

Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in the First Round of the 2024 Presidential Debate: A Pragmatic Study Based on Kreidler's Theory

¹Chantika Egysta Ananda, ²Fathu Rahman, ²M. Dalyan, ¹Nana Yuliana, ³Nurul Intan Pratiwi

¹Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar, Indonesia

³Politeknik Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

Co-email: fathu.rahman@unhas.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts used in the first round of the 2024 Indonesian presidential debate. The analysis employs a pragmatic approach based on Charles W. Kreidler's theory and is compared with John Searle's classification of speech acts. The data were obtained from the official transcript of the debate and analyzed qualitatively using discourse analysis techniques. The findings indicate that the presidential candidates strategically used various types of illocutionary acts to convey political messages, build their public image, and influence the audience. The dominant types of illocutionary acts include asserting beliefs, making commitments, giving directives, expressing emotions, and asking questions. Each candidate demonstrates a distinctive communication style: Anies Baswedan emphasizes moral and critical perspectives through assertive and expressive acts; Prabowo Subianto uses expressive and commissive acts to project loyalty and patriotism; while Ganjar Pranowo relies on commissive and directive acts to offer concrete policies. The comparison between Kreidler and Searle's theories reveals that Kreidler's functional classification offers more flexibility and contextual depth in analyzing political discourse, especially for detecting implicit criticism, rhetorical questions, and emotionally charged statements. Therefore, Kreidler's framework is considered more effective for examining complex communicative strategies in political debates. This study contributes to the field of political pragmatics by demonstrating how language functions not only as a tool of expression but also as a strategic act in political communication. The findings also encourage the development of political literacy and critical discourse awareness among the public.

Keywords: Illocutionary speech acts, 2024 presidential debate, political pragmatics, Kreidler's theory, Searle's theory, communication strategy, political discourse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool of communication that is not only used to convey information, but also to express emotions, build social relationships, and perform certain actions within society. In linguistics, the function of language as action becomes a central focus in the field of pragmatics (Birner, 2021; Kaharuddin et al., 2023; Weda et al., 2021). Pragmatics emphasizes the use of language in real social contexts, including how the meaning of an utterance is determined not only by sentence structure but also by who is speaking, to whom the utterance is directed, in what situation, and for what purpose (Grund & Fricke, 2020; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Rahman & Weda, 2019).

One of the core concepts in pragmatics is speech acts, particularly illocutionary acts, which concern the speaker's intentions and purposes when saying something (Kecskes, 2022). Illocutionary acts are a critical focus because they demonstrate that speaking is also acting: when someone states, commands, promises, or criticizes, they are in fact performing an action through language (Haugh, 2020). In practice, understanding these acts greatly depends on context, so it is not enough to only interpret the literal meaning of a sentence — one must also consider the overall communicative situation (Verschueren, 2022; Adam et al., 2024; Dalyan et al., 2022). This contextual sensitivity makes speech act theory especially relevant in analyzing real-world communication, particularly in political discourse, legal language, and intercultural interactions.

In the political sphere, language is a strategic instrument used to influence the public, construct personal image, and convey political agendas (Chilton & Schäffner, 2011; Etzer & Bull, 2012). Debates between political candidates, especially presidential and vice-presidential (capres-cawapres) debates, serve as a rich arena for illocutionary acts. The utterances in such debates not only deliver information but are also designed to create specific effects on the audience. Therefore, analyzing speech acts in political debates is highly relevant to understanding how language functions as a tool of power and persuasion (Ilie, 2019; Kreidler, 2013; Searle, 1979; Sujoko et al., 2023).

The first round of the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debate, held on December 12, 2023, featured three candidate pairs: Anies Baswedan – Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto – Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and Ganjar Pranowo – Mahfud MD. The debate addressed strategic issues such as governance, law, anti-corruption efforts, human rights, and the strengthening of democracy. Each candidate presented their communication strategy, conveyed their vision and mission, and responded to opponents' arguments and panelists' questions. Their utterances contained numerous elements of illocutionary acts, making this debate an interesting subject for pragmatic analysis.

This study applies Charles W. Kreidler's theory, which classifies illocutionary acts into seven functions: stating, asserting, questioning, commanding, requesting, promising, and apologizing. This theory is used to identify the functions of the candidates' utterances during the debate. To enrich the analysis, the findings are also compared with John Searle's theory, which divides illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. This comparison aims to show how the two theories complement each other in understanding the political communication strategies of the candidates. This study is significant not only for its theoretical contribution to linguistic research but also for its practical benefits in helping the public better understand how political language works. In an era of information openness, the public's ability to interpret the intentions behind political speech is a crucial asset for forming rational political opinions and attitudes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatic studies in linguistics focus on how context influences the meaning of utterances. Within this framework, speech acts are one of the central concepts. A speech act refers to an action performed through language, such as stating, commanding, promising, or requesting. According to Austin (1962), there are three types of speech acts: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the act intended by the speaker), and perlocutionary (the act that has an effect on the listener). The main focus of this study is on illocutionary acts, which are the actions directly performed by the speaker within the context of communication.

John Searle (1979) developed a classification of illocutionary acts into five main categories: a. Assertives – stating or explaining something the speaker believes to be true. b. Directives – attempting to get the listener to do something (e.g., commands, requests, suggestions). c. Commissives – expressing the speaker's commitment to a future action (e.g., promises, threats). d. Expressives – expressing the speaker's psychological or emotional attitude (e.g., praise, thanks, complaints). e. Declaratives – utterances that directly change the status or condition of reality (e.g., appointing, declaring decisions).

On the other hand, Kreidler (1998) studied illocutionary acts through the lens of function and grammatical form. He classified speech acts into seven functions based on grammatical structure and communicative purpose: stating, asserting, questioning, commanding, requesting, promising, and apologizing. Kreidler's approach tends to be more descriptive of the grammatical function of utterances, whereas Searle emphasizes their social and psychological functions.

In the context of political debates, candidates do not only present ideas; they also seek to persuade the public, construct their image, attack opponents, and demonstrate credibility. Research conducted by Yule (1996) and Cutting (2002) shows that political debates are rich in speech acts,

especially directives and commissives. However, most previous studies have relied on a single theoretical framework. This study adopts a comparative approach between Kreidler's and Searle's theories to capture the complexity of the candidates' communication strategies in the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debate. By comparing these two theories, this study aims to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the functions of utterances in political debates as socially meaningful and strategic actions.

III. METHODS

A. Research Approach and Type

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using discourse content analysis based on pragmatic theory. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the objective of describing and analyzing the forms and functions of illocutionary speech acts within the context of political debate. The study does not focus on quantitative measurement but rather on an in-depth understanding of the meaning of utterances in actual social and political contexts. Through close reading and contextual interpretation of the debate transcript, the research identifies the strategic intent behind each speech act. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of how language is used to construct political identity and persuade the audience.

B. Sources and Types of Data

The primary data in this study are the verbal utterances of the presidential candidates delivered during the first round of the 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debate, held by the General Elections Commission (KPU) on December 12, 2023. The debate featured three candidate pairs: Anies Baswedan – Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto – Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and Ganjar Pranowo – Mahfud MD. The data consist of utterances in the form of sentences that potentially contain illocutionary speech acts—be they statements, questions, exclamations, or inter-candidate responses.

C. Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through documentation of the official debate video available on the KPU RI YouTube channel, which was then manually transcribed by the researcher. The transcript served as the corpus for identifying and analyzing speech acts in the debate. The data were selected based on contextual relevance, the illocutionary force within the utterances, and the representativeness of each candidate.

IV. RESULTS

A. Findings

1. Dominant Patterns of Illocutionary Speech Acts

The analysis of the first 2024 Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debate transcript reveals that the illocutionary acts most commonly used by the three candidates were *stating belief*, *making commitment*, and *giving orders*. These types of speech acts reflect the characteristic dynamics of political debates, which involve persuasion, self-positioning, and the projection of future agendas.

- a. **Stating Belief (Assertive):** Assertive acts were primarily used to articulate political ideologies, reaffirm constitutional values, and criticize opposing views. This function was utilized to reinforce credibility and enlist ideological support from the audience. For instance, when Anies Baswedan said, "*This is a state of law, not a state of power*," he both affirmed democratic values and criticized implied institutional abuse.
- b. **Making Commitment (Commissive):** Commissive acts, especially in the form of policy promises, were prevalent throughout the debate. These acts functioned as rhetorical

commitments, designed to invoke future-oriented trust. Prabowo Subianto, for example, often used this form to assert his pledge to safeguard national interests and stability.

- c. **Giving Orders (Directive):** Directive acts appeared in the form of calls to action or appeals, particularly evident when candidates addressed issues like corruption and governance. This was especially visible in Ganjar Pranowo's assertive command, "*Send them to Nusa Kambangan!*", portraying a strong stance against corruption.

In addition to these, the expressive function was frequently used to evoke empathy, concern, or camaraderie, especially when discussing vulnerable groups or national crises. The use of interrogative directive acts was also notable, particularly during inter-candidate questioning sessions where rhetorical questions were deployed to challenge or undermine opponents.

2 Illocutionary Strategies of Each Candidate

The findings show that each candidate employed distinct illocutionary strategies aligned with their political personas and rhetorical objectives:

- a. **Anies Baswedan** favored a mix of assertive and expressive acts, projecting a rational, empathetic leadership style. He often employed criticism and appeals to justice and morality, aligning himself with reformist and humanist values.
- b. **Prabowo Subianto** leaned toward expressive and commissive acts, projecting himself as a dependable and patriotic leader. His utterances often conveyed personal sacrifice and commitment to national defense, revealing a populist and emotive style.
- c. **Ganjar Pranowo** predominantly used directive and commissive acts, delivering clear and actionable policy proposals. His technocratic and solution-focused communication aligned with a pragmatic leadership image.

These strategic differences are indicative of the candidates' attempts to mold public perception, rally support, and establish ideological positioning within the constrained space of a televised debate.

3 Kreidler's and Searle's Theoretical Comparison in Debate Analysis

In analyzing the speech acts, Charles W. Kreidler's and John Searle's frameworks were both applied, revealing complementary yet distinct insights. While Searle's taxonomy (assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, declarative) provides a clear function-based classification, it tends to focus on the dominant intent of an utterance. Kreidler's model, by contrast, offers a more flexible approach that considers the social and emotional nuances of language.

For example:

- a. Anies's utterance, "*Unfortunately, not everyone can withstand being in opposition,*" is classified by Searle as an *assertive*, while Kreidler's model identifies it as a combination of *stating belief* and *criticizing*, capturing its layered rhetorical function.
- b. Prabowo's line, "*I have risked my life for democracy and human rights,*" is categorized as *expressive* in both models, but Kreidler's approach highlights its socio-emotional function as well as its persuasive intent.

The findings suggest that Kreidler's theory is better suited for analyzing complex political discourse, where multiple intentions, such as persuasion, emotion, and critique, may coexist within a single utterance. However, Searle's theory remains foundational for identifying the core pragmatic function of speech acts.

4 Pragmatic and Political Communication Implications

The analysis demonstrates that speech acts are central to political rhetoric and act as strategic tools in public debates. Their use is not merely linguistic but highly performative, driven by the desire

to shape audience perception, project authority, and contest narratives.

Illocutionary acts during the debate were shown to:

- a. Clarify visions and policy programs (*commissive*)
- b. Establish ethos and cultivate emotional bonds (*expressive, assertive*)
- c. Undermine opposition and assert moral high ground (*directive, criticizing*)
- d. Mobilize public response and reinforce shared values (*directive*)

This study confirms that illocutionary acts play an essential role in election debates by structuring political messages, enhancing candidate credibility, and navigating ideological conflict. As such, a pragmatic perspective offers critical insight into the subtle interplay between language, power, and political identity.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the inherent complexity and strategic nature of political discourse during presidential debates. The diverse deployment of illocutionary speech acts reflects not only the structural features of political communication but also the distinct rhetorical identities each candidate seeks to construct. In line with previous studies on political pragmatics, the candidates used language not simply to inform, but to persuade, challenge, and evoke emotional responses from the audience (van Dijk, 2006; Chilton, 2004).

1 Speech Acts as Strategic Political Communication

The dominance of the assertive, commissive, and directive functions aligns with the central aims of political debates: presenting ideological positions, laying out future programs, and mobilizing public support. Such patterns confirm that debates function as performative discourse arenas where speech acts are less about literal meaning and more about the construction of political identity and legitimacy. For example, assertive speech acts like Anies Baswedan's criticism of institutional power ("*This is a state of law, not a state of power*") did more than convey belief—they positioned him as a defender of democratic integrity. Similarly, commissive acts like Prabowo Subianto's pledge to protect democracy sought to build trust and credibility, essential components of political ethos.

2 Emotional Appeals and Public Engagement

The expressive function of speech acts, though less dominant quantitatively, played a significant role in shaping affective relationships with the public. The candidates' use of personal experiences, emotional tone, and empathetic language served to humanize them and foster relatability. This supports the notion that political persuasion depends on emotional as much as rational appeals. Ganjar Pranowo's emphatic directive against corruptors, for example, was both a policy statement and a call to shared moral outrage.

This emotional dimension emphasizes that political speech acts are hybrid in nature. They operate at the intersection of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, interweaving fact, persona, and emotion to appeal to a wide spectrum of voters. This fusion of emotionality and rationality is a defining feature of modern political rhetoric.

3 Theoretical Insights: Kreidler vs. Searle in Political Context

The comparative application of Kreidler's and Searle's models provides valuable insight into the nature of pragmatic analysis in political contexts. While Searle's classification offers a solid foundational framework, its limitations become evident when confronted with multifaceted statements that serve multiple purposes (e.g., informing, criticizing, and evoking emotion simultaneously). Kreidler's approach, which allows a single utterance to be categorized under multiple functions, better reflects the rhetorical complexity of political discourse. This study reinforces the suitability of Kreidler's model for analyzing dialogic and strategic language use in

contexts charged with ideological and emotional significance, such as political debates.

Thus, the findings contribute to pragmatic theory by highlighting the need for adaptable models that can account for layered speech act functions. The study also demonstrates the practical value of speech act theory in decoding political communication, which is often rife with ambiguity, manipulation, and persuasive intent.

4 Implications for Political Communication Research

This study contributes to the discourse on political pragmatics by revealing how speech acts are employed to advance political agendas and influence public opinion. It shows that:

- a. Speech acts function as tools of political power, constructing and contesting narratives on democracy, justice, and national identity.
- b. Expressive and directive speech acts play a significant role in mobilizing public sentiment and strategic positioning during debates.
- c. Mixed-function speech acts reflect the need for a broader analytical framework in pragmatics that accounts for socio-political complexity.

For future research, scholars might explore deeper intersections between speech act theory and media framing, or examine audience reception of specific speech act functions during debate broadcasts. Additionally, multimodal analysis (verbal + non-verbal communication) could further enrich the understanding of political persuasion beyond spoken language alone.

V. CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify and analyze the types and functions of illocutionary speech acts in the first round of the 2024 Presidential and Vice-Presidential debates, using a pragmatic approach based on Charles W. Kreidler's theory and comparing it with John Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. The debate is analyzed as a space of political communication that is rich in linguistic strategies, persuasion, and the construction of candidates' public image.

The findings show that the presidential candidates deliberately and strategically used various forms of illocutionary acts as tools of public communication. The most dominant types of speech acts include stating belief or assertive acts to convey political views and principles; making commitment or commissive acts to express political promises and commitments; giving orders or directive acts used in the form of policy calls or commands; expressing feeling or expressive acts to show emotions, empathy, and moral judgment; and asking or directive-interrogative acts, used as rhetorical strategies to challenge opponents or elicit responses.

The variation in the use of speech acts reflects each candidate's personality and communication style. Anies Baswedan tends to be argumentative and moralistic, emphasizing assertive and expressive acts. Prabowo Subianto shows a more personal and patriotic tone, relying on expressive and commissive acts. Ganjar Pranowo adopts a technocratic and straightforward communication style, with a dominant use of directive and commissive speech acts.

From a theoretical perspective, Kreidler's framework allows for a more contextual and flexible interpretation of political utterances, especially those involving sarcasm, implicit criticism, or combined functions within a single statement. While Searle's classification remains relevant as a systematic foundation for categorizing speech acts, Kreidler's theory proves to be more adaptable for analyzing the dynamic and complex nature of political discourse in public debates.

In conclusion, this study finds that illocutionary speech acts play a central role in shaping political narratives and constructing candidate images in public debates. The strategic use of language by the presidential candidates reflects their political orientation, the values they promote, and the ways they engage with their audience. Kreidler's approach is found to be more effective in analyzing complex and contextual political discourse than Searle's more structural model. This research

contributes to the field of political pragmatics by showing that speech act analysis can be a powerful tool for understanding elite political communication in public forums. Furthermore, it is expected that the findings of this study will help raise critical public awareness in interpreting rhetorical political statements presented in mass media.

Financing

The authors did not receive financing for the development of this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Adam, M., Rahman, F., Abbas, H., & Sahib, H. (2024). Corpus-Based Diachronic Study of WAR Metaphor in Indonesian Political Discourse. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(7), 515-523.
2. Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
3. Birner, B. J. (2021). *Introduction to pragmatics (2nd ed.)*. Wiley-Blackwell.
4. Chilton, P., & Schäffner, C. (2011). *Politics as text and talk: Analytic approaches to political discourse*. John Benjamins Publishing.
5. Cutting, J. (2002). *Pragmatics and discourse: A resource book for students*. Routledge.
6. Dalyan, M., Darwis, M., Rahman, F., & Latjuba, A. Y. (2022). Cultural discourse in Indonesian humor: A case study of some short dialogues. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 12(5), 1009-1018.
7. Etzer, F., & Bull, P. (2012). Political language and persuasion: Rhetorical strategies in political speeches. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 11(3), 435–456.
8. Grund, M., & Fricke, E. (2020). *Pragmatics and its interfaces*. De Gruyter Mouton.
9. Haugh, M. (2020). *Understanding pragmatics (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.
10. Ilie, C. (2019). *Political debates as argumentative activity types*. Springer.
11. Kaharuddin, Dalyan, M., Abbas, A., Hasjim, M., & Armin, M. A. (2023). Formation Rules for Indonesian Nouns Reduplication (Generative Morphology Review). *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 6(2), 397-408.
12. Kecskes, I. (2022). *Intercultural pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
13. Kreidler, C. W. (1998). *Introducing English semantics*. Routledge.
14. Kreidler, C. W. (2013). *Semantics: The study of meaning (3rd ed.)*. Wiley-Blackwell.
15. Rahman, F., & Weda, S. (2019). Linguistic deviation and the rhetoric figures in Shakespeare's selected plays. *XLinguage" European Scientific Language Journal"*, 12(1), 37-52.
16. Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
17. Sujoko, A., Rahmiati, D., & Rahman, F. (2023). The role of radio as the public sphere for public political education in the digital era: Challenges and pitfalls. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), 2239627.
18. Sukmawaty, S., Andini, C., & Rahman, F. F. (2022). The Shift of Honorifics due to The Promotion As A Government Official: Comparative Study. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(1), 166-176.
19. Verschueren, J. (2022). *Understanding pragmatics (2nd ed.)*. Routledge.

20. Weda, S., Atmowardoyo, H., Rahman, F., & Sakti, A. E. F. (2021). Linguistic aspects in intercultural communication (IC) practices at a higher education institution in Indonesia. *Eroupean Language Scientific Journal*, 14(2), 76-91.
21. Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.