



ELEJ

English Language Education Journal

E-ISSN: 2828-5077

<https://jurnal.unikastpaulus.ac.id/index.php/elej>

Vol. 5, No. 1, April 2026, Pp. 12-25

EXPLORING SPEECH ACTS IN MEDIA DISCOURSE: A CASE STUDY OF TALK SHOW INTERACTION BETWEEN JIMMY FALLON AND EMMA WATSON

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Abstract: This study investigates the realization and functions of speech acts in media discourse through a case study of interaction between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson in a talk show setting. Grounded in Speech Act Theory, the study aims to identify the types of speech acts employed, determine the dominant type, and explain their intended meanings within the interaction. The data were obtained from a transcribed segment of the talk show and analyzed qualitatively using a pragmatic approach. The findings reveal that all five major categories of speech acts expressive, directive, representative, commissive, and declarative are present in the interaction. Among these, directive speech acts are the most dominant, primarily used by the host to control the flow of conversation, manage turn-taking, and elicit responses from the guest. Expressive acts are also frequently used to build rapport and maintain a friendly atmosphere, while representative acts function to convey information and personal experiences. Commissive and declarative acts occur less frequently but contribute to the performative and institutional dimensions of the discourse. The study highlights that speech acts in talk show discourse are not solely informational but also serve interpersonal and entertainment purposes. The dominance of directive acts reflects the institutional role of the host, whereas the use of expressive and representative acts enhances audience engagement. These findings suggest that speech act

realization in media discourse is shaped by both communicative goals and contextual factors, offering valuable insights for pragmatic studies, media communication, and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Media Discourse, Talk Show, Interaction, Pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

Indent Language in media discourse is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but also a means of performing social actions. Within the field of Pragmatics, meaning is understood as context-dependent and shaped by the intentions of speakers and the interpretations of listeners. One of the most influential frameworks in this regard is Speech Act Theory, initially proposed by J. L. Austin (Austin, 1962) and later developed by (Searle, 1979). This theory posits that utterances function as actions, such as requesting, informing, promising, or expressing feelings, rather than simply representing reality.

Speech Act Theory classifies utterances into several categories, including expressive, directive, representative, commissive, and declarative acts (How & Jan, 2019). Each type reflects a different communicative intention and performs a specific function within interaction. In spoken discourse, especially in institutional settings, these speech acts are often shaped by participants' roles, power relations, and communicative goals (Meihami & Khanlarzadeh, 2015). Thus, analyzing speech acts provides valuable insights into how speakers manage interaction, construct meaning, and achieve their communicative purposes in various contexts.

One of the most relevant contexts for examining speech acts is media discourse, particularly talk shows. Talk shows represent a hybrid communicative setting that combines elements of formal institutional discourse and informal conversation. In programs such as *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, interactions are semi-structured, allowing for both planned questions and spontaneous

responses. This creates a rich environment for analyzing how speech acts function in real-time communication that is simultaneously informative and entertaining (Fei & Leilei, 2023).

A notable phenomenon in talk show discourse is the prominent role of the host in directing the interaction. The host typically controls the flow of conversation, introduces topics, and engages the guest through questions, humor, and performative acts (Rabiah, 2018). For instance, interactions between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson illustrate how language is used not only to exchange information but also to entertain audiences and build interpersonal rapport. This dual function makes talk shows an ideal site for exploring the pragmatic realization of speech acts.

Previous studies have examined speech acts in media discourse from various perspectives. Sarfo-adu & Osei (2021) studied Politeness in media talk shows: The case of media panel discussions in Ghana Kwasi. The study reveals that media panel discussions in Ghana are predominantly characterized by positive politeness strategies (43.35%), indicating that participants tend to emphasize solidarity and mutual respect, although instances of negative politeness (38.93%) and unmitigated face-threatening acts (15.70%) are still present. Similarly, Al-saedi & Jabber (2020) studied A Pragmatic Study of Newspaper Headlines in Media Discourse : Iraq as a Case Study. The study finds that Iraqi newspaper headlines in *Alsabah* predominantly employ expressive and declarative speech acts to convey messages, strategically addressing readers' emotions and emphasizing narratives of victory and liberation during the Iraq-ISIS conflict. Other study was carried out by Aboh (2020) on Between Statements and Actions : A Speech Act Analysis of President Buhari ' s Media Political Discourses. The study reveals that Muhammadu Buhari's statements demonstrate clear locutionary and illocutionary acts aligned with factual claims of anti-corruption efforts, while also producing notable perlocutionary effects and occasionally conforming to or violating Austin's felicity conditions. Moreover, Rakhmawati & Sulistyorini (2021) studied Speech-acts Strategies of Indonesian Television Talkshow Host : Indonesian Lawyer Club Weekly Program. The study finds that Karni Ilyas employs a range of positive and negative

politeness strategies alongside diverse expressive speech acts such as gratitude, criticism, and apology to effectively manage interaction and ensure the smooth progression of the talk show.

Despite these contributions, there remains a gap in the literature regarding in-depth qualitative analyses of speech acts in specific talk show interactions, particularly those involving globally recognized figures. Many previous studies focus on general patterns or rely on quantitative approaches, which may overlook the nuanced meanings and contextual functions of individual utterances. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how different types of speech acts interact within a single discourse to achieve both communicative and entertainment goals.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to explore the realization of speech acts in a specific talk show interaction between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson. This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of pragmatic functions in media discourse and to enrich the application of Speech Act Theory in contemporary communication contexts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design within the framework of Pragmatics, focusing on how meaning is constructed through language use in media interaction. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to interpret speech acts and their intended meanings rather than to measure frequencies statistically. The analysis is grounded in Speech Act Theory, which provides a systematic classification of utterances into expressive, directive, representative, commissive, and declarative acts.

In addition, this research adopts a case study approach to allow an in-depth examination of naturally occurring discourse in a specific communicative context. The case study focuses on a single episode segment to capture the richness and complexity of interaction in a talk show setting. This design enables the researcher to explore not only the types of speech acts used but also their pragmatic functions, contextual

meanings, and interactional dynamics within media discourse.

Object of the Study

The object of this study is the verbal interaction between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson in a segment of *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. This interaction is selected because it represents a typical talk show discourse characterized by a combination of structured interviewing and spontaneous conversational elements. The data consist of utterances produced by both participants, including verbal expressions and relevant paralinguistic features such as laughter.

The focus is placed on identifying and analyzing speech acts within this interaction. Each utterance is treated as a unit of analysis, considering both its linguistic form and its contextual function. The study emphasizes how the roles of host and guest influence the distribution and function of speech acts, particularly in relation to discourse management, interpersonal relations, and entertainment purposes.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected through documentation and transcription techniques. The primary source is a recorded talk show segment featuring the interaction between the host and the guest (<https://youtu.be/SudIwoKEQKk?si=WJpMSOfTBrXDywpJ>). The video was carefully observed, and the spoken interaction was transcribed into written form to facilitate systematic analysis. Non-verbal elements such as laughter, pauses, and audience reactions were also noted, as they contribute to the interpretation of speech acts.

To ensure data accuracy, the transcription process involved repeated viewing and cross-checking of the recorded material. The researcher verified the consistency of the transcription by comparing it with available online transcripts where applicable. This method enhances the reliability of the data and ensures that the analysis reflects the original interaction as closely as possible.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative pragmatic analysis based on the classification of speech acts proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Each utterance in the transcript was identified and categorized into one of the five speech act types: expressive, directive, representative, commissive, or declarative. The analysis also considered the illocutionary force and intended meaning of each utterance within its specific context.

Furthermore, the analysis involved interpreting the functional role of each speech act in the interaction. This includes examining how speech acts contribute to discourse management, interpersonal relationship building, and audience engagement. The findings were then synthesized to determine the dominant speech act type and to explain the overall communicative patterns observed in the talk show discourse.

RESULTS

Based on the data analyses, the speech acts found in the talk show Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson in a segment of *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* are expressive, directive, representative, commissive and declarative speech act.

Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive speech acts are used to convey the speaker's feelings, attitudes, or evaluations toward a situation or interlocutor (Witek, 2021). In the interaction, this type is clearly illustrated in Jimmy's opening remark: *"Ah, you look gorgeous."* and his later statement, *"I'm excited about your new movie."* These utterances function as compliments and expressions of enthusiasm rather than as carriers of factual information. The intended meaning is to establish a warm interpersonal connection, reduce social distance, and create a welcoming atmosphere for both the guest and the audience.

In addition, Emma's responses such as *"Thank you!"* and her frequent laughter [*Laughter*] also function as expressive acts. These responses indicate appreciation, agreement, and emotional alignment

with the host's tone. Laughter, although non-verbal, serves a pragmatic function by signaling comfort, amusement, and engagement in the interaction. It helps sustain the conversational flow and contributes to the informal and entertaining nature of the talk show setting.

Furthermore, expressive acts in this interaction play a strategic role in audience engagement. Statements like *"That's the biggest compliment I've ever received"* demonstrate heightened emotional response, which amplifies the authenticity of the exchange. The intended meaning goes beyond personal expression; it also invites the audience to share in the emotional moment. Thus, expressive speech acts not only maintain interpersonal harmony but also enhance the overall entertainment value of the discourse.

Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts are used to prompt the hearer to perform an action, whether through requests, questions, or commands (Pratama et al., 2022). In this interaction, directives are highly frequent, especially in Jimmy's utterances such as: *"Do you watch a lot of late night television?"*, *"Where is it again?"*, and *"Are you shooting a movie with Russell Crowe, right?"* While structurally these appear as questions, pragmatically they function as prompts that guide Emma to provide specific information. The intended meaning is to control the direction of the conversation and ensure a smooth progression of topics.

More explicit directives can be observed in utterances like *"Look in that camera right there and just make a dangerous face"* and *"Could you teach me those dances?"* These are not merely conversational moves but action-oriented instructions that require immediate response. The intended meaning here extends beyond information exchange to performance, transforming the interaction into a dynamic and visually engaging segment. This reflects the hybrid nature of talk shows as both conversational and performative events.

Additionally, directives such as *"Let's go"* and *"Teach me some"* function as collaborative invitations rather than authoritative commands. These utterances reduce hierarchical distance and position the host as a co-participant rather than a controller. However, despite this collaborative tone, the dominance of directive acts highlights

Jimmy's institutional role as the host who manages turn-taking, topic shifts, and audience engagement. This confirms that directive speech acts are the most dominant type in the interaction.

Representative (Assertive) Speech Acts

Representative speech acts are used to convey information, describe situations, or express beliefs that the speaker holds to be true (Yandra et al., 2018). In the interaction, Emma's statement "*We were shooting in Iceland, in Reykjavik*" and Jimmy's remark "*You were the most dangerous person on the internet*" exemplify this category. These utterances function to present factual or reported information to the audience. The intended meaning is to inform and provide context about Emma's professional activities and public image.

In addition, evaluative statements such as "*The soundtrack is awesome*" and "*He's an adventurous guy*" also fall under representative acts. Although they contain subjective elements, they are presented as assertions about reality. These utterances contribute to shaping the audience's perception of the film, the actors, and related experiences. The intended meaning here is not only to inform but also to influence how the audience interprets the discussed topics.

Moreover, representative acts serve as the backbone of the informational content within the talk show. While the program prioritizes entertainment, it still relies on these acts to deliver meaningful content. For example, Emma's explanation of the film's storyline provides narrative clarity and depth. Thus, representative speech acts play a crucial role in balancing entertainment with informative discourse, ensuring that the interaction remains both engaging and substantive.

Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive speech acts involve the speaker committing to a future course of action. In this interaction, an example is Jimmy's statement: "*You teach me, I'll do it.*" This utterance signals his willingness to participate in the dance activity introduced by Emma. The intended meaning is to express readiness and commitment, thereby encouraging the continuation of the interactive segment.

Although commissive acts are not as frequent as directives or expressives, they play an important role in maintaining the dynamic nature of the conversation. By making such commitments, the speaker creates expectations for subsequent actions, which adds spontaneity and excitement to the interaction. In this case, Jimmy's commitment leads directly to a performative segment that enhances audience engagement.

Furthermore, commissive acts in this context often function as a strategy to build rapport and demonstrate flexibility. By agreeing to participate, Jimmy positions himself not only as a host but also as an active participant in the entertainment process. The intended meaning extends beyond mere commitment; it reflects cooperation, humor, and a willingness to share the spotlight. This contributes to the overall informal and engaging tone of the talk show.

Declarative Speech Acts

Declarative speech acts are those that bring about a change in the social or institutional state of affairs through the act of utterance itself. In the interaction, this type is exemplified by Jimmy's statement: *"Welcome to our show."* This utterance functions as a formal act that marks the initiation or continuation of the talk show segment. The intended meaning is not only to greet but also to enact the institutional role of the host within the media setting.

Unlike other speech acts, declaratives require a specific institutional context and authority to be effective. Jimmy, as the host, holds the authority to perform such acts within the framework of the talk show. This makes the utterance performative in nature, as it does not merely describe a situation but actively establishes it. The statement thus reinforces the structured nature of the interaction despite its informal tone.

However, declarative acts are relatively limited in this discourse compared to other types. Their primary function is to frame the interaction rather than sustain it. Even so, they remain significant because they signal transitions, boundaries, and roles within the communicative event. In this way, declarative speech acts contribute to maintaining the institutional identity of the talk show while allowing

space for more flexible and entertaining forms of interaction.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the interaction between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson demonstrates that all major categories within Speech Act Theory are present; expressive, directive, representative, commissive, and declarative acts. However, the findings clearly indicate that directive speech acts are the most dominant, primarily due to the institutional role of the host in structuring and managing the interaction. This supports the foundational argument proposed by Austin (1962) and further systematized by Searle (1969), that language is not merely used to convey information but to perform actions. In this talk show context, directives function as tools to organize discourse, maintain topic flow, and stimulate audience engagement.

The dominance of directive speech acts aligns with the nature of institutional discourse, particularly in media settings such as talk shows. The host frequently employs questions and instructions, such as *"Where is it again?"* and *"Look in that camera..."*, which function not only as requests for information but also as mechanisms of discourse control. This finding aligns with (Humaira et al., 2022), stating that participants in institutional talk assume specific roles that shape interactional patterns. Jimmy Fallon, as the host, exercises conversational authority through directives, thereby reinforcing asymmetrical power relations while still maintaining an informal and entertaining tone.

In contrast, expressive speech acts are predominantly used to construct interpersonal rapport and emotional alignment. Utterances such as *"You look gorgeous"* and *"I'm excited about your new movie"* illustrate how affective language contributes to a positive communicative environment. This supports the findings of (Grüber et al., 2020), who argues that expressive acts are central to maintaining solidarity and politeness in social interaction. Similarly, Emma Watson's responses, including *"Thank you"* and laughter, function as alignment strategies that reinforce mutual engagement and minimize social distance between interlocutors.

Representative speech acts, while less dominant than directives,

play a crucial role in conveying information and shaping audience understanding. Statements such as *"We were shooting in Iceland, in Reykjavik"* provide factual content, while evaluative assertions like *"The soundtrack is awesome"* influence audience perception. This dual function is consistent with Searle's (1979) classification of assertives as acts that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. In media discourse, such acts are essential for balancing entertainment with informational value, ensuring that the interaction remains meaningful beyond its performative aspects (Sarfo-adu & Osei, 2021).

Commissive speech acts appear less frequently but contribute significantly to the dynamic and interactive nature of the talk show. Jimmy's statement *"You teach me, I'll do it"* exemplifies a commitment to future action that leads to a performative segment. Commissives are important for establishing cooperation and building interactional momentum (Anin & Novitasari, 2015) (Dewi et al., 2020). In this context, the commissive not only signals willingness but also facilitates a shift from verbal interaction to physical performance, enhancing audience engagement.

Declarative speech acts are minimally represented, with examples such as *"Welcome to our show"* serving primarily as institutional markers. These acts align with Austin's (1962) notion of performatives that enact social reality through utterance. However, their limited occurrence suggests that talk show discourse relies more heavily on flexible and interactional speech acts rather than formal institutional declarations. Media discourse often blends institutional authority with conversational informality (Rakhmawati & Sulistyorini, 2021).

The findings suggest that speech act realization in talk shows is shaped by both institutional roles and entertainment goals. Directive acts dominate due to the host's responsibility for managing discourse, while expressive, representative, and commissive acts contribute to relational and performative dimensions. This supports a broader understanding of speech acts as context-dependent and multifunctional, extending beyond traditional conversational settings into complex media interactions.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the interaction between Jimmy Fallon and Emma Watson reflects a dynamic realization of speech acts as conceptualized in Speech Act Theory. All five major types of speech acts expressive, directive, representative, commissive, and declarative are present, indicating that talk show discourse is pragmatically rich and multifunctional. Among these, directive speech acts emerge as the most dominant, primarily used by the host to guide the flow of interaction, manage turn-taking, and maintain audience engagement. At the same time, expressive acts play a significant role in establishing rapport and creating a friendly atmosphere, while representative acts contribute to delivering information and shaping audience understanding.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that speech acts in media discourse extend beyond their traditional communicative functions to serve entertainment and relational purposes. The interplay between directive control and expressive engagement illustrates how institutional roles and conversational strategies are blended in talk show settings. Although commissive and declarative acts appear less frequently, they still contribute to the performative and structural dimensions of the interaction. Overall, this study confirms that speech act realization is highly context-dependent and influenced by the communicative goals of the discourse, offering valuable insights for future research in pragmatics, media discourse, and interactional analysis.

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