

The Analysis of Illocutionary Speech Act on Boris Johnson's Speeches about Covid-19 Pandemic

Kevin Sandi Sanusi¹, Weningtyas Parama Iswari, ³Satyawati Surya
¹sanusikevin@yahoo.com, ²weningtyaspiswari@fkip.unmul.ac.id,
³satyawatisurya@fkip.unmul.ac.id

Abstract

This study analyzes the types and functions used by Boris Johnson in his speech about COVID-19 pandemic. In education, this can help students to learn how to express something in English. The researcher uses five speeches that was conducted by Boris Johnson from 23 March 2020 to 31 October 2020. The researcher uses content analysis method on qualitative approach to describe and analyze the illocutionary act performed by Boris Johnson and then classifies them according to Searle's theory of illocutionary act. The result is that Boris has performed 160 representatives illocutionary act, 48 directives, 54 commissives, 49 expressives, and 14 declaratives. As for the illocutionary act performed by Boris, he has performed 158 collaborative function, 118 convivial function, 46 competitive, and just 2 conflictive.

Keywords: Speech, Speech Act, Illocutionary

1. Introduction

Speech act is something expressed by an individual that does not only present information but also performs action (Austin, 1975). There are three kinds of speech act, as explained by Yule (1996). The first is locutionary act, which is an act that focuses on how a language used to communicate. The second is illocutionary act, which is an act that focuses on what the utterance is supposed to mean. The third is perlocutionary act, which focuses on action taken from said utterance. From *A classification of illocutionary acts*, Searle (1975) developed the types of illocutionary act into five categories: Representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative.

With the appearance of Covid-19 virus since December 2019, in such a short time, this disease has changed our society in a global scale. Suddenly, we are forced to change our normal behaviour to adapt with this disease. Heads of state around the world are struggling to keep their country in check, such as Boris Johnson, for example, taking steps like locking down UK for an uncertain time and restrict any public activities until uncertain time.

Alexander Boris ds Pfeffel Johnson, simply known as Boris Johnson, is a British politician, author, and former the daily telegraph journalist that was born on 19 June 1964. He is currently serving as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom since 2019. Crines (2013) explained that Boris displayed "the character of a likeable and trustworthy individual with strong intellectual capital". Purnell (2011) described Johnson as "the most unconventional, yet compelling politician of the post-Blair's era". However, Staunton (2019) described him as "deeply polarising figure, cherished by many older conservatives but viewed by others as a serial liar and an amoral opportunist who sold Brexit to the British people on the basis of false promises."

Researcher is interested to research the speech act performed by Boris Johnson on his speech about Covid-19. Researcher will commence a study to understand about Boris' opinion of this global pandemic by analyzing his speech. Furthermore, study of speech act will also be beneficial in educational degree for students that are learning English so they

can learn a proper manner of speaking and its linguistic contents, mainly with other speakers who use English as their primary or secondary language. The question remain on two things of what are the types of illocutionary act performed by Boris Johnson in his speech about Covid-19 pandemic and what are the function of Illocutionary act performed by Boris Johnson in his speech about Covid-19 pandemic? This study can be used to learn about speaking, mainly to a subjects that concerns about expressing something in English speech.

The researcher put focus of his study to the types of illocutionary act that was proposed by Searle. To limit the data, researcher only used five speech transcripts of Boris Johnson's speech about Covid-19 that was declared and published since 23 March 2020 to 31 October 2020.

2. Literature Review

Pragmatics was a subfield of linguistic that studied the language used in social contexts, how people produce a language, and comperhend its meaning through language. Yule (1996) defined pragmatics as "the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms". Austin (1976) described speech act as something expressed by an individual that not only presents information, but also performs action. Austin proposed three different types of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. Locutionary act, according to Austin, was an act of uttering certain utterances with particular references and senses, that was roughly the same as the meaning in traditional sense. Illocutionary act was an utterances that had a particular conventional force. And perlocutionary act was what the speaker wanted to achieve from said utterances. Searle (2005) proposed a different kinds of speech acts: Utterance act, propotional act, and illocutionary act. Utterance acts referred to the uttering collection of words. while propositional acts and illocutionary acts dealt with uttering words in sentences in certain context, under certain conditions, and with certain intentions.

- **Illocutionary acts**

Searle (1976) classified illocutionary act into five different categories:

- a) *Representatives*. The point or purposes of these categories is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. For example, **boasting, informing, stating, concluding**.
- b) *Directives*. The illocutionary point consists in the fact that there are attempts (of varying degrees, and hence, more precisely, they are determinates of the determinable which includes attempting) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. For example, **ordering, asking, forbidding, reminding**.
- c) *Commissives*. The point or purpose of these categories is to commit speaker to future action. For example, **promising, offering, planning**.
- d) *Expressives*. The illocutionary point of these categories is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. For example, **thank, congratulate, apologize, condole, deplore**.
- e) *Declaratives*. The purpose of these categories is to change the world through utterances. for example, **declaring, announcing, appointing, naming, baptizing, verdicting**.

- **Functions of Illocutionary Act**

Leech (1983) divides function of Illocutionary act into four types:

- a) *Competitive*. This is a function where the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal. Politeness in this function has negative nature and aims to reduce disharmony (*example: ordering, asking, declaring, demanding, etc.*).
- b) *Convivial*. The illocutionary goal in this function coincides with the social goal. It has more positive politeness and aims to find opportunities for social goal (*example: offering, inviting, thanking, greeting, etc.*).
- c) *Collaborative*. Because this function does not contain politeness, due to its irrelevance in this type of function, the illocutionary goal is indifferent to the social goal (*example: boasting, stating, claiming, planning, announcing, etc.*).
- d) *Conflictive*. As its name suggest, the illocutionary goal in this function conflicts with social goal. This is because this function has a purpose to cause anger and conflict (*example: accusing, threatening, cursing, reprimanding*).

3. Methods

This research uses qualitative approach by using content analysis as its design. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2004). Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as a mean for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups to social or human problem. The data of this study was Boris Johnson's speech transcript. Sources was taken from five Boris Johnson's speech transcripts related to Covid-19 that was compiled since March 2020 to October 2020. These speech transcript was taken on UK official government website on <https://www.gov.uk>. Researcher watched the press conference videos from each speech to support the analysis.

- **Data Collection Method**

Researcher had collecting datas through three steps. Step one was downloading the speech transcript. Fortunately each speech transcript had its own videos, but just in case, researcher also saved the speech video that he found on youtube. Step two was converting the datas into Microsoft word and then putting the datas into Microsoft Excel, since the analysis can be conducted more accurately by using formulas in Excel. step three, the datas were coded using IFID theory.

- **Data Analysis Method**

To analyze the data, the researcher used the method proposed by Bengtsson (2016). First, researcher identified every utterance said and then pick every important utterance needed for analysis. Second, the researcher re-context the utterances by comparing his collected data to the original data as cross-reference. Third, researcher categorised each collected utterances into five different type of illocutionary act. Last, the researcher drew conclusion of the research and then present it.

4. Results

a. Representative

The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone. This data was taken from Boris speech that was conducted by Boris on 23 March 2020 on second utterances. Boris thinks that coronavirus is the biggest threat that UK has faced in decades, and he thinks that UK is not the only country that has faced this threat. Boris says that what he think is right based on the fact. It is supported with the status quo when this utterances was uttered. So this

statement shows the indicator of representative. Boris *boasts* the coronavirus as the biggest threat that UK has faced for decades, making it functions as collaborative.

b. Directive

And I must stress again that all of this is conditional, it all depends on a series of big ifs. It depends on all of us – the entire country – to follow the advice, to observe social distancing, and to keep that R down. This data was taken from speech conducted by Boris on 10 May 2020 on utterances number 72. In this example, Boris reminds his citizen that his plan to end the lockdown depends on citizen's willingness to follow advice from government to keep the covid alert level under control. Boris wants people to remember that citizen must follow the advice that has been provided by the government. This is why this utterances are categorized into directive illocutionary act. and the whole utterances contains the competitive function of *reminding*, because the illocutionary goal of this utterances are competing with the social goal.

c. Comissive

Instead of government telling people to work from home, we are going to give employers more discretion, and ask them to make decisions about how their staff can work safely. This data was taken from speech conducted by Boris on 10 July 2020 on utterances number 55. Rather than telling workers to keep working from home, Boris offers the employers to choose the decision on how their staff can work safely by themselves. The comissive type of illocutionary act in this example is identified from Boris intention of giving the employers more discretion to decide it. the same identification also indicates the function performed by Boris. In this case, convivial function of *offering*.

d. Expressive

I know that the steps we are taking will be a heavy blow to many people – to everyone whose wedding plans have been disrupted, or who now cannot celebrate Eid in the way they would wish, I am really, really sorry about that. But we simply cannot take the risk. This data was taken from speech conducted by Boris on 31 July 2020 on utterances number 28. This data was a response to Boris decision to enforce restrictions one more time in UK, because of the worrying spreadment of the virus there. It is found that Boris expressing regret that he has to impose another restrictions in UK, potentially ruining people's plan to be together with their family. From this explanation. It is found that Boris has performing *expressive* illocutionary act when uttering this utterances. the expression of regret in this thesis is described as the action of deploring. So, looking at the indicator of illocutionary act function. It is found that the illocutionary function performed in this utterances is *convivial*.

e. Declarative

And to prevent re-infection from abroad, I am serving notice that it will soon be the time – with transmission significantly lower – to impose quarantine on people coming into this country by air. This data was taken from speech conducted by Boris on 10 May 2020 on utterances number 73. In this example, Boris announces that it will soon the time he will impose quarantine on people that entering UK by air to prevent re-infection from outside UK. Boris utters *it will soon be the time.....to impose quarantine on people coming into this country by air*, when this utterances was uttered, the state of changes that visitors to UK will now be quarantined. Based from this analysis, it can be determined that the type of illocutionary act used in this utterances is declarative. Based from the action performed when this utterances was

uttered, which is *announcing*, it can be determined that the function identified is *collaborative*.

5. Discussions

Searle describes that the characteristic of his illocutionary act depends on many situation. For most of the most important illocutionary act, there is no essential perlocutionary intent associated by definition with the corresponding verb. That means, in the case of representative illocutionary act, because there are no particular perlocutionary intent when uttering the utterances. What is Boris intention of uttering those representative illocutionary act? This question can be answered because the purpose and the nature of speech itself. Hence in many similar researches conducted using speeches as the sources of data. Representative illocutionary act is often the most dominant illocutionary act performed.

According to Leech (1983), Searle's definition of *representative* illocutionary act tends to be neutral in terms of politeness (which also matched with how Leech describe collaborative function. In which that it ignores the politeness). That's why the utterances that performs *representative* illocutionary act was all found using *collaborative* function. Although it is not exclusive to be used just on *representative*, as collaborative function can be found on *comissive* illocutionary act as well. The main point of this function is that **the politeness of collaborative function can be ignored.**

The indicator for *directive* illocutionary act is a specific verb that is directed towards the hearer. For example, *you should stay at home*. Notice that in this example, there is the verb *stay* and then it directed towards the hearer by the word *you*. However, the word *you* is not strictly necessary to determine whether the utterances belongs to directive illocutionary act or not. As long as that utterances directed towards the hearer and there is a specific verb as guidance to the hearer. It can still be categorized into *directive* illocutionary act. Relating to the function that was associated with *directive* illocutionary act, according to Leech (1983), it is associated to *competitive* function because of the purpose to aims to reduce disharmony.

Searle mentions the illocutionary point of *comissive* illocutionary act is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to some future action. He also mentioned the key word for this type of illocutionary act. Such as *shall, will, intend, etc.* the requirement for utterance to be on *commisive* illocutionary act is that, when uttered, the speaker must commit what he says in the future.

The illocutionary point of expressive illocutionary act is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about state of affairs specified in propositional content (Searle, 1976). And so, Expressive illocutionary act paradigms is around the common expression we usually used, like *thanking, deploring, welcoming, sympathizing, etc.* these paradigms are how each utterances is put into expressive illocutionary act category. Because of the characteristic of this illocutunary act category, it tends to be convivial (Leech, 1983).

Searle (1976) explains that *declarative* illocutionary act brings some alterations in the status or condition of the referred-to object or objects solely in the virtue of the fact that declaratives has been successfully performed. Unlike the other four categories of illocutionary act that has been explained before, declarative illocutionary act do not represent what is typical of illocutionary act. Instead, they are conventional rather than communicative act (Leech, 1983). Hence, the indicator of declarative illocutionary act is the action performed. However, unlike *comissive*, actions in declarative is in effect

immediately. As for the functions, it has no sincerity conditions. So collaborative function is commonly used. Although *competitive* function can be found as well if the illocutionary goal of the utterances are competing with the social goal.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings. Researcher has found that Boris performs all five types of illocutionary acts. From 319 utterances analyzed, Boris has performed 148 representatives illocutionary act, 66 expressive, 52 commissive, 44 directive, and 9 declarative. The functions performed are quite various. Collaborative function has been performed 148 times on representative, 28 times on commissive, and 6 times on declarative. Directive and Expressive illocutionary has not using any collaborative function. Competitive function has been performed by Boris 44 times, 33 of them is on directive, 8 times on commissive, 3 on declarative, and no competitive function found on expressive and representative illocutionary act. Convivial function has been performed 91 times, 66 times on expressive, 14 on commissive, 11 on directive, and none on representative. And conflictive function has been performed twice both on commissives.

7. Suggestion

The researcher can suggest some advice for future researchers that intended to conduct the same research:

1. Speech is not the only research subject that can be used. Future researcher may use another media, such as song lyrics, movie script, episodes from TV show, or if you are brave enough, you can analyze the illocutionary act on advertisements, or even radio communication transcript, in which direct communication can be conducted and recorded
2. Future researcher may want to also analyze the deixis and implicature and also presupposition. If you want to conduct the research in more in-depth.
And so. The researcher hopes that this study will provide benefits to the readers and most importantly to the future researcher.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. London: Oxford University press.
- Bach, K. (2008). Speech Acts and Pragmatics. In M. D. Hanley, *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language* (pp. 147-167).
- Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NurslingPlus Open* , 8-14.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for Education: an introduction to theory and methods*. 5th edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Crines, A. S. (2013). Why did Boris Johnson win the 2012 mayoral election? *Public Policy and Administration Research* , 1-7.

- Gerot, & Wignell. (1994). *Making Sense of Functional Grammar*. New South Wales: Antipodean Educational Enterprise.
- Huang, Y. (2012). *The Oxford Dictionary of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ingber, W., & Bach, K. (1982). *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*. Duke University Press.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: second edition*. Pennsylvania: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Leech, G. (1983). *principles of pragmatics*. New York: Longman.
- Marshall, & Rossman. (2016). *Designing Qualitative Research: 6th Edition*. Sage Publications Inc.
- Purnell, S. (2011). *Just Boris: Boris Johnson: The Irresistible Rise of a Political Celebrity*. London: Aurum Press Ltd.
- Salgado, E. F. (2011). *The Pragmatics of Requests and Apologies*. John Benjamins.
- Scollon, Ron, & Wong, S. (2001). *Intercultural communication: A discourse Approach 2nd Edition*. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Searle, J. R. (1976). A Classification of Illocutionary acts. *Language in Society* vol.5 no.1 , 1-23.
- Searle, J. R. (2005). *Expression and Meaning: studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Staunton, D. (2019). Boris Johnson: The UK's deeply polarising next prime minister. *The Irish Times*: Retrieved 8 May 2021.
- Vallin, R. D., & LaPolla, R. J. (2012). *Syntax: Structure, Meaning, and Function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WHO and UNICEF. (2020). *Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools*. Retrieved from [www.who.int](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200528-key-messages-covid-19.pdf): [https://www.who.int › docs PDF](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronavirus/situation-reports/20200528-key-messages-covid-19.pdf) Web results Key Messages and Actions for COVID- Prevention and Control