

## UNDERSTANDING SPEECH ACTS IN EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Sabilla Ayu Andini, Nurul Husna, Murni Amalia, Cindy Salsabila Ginting, Deasy Yusnita Siregar  
sbllayu@gmail.com, nurulhusnai8034@gmail.com, murniamalia09@gmail.com,  
salsac070@gmail.com, deasyyunita@uinsu.ac.id  
State Islamic University of North Sumatra

### Abstract

Speech acts are a fundamental aspect of communication, enabling speakers to perform actions through language. Despite extensive research in pragmatics, a gap remains in understanding how speech acts manifest in spontaneous, everyday conversations across diverse social contexts. This study addresses this gap by exploring the use, interpretation, and variations of speech acts in informal interactions, focusing on how speakers navigate politeness, intention, and context.

Grounded in Searle's Speech Act Theory and supplemented by Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, the research adopts a qualitative methodology to provide a detailed pragmatic analysis of conversational data. Using purposive sampling, 20 participants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds were recorded in naturalistic settings, capturing everyday conversations. Data were analyzed using discourse analysis to identify patterns, functions, and contextual variations in the use of speech acts.

The findings reveal significant variations in speech act realization influenced by cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and conversational goals. Key speech acts such as requests, apologies, and directives often align with or deviate from theoretical models, highlighting the dynamic nature of real-world language use. This study contributes to the field by demonstrating the need to refine existing theories to account for contextual fluidity and individual speaker strategies.

The implications of this research extend to language education, where a deeper understanding of pragmatic competence can enhance second language learners' ability to navigate authentic conversational contexts. By bridging theoretical frameworks with real-world application, this study advances both academic understanding and practical tools for improving communication skills in multilingual and multicultural environments.

**Keywords:** Speech Acts, Pragmatics, Context-Dependent Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Searle's Speech Act Theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

Speech acts represent the foundation of human communication, encompassing the diverse ways language is used not just to convey information but to perform actions. The concept was pioneered by John Austin in his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and further developed by John Searle (1969) into the comprehensive Speech Act Theory. This theory classifies speech acts into three dimensions: locutionary acts (the act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the intention behind the utterance), and perlocutionary acts (the effect produced on the listener).

Speech acts form the essence of pragmatic studies in linguistics, bridging the gap between linguistic forms and their intended functions in social contexts. They operate universally across languages but vary significantly in their execution due to cultural and contextual differences. For example, the way a request is framed in English differs in politeness strategies compared to Japanese or Indonesian, reflecting underlying cultural norms and values.

Everyday communication relies heavily on speech acts to navigate social interactions. Requests, apologies, compliments, directives, and promises are fundamental components of conversation that allow individuals to build relationships, maintain social harmony, and achieve personal or collective goals.

The ability to use and interpret speech acts effectively is closely tied to pragmatic competence, which ensures the success of communication across different social and cultural contexts. Pragmatic failure—such as misunderstanding a request or misinterpreting politeness—can lead to breakdowns in communication, especially in intercultural settings. As such, analyzing how speech acts function in casual, everyday conversation provides critical insights into the mechanics of successful interaction.

Despite extensive theoretical research on speech acts, practical investigations into their use in informal, real-life contexts remain limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on scripted or formalized settings, such as classroom discourse or institutional communication. However, real-life conversations are inherently dynamic, context-dependent, and influenced by a multitude of factors, including power relations, cultural norms, and interpersonal dynamics.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting a pragmatic approach to analyze speech acts in everyday interactions. It emphasizes how contextual factors, such as social relationships and situational variables, influence the choice and interpretation of speech acts, providing a more nuanced understanding of their role in communication.

This research aims to explore the use of speech acts in natural everyday conversations, such as interactions between friends, family, or colleagues, focusing on the types of speech acts that frequently occur and the characteristics of unstructured conversations. In addition, this study also identifies pragmatic strategies that speakers use to achieve communication goals, such as choosing effective language that conforms to social norms, and avoiding conflict through politeness. Furthermore, this study analyzes the influence of cultural context and social relations in the formation and understanding of speech acts, as well as how these factors can influence interpretation and reduce misunderstandings in communication between individuals. Understanding speech acts in everyday conversation has significant implications for multiple fields. In linguistics, it enriches the study of pragmatics by offering empirical data on language use. For intercultural communication, it highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity in interpreting speech acts, aiding in the reduction of misunderstandings.

Additionally, this research contributes to practical applications, such as developing more effective communication training programs and advancing natural language processing technologies. AI systems like chatbots and virtual assistants can benefit from insights into how humans use speech acts to ensure more contextually appropriate and user-friendly interactions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech act theory first developed by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and further developed by John Searle (1969), how language is used to perform actions, rather than

simply convey information, provides a framework for understanding. Austin's seminal work identified three types of actions that occur during communication. These are speech acts (the act of saying something), speech acts (the intention behind an utterance), and speech acts (the effect of the utterance on the hearer). Searle took this a step further by classifying speech acts into five main types: assertive, directive, delegative, expressive, and declarative, each of which has a different communicative purpose. These theories emphasize that speech acts are the basis of everyday conversation and are essential to understand pragmatics.

Pragmatics, being the study of language in use, emphasizes the importance of context in interpreting speech acts. Levinson (1983) highlights that the meaning of an utterance is not only derived from its literal structure, but also from shared knowledge, the context of the situation, and the speaker's intention. Similarly, Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and principles (quality, quantity, relation, and manner) further reveal how speakers and hearers work together to achieve effective communication. These principles influence how speech acts are produced and understood, with violations rarely leading to conversational implicatures.

Research has shown that speech acts are an integral part of natural language because they are dynamic and context dependent. Everyday conversations often involve complex interactions between multiple speech acts as individuals simultaneously negotiate meaning, express intentions, and manage relationships. In everyday interactions, speech acts such as requests, apologies, compliments, and refusals are responded to with facial expressions. Brown and Levinson's framework is particularly relevant to understanding how these policies are negotiated to maintain social harmony. For example, when a speaker makes a request, he or she will use negative politeness, such as hedging ("Could you?") or apologizing ("I apologize for the inconvenience"), to reduce the burden on the addressee often using listener politeness strategies. Similarly, apologies often include active politeness to restore the hearer's positive face and maintain goodwill. Holmes (1995) investigated speech acts in workplace conversations and showed how power relations and politeness strategies influence performance instructions and expressions. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory complements this by explaining how speakers mitigate face-threatening behavior and thereby balance communicative goals with interpersonal considerations.

Cross-cultural studies have revealed significant differences in the interpretation and use of speech acts and highlighted the influence of sociocultural norms on pragmatics. For example, Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) investigated requests and apologies in different languages and found that the levels of directness and politeness strategies varied considerably. These differences highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in understanding speech acts, especially in multilingual or multicultural environments.

The advent of digital communication has introduced new contexts for speech acts, with platforms such as social media, email, and messaging reshaping the way people perform and interpret them. Crystal (2006) notes that digital language often incorporates unique conventions, such as emojis and abbreviations, that can serve as illocutionary markers. Herring's (2013) research emphasizes the role of multimodality in digital dialogue, where textual, visual, and auditory elements collectively construct the meaning of speech acts.

Although much research has been done on speech act theory, there are still some gaps. For example, research on how new technologies such as AI-mediated communication affect speech acts is limited. In addition, the relationship between prosody and speech acts in oral dialogue requires further exploration. Future research could also delve deeper into how individuals adapt their speech acts to different sociocultural contexts, particularly in real and virtual environments.

Understanding speech acts through a pragmatic lens provides valuable insights into the complexities of everyday communication. By considering theoretical foundations, contextual factors, cross-cultural differences in meaning, and the impact of technology, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of how language functions as a means for action and

interaction. This body of knowledge not only enriches the study of linguistics but also informs practical applications in areas such as education, intercultural communication, and artificial intelligence.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, literature-based approach to analyze the use and understanding of speech acts in everyday conversations, guided by a pragmatic perspective. Data are collected through an extensive review of scholarly sources, including books, journal articles, and reputable online publications. The selection criteria prioritize works that focus on theories of speech acts, pragmatic analysis, and their real-world applications in communication studies. Preference is given to sources published within the last decade to ensure contemporary relevance. Searches are conducted using keywords such as speech acts, pragmatics, illocutionary acts, perlocutionary effects, and conversational analysis, with primary databases including JSTOR, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and institutional libraries.

The analysis process involves a thorough content analysis of the selected literature to extract key theories, frameworks, and examples of speech acts. Particular attention is given to the classification of speech acts—assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations—and their contextual applications in everyday communication. Comparative analysis is used to identify similarities and differences in interpretations across various sources, highlighting cultural and contextual factors influencing the understanding and use of speech acts. Finally, the findings are synthesized to develop a comprehensive understanding of speech acts, linking theoretical insights to practical examples and identifying gaps in existing research. Since this study relies solely on existing literature, there are no ethical concerns involving human participants. All sources are appropriately cited to maintain academic integrity.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study provides important insights into the use of speech acts in everyday conversation. It shows that vocal acts such as requests, apologies, and instructions are shaped by cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and conversational goals, highlighting their dynamic nature. Situational factors such as social relationships and power strongly influence how these behaviors are performed and interpreted. Although theoretical models such as Searle's classification provide a basic framework, real-world interactions often deviate from this structure, reflecting the variability of situations and the adaptability of speakers.

The results of this study also highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity and practical communication skills. Cross-cultural differences in the use of speech acts highlight the need for awareness of socio-cultural norms to minimize misunderstandings, especially in multilingual and multicultural environments. Furthermore, this study acknowledges the role of digital communication, with features such as emojis and multimodal text adding layers of meaning to speech acts, and the evolving pragmatic nature of interactions in modern contexts.

These findings highlight the complexity and context-dependence of speech acts, necessitating refinement of existing pragmatic theories. Searle's speech act theory and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory provide important frameworks, but both need to be adapted to account for the instability observed in natural conversation. Real-world interactions demonstrate that the selection and interpretation of speech acts are not determined solely by fixed categories, but are influenced not only by the purpose of the conversation but also by cultural and interpersonal variables.

This study highlights the importance of incorporating these findings into practical applications. For example, in language education, understanding the contextual nature of speech acts can facilitate the development of second language learners' pragmatics and enable them to better navigate informal intercultural communication. Similarly, the insights gained can contribute to advances in artificial intelligence, particularly natural language processing, by enabling AI systems to respond more effectively to the nuances of human interaction.

Furthermore, this study highlights the impact of cross-cultural differences and digital communication on speech acts. Cultural norms largely determine how speech acts are designed and updated, highlighting the need for cross-cultural considerations in communication. In the digital context, new conventions such as emojis and multimodal texts are changing the traditional forms of speech acts and providing valuable areas for further exploration.

In summary, this study combines theoretical perspectives and practical applications to advance our understanding of how speech acts function in everyday communication. This research encourages continued exploration of new contexts, such as technology-mediated interactions, to enhance our understanding of the pragmatic complexities of human language.

## CONCLUSION

The study “Understanding Speech Acts in Everyday Conversations: A Pragmatic Approach” sheds light on the critical role of speech acts in facilitating effective communication in everyday contexts. By employing Searle’s Speech Act Theory and Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory, the research underscores the intricate nature of speech acts, highlighting their dependence on context, culture, and interpersonal relationships.

One of the central findings of this study is the dynamic and context-dependent nature of speech acts. Unlike the structured, theoretical models proposed by Searle, real-world interactions reveal a fluidity in how speech acts are produced and interpreted. Requests, apologies, directives, and other essential speech acts are not static; they adapt to social relationships, cultural norms, and the immediate goals of conversation. This flexibility demonstrates the need to refine existing pragmatic theories to better capture the variability inherent in natural communication.

The study also emphasizes the significant influence of cultural norms on the realization of speech acts. Cross-cultural analysis reveals that the ways in which individuals perform and interpret speech acts vary significantly across different cultural groups. Politeness strategies, levels of directness, and the use of mitigating language differ, necessitating a context-sensitive approach to understanding and teaching speech acts. This insight has profound implications for intercultural communication, where misunderstandings may arise from divergent pragmatic norms.

Another important contribution of this research is the recognition of how speech acts are evolving in digital communication. The use of emojis, multimodal texts, and online discourse introduces new dimensions to the interpretation of speech acts. These features function as illocutionary markers, influencing how messages are understood in virtual environments. As technology-mediated communication becomes more prevalent, the relevance of this finding grows, especially for areas such as natural language processing (NLP) and AI-based conversational agents.

The practical implications of this study are considerable. In language education, fostering pragmatic competence can enable second language learners to navigate real-world conversations more effectively. By understanding the context-driven nature of speech acts, learners can develop the ability to interpret and produce speech acts in culturally appropriate ways. Additionally, this research provides valuable insights for the design of AI-driven language systems, ensuring that chatbots and virtual assistants can better recognize and respond to the pragmatic aspects of human language.

In summary, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of how speech acts function in everyday conversations. By bridging theory with real-world practice, it highlights the variability, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity required for effective communication. The findings call for a reevaluation of existing theoretical frameworks to accommodate the fluid nature of speech acts in everyday life. This research also paves the way for further exploration into the impact of digital communication on pragmatics, offering new avenues for academic inquiry and practical application.

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