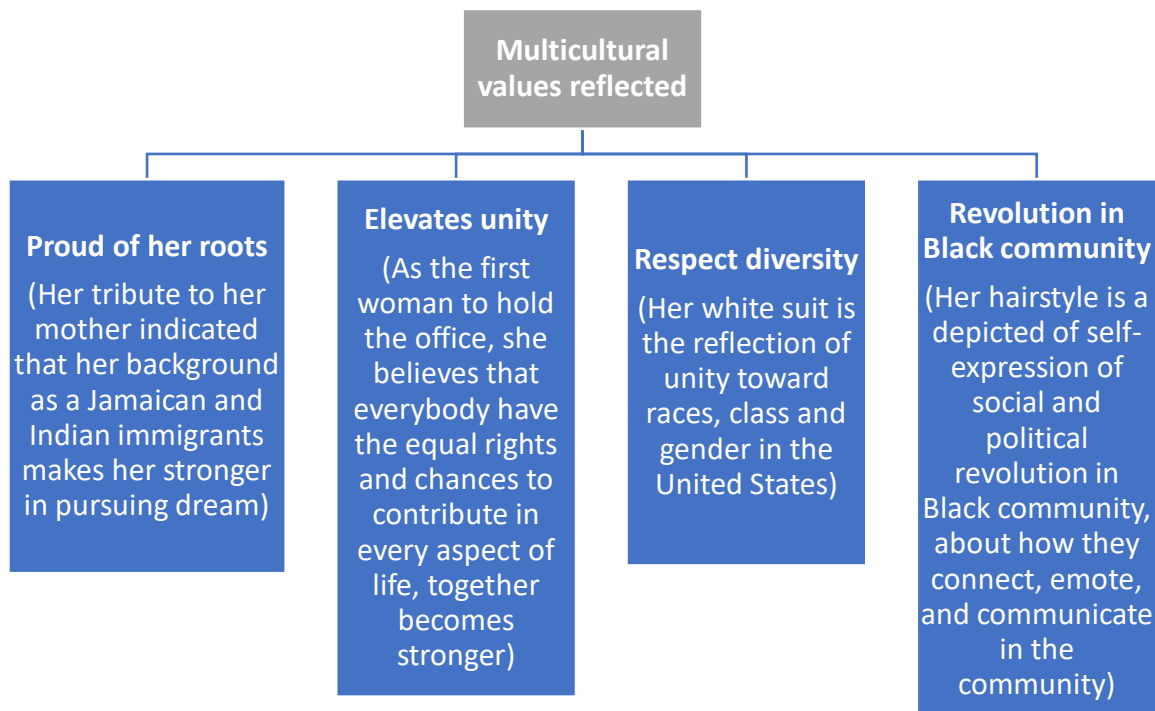


Figure 2 reflects the multicultural values that can be described as follow

a. Proud of her roots

Kamala Harris grown-up as a daughter of Jamaican and Indian Immigrants, there are no barriers to Harris` dreams. She has proved that her origin is a matter and has nothing to do with that. Through her victory speech, Harris paid tribute to her mother, Syamala Gopalan Harris, that *“When she came here from India at the age of 19, she maybe didn’t quite imagine this moment. But she believed so deeply in an America where a moment like this is possible.”* This statement clarifies that she is so proud of the South Asian Pride that she got from her mother. It implies that everyone can make their dreams come true, even in a competitive world and superpower country such as the United States of America. Different from Americans, Indians always hold on to their beliefs and cultural values. We cannot deny that the values she holds made Kamala Harris become the person she is now. The multicultural backgrounds she got from her parents transformed her to have a prudent attitude and create her personality as a very discreet woman.

b. Elevates unity

Through her victory speech, Kamala Harris defends the existence of minorities group in America, especially women. Through her statement *“And so, I’m thinking about her and the generations of women — Black women, Asian, White, Latina, Native American women who throughout our nation’s history have paved the way for this moment tonight,”* she clarifies that she stands for equality. Everything should be equal in every aspect of life. America should be a country of possibilities for everyone in it.

c. Respects diversity

The moment she delivered the speech, Harris wears a white suit. According to Teen Vogue (2021), the color white in Harris’s suit illustrates the history of women`s rights. It comes to American history, that the color of white symbolizes women`s rights and a symbol of honor towards the women's suffrage movement. Looking back to 1917, African-American participants in the Silent Protest and white have unified the colors of protest. It is the symbol of unity toward races, classes, and gender. On the other hand, in Hindu culture white represents mourning and spiritual rebirth.

#### d. Revolution in the Black community

According to The Teen Vogue (2021), Kamala Harris' hairstyle is a depiction of self-expression of social and political revolution in the Black community. It explains how Black people connect, emote, and communicate in their Communities. So, it reflects an advancement that still continued and developed.

### 5 Conclusion

After observing and analyzing the data, it is confirmed that expressive speech acts are found. To be precise, there are 20 utterances classified as part of the expressive speech act. Each of them belongs to the expressive speech acts of greeting, gratitude, sadness, praise, happiness, and also expressive speech act of thoughtfulness. The types comprise the expression of appreciation, gratitude, volition (hope), encouragement, pride, and solidarity. Behind those expressive speech acts, apparently, Kamala Harris has a great intention to empower the all-black community, especially women, and also to battle racism in the United States of America. The multicultural values that she embraced in the speech reflect that she is rightfully proud of her roots, she elevates unity in the United States, respects the diversities of race, class, and gender, and last but not least it reflects the revolution in Black communities.

Finally, this preliminary research shows that speech acts of expressive can actually be conveyed through various kinds of vocabularies or choice of words, but the choice word goes back to the speakers so that they can be wiser to be able to adjust the choice of words to the situations and the conditions and other contexts influenced so that at the end of the purposes and the intents of the communication carried out can be achieved as they should be.

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