

Variations of Speech Act Realizations in *The Jakarta Post Readers' Forum*

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ABSTRACT

The research investigated variations of speech act realizations in *The Jakarta Post readers' forum*. The research focused on the speech acts found in *The Jakarta Post readers' forum* and the variations made when a speech act was realized by using a speech acts theory proposed by Bach and Harnish (1979). Based on the theory, speech acts are classified into four major categories in which each category consists of subcategories in a system namely, a taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts. The data were obtained from six pages of *The Jakarta Post readers' forum* online edition under the heading of the topic about a lack of religious tolerance. The data were analyzed by categorizing the kinds of speech acts and the variations of each category according to speech acts classification provided by the taxonomy. The research finds that the kinds of speech acts realized by the contributors to the readers' forum were *Constatives*, *Acknowledgments* and *Directives*. Each of which was comprised of finer classes of speech act variations. The research concluded that the readers' forum has been used to serve several functions in accommodating its contributors' beliefs, feelings and desires. The contributors provided many reasons in form of beliefs to encourage a reasonableness of the blaming/complaint/critique or even an urgency of the order/asking/advice.

Keywords: *Speech acts, Speech acts schema, Taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts*

INTRODUCTION

Language is human's basic needs of communication. Using the in linguistics – study of language – which concerns on investigating meaning based on context is pragmatics. According to Cipollone *et al.* (1998: 234), context can be divided into four, which are 'physical context' (related to place, objects and actions); 'epistemic context' (related to background knowledge); 'linguistic context' (related to accompanied utterances); and 'social context' (related to social relationship). The use of the contexts is further illustrated by Cipollone *et al.* (1998: 234) in a situation when a stranger interrupted library visitors who were talking loudly. When the stranger utters, "*Talk a little louder, won't you? I missed what you just said.*", the utterance means a request for silence. It considers a physical context (library), an epistemic context (the library is a silent place), a linguistic context (the utterance is said sarcastically) and a social context

language, a speaker conveys meaning that is inferred or concluded by a hearer. One of subfields (there is distant relationship between the stranger and the visitors). Thomas (1995: 22) defined pragmatics as 'meaning in interaction' due to the negotiation among context, speaker and hearer in assigning meaning of utterances. Assigning meaning based on context has a close relationship with performance of 'speech acts'. Considering physical and social contexts are needed to analyze speech act since meaning is assigned from interaction (among context, speaker and hearer) (Paltridge 2005:60).

In the previous illustration, the stranger was not merely uttering a sort of words but he also performs an act of requesting, in this case requesting the visitor to be silent. Acts that are performed when uttering words are called speech acts. The theory of speech acts was firstly introduced by J.L. Austin (1962). The stranger's utterance is an indirect speech act (Searle 1969). It is because the

utterance does not contain 'performative verb' and it meets 'felicity conditions' of requesting. Moreover, the utterance which is conveyed in interrogative and declarative manner has forces like imperative manner. Nonetheless, it can be interpreted as a request by looking at the contexts operated behind the utterances. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) suggested classification of speech acts which is derived from their theory emphasizing rules for defining speech act. Austin classified illocutionary verbs lexically so that speech acts consist of five kinds (Expositives, Verdictives, Commissive, Exercitives, Behabitives). On the other hand, Searle classified five kinds of speech acts based on the nature of act performed (Assertives, Directives, Commissive, Expressives, Declaration). Unfortunately, defining speech act based on rules brings some weaknesses.

Using rules to define speech act seems inappropriate because it

tends to be grammatical instead of pragmatic descriptions (Thomas 1995). Aziz (2000) argued that a speech act will not be effective if any reactions do not come from interlocutors. Thus, a corresponding attitude on the part of the hearer is more important than rules to determine successfulness of a speech act performance. Bach and Harnish (1979) paid attention to this important aspect. They theorized speech acts based on the speaker's expressed attitudes which form the hearer's corresponding attitudes. The corresponding attitudes are derived from hearer's inferential process toward the speaker's attitudes. The inferential process is comprehensively described in a speech act schema (SAS). The SAS, as their influential contribution, has made a clear pattern of inference done by the hearer. A product of the SAS used by this research is the taxonomy of communicative illocutionary acts. It is a classification of speech acts which categorizes speech acts into four kinds (Constatives, Directives, Commissive, Acknowledgments). The classification

is used to categorize speech acts realized in the readers' forum due to its detail and comprehensiveness. Besides, it seems reasonable to prefer the expressed attitudes-based speech acts theory since the rules-based theory brings lots of weaknesses.

There are previous research which mainly focused on categorizing speech acts by using this classification including the research conducted by Lazuka (2006), Babatunde (2007) and Andor (2008). Both Lazuka (2006) and Babatunde (2007) categorized speech acts on speeches; the former on precedential speeches while the latter on evangelical Christian religious speeches. Unlike the others, Andor (2008) paid attention to investigate the usage factors, structural types of occurrence and functionality of expression "No problem" by way of dictionary-based identifications, corpus-based investigations and native speaker testing. Nonetheless, all of them took advantages of Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech acts classification. Noticeably, categorizations of speech acts on a

readers' forum have not been found yet. So, this research fills the gap by categorizing speech acts in *The Jakarta Post* reader's forum.

The Jakarta Post has claimed itself as 'the largest English newspaper in Indonesia' (available at www.thejakartapost.com). The data of this research was obtained from *The Jakarta Post* online edition which serves both local and international audiences. Consequently, contributors to the readers' forum were Indonesians (who are not native speakers of English) since the local readers are Indonesians. Besides, the contributors were possibly foreigners who (stay or do not stay in Indonesia) are native speakers of English and interested in events held in Indonesia. Samples of the readers' forum were taken narrowly to a topic regarding a lack of religious tolerance. The topic seems a 'hot button' issue in Indonesia because touching ethnic, race and religious issues (*isu SARA*) is often highly sensitive. In fact, more than 50 % of the latest 60 titles within the readers' forum carried the topic out. Thus, the

research revealed how Indonesians, who are Muslims as majority, view the topic. They were confronted with foreigners who are (commonly) non-Muslims or even Indonesians believing religions other than Islam. Both of them were placed on different sides in 'face-threatening situations' (Brown and Levinson 1987). Henceforth, the realizations of the contributors' speech acts showed the functions of the readers' forum itself. Specifically, this research examined following problems:

- 1) categorizing the speech acts found in *The Jakarta Post readers'* forum
- 2) distinguishing the variations made when a speech act was realized.

FINDINGS

The research found that *Constatives* speech acts were the most frequently realized in *The Jakarta Post readers'* forum. It was realized 45 times (44,1 %) out of 102 locutions. The second frequently realized were *Acknowledgments* speech acts. It was realized 38 times (37,2 %) out of 102 locutions. At the last, *Directives*

speech acts were realized 19 times (18,6 %). Next findings are in regards with variations generated by each category of speech acts. Eight variations were made when *Constatives* speech acts were realized; those are *Assertives* (57,7 %), *Predictives* (13,3 %), *Descriptives* (8,9 %), *Informatives* (4,4 %), *Confirmatives* (4,4 %), *Assentives* (4,4 %), *Dissentives* (4,4 %) and *Suggestives* (2,3 %). Meanwhile, two variations were made when *Acknowledgments* was realized, namely *Reject* (97,3 %) and *Congratulate* (2,3 %). The last was *Directives* varying five variations which were *Requestives* (21%), *Questions* (10,5%), *Requirements* (31,5%), *Prohibitives* (10,5%) and *Advisories* (26,5%).

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the three classes of speech acts deployed in the analyzed utterances, several functions of the readers' forum were revealed. A frequent use of *Constatives* speech acts showed that the most essential

function of the readers' forum was to convey its contributors' beliefs regarding given topic. Since its occurrences were not too far compared to *Constatives* speech acts, numerous *Acknowledgments* speech acts pointed to another significant function of the readers' forum that was to convey its contributors' feelings. The feelings reacted to behavior of people involved in the topic which was carried out. A rarely use of *Directives* speech act showed only a little number of contributors used the reader's forum to convey their desire.

Analyses of the head acts of utterance in order to determine variations of speech acts revealed that 23 contributors out of 29 presented the Muslims negatively. The negative presentation was established by those speech acts realizations. *Constatives* speech acts commonly accomplished direct blaming, cursing, asking or order which was the act generated by *Acknowledgments* and *Directives* speech acts. *Constatives* speech act prevalently presented the contributors'

statement of attitude towards a proposal to control acts showing a lack of religious tolerance. Besides, numerous descriptions, information and confirmations gave reasons for a worthiness of a direct blaming or an urgency of an order.

Although *Constatives* speech acts were the most frequently realized by the contributors, yet the analyzed utterances were dominated by *Reject* variation. *Reject* variation was a variation under *Acknowledgments* speech acts. It was made 37 times out of 102 compared to *Assertives* variation (the most frequently occurred variation under *Constatives* speech acts) which was only made 26 times out of 102. It suggested that most contributors presented the Muslims negatively by deploying *Reject* variation. It was in line with attitude expressed by the variation which is a lack of appreciation towards the hearer(s).

Eventhough *Directives* speech acts occurred at the least, it gave an important contribution in presenting

the Muslims negatively. It frequently occurred in the last part of a comment. So, it seemed like a core of the whole part of the comment. The core pointed to the contributors' wants that the hearer(s) do certain future act.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the findings above, the research concludes that the readers' forum has been used to serve several functions in accommodating its contributors' beliefs, feelings and desires. Factually, forces of comments delivered by the contributors pointing to the topic about a lack of religious tolerance commonly presented the Muslims negatively. It was deduced from analyses of head acts and supportive moves to determine variations of speech acts. The negative presentation was established by the realizations of the three categories of speech acts which were found (*Constatives, Acknowledgments, Directives*). Specifically, the negative presentation was directly stated by direct blaming or complaint and

indirect critique. It can be in form of direct order or asking and indirect advice stated in the last part of the comments. In addition, the contributors provide reasons in form of beliefs to encourage a reasonableness of the blaming/complaint/critique or even an urgency of the order/asking/advice.

The research was limited to categorize speech acts as well as its variations found in a readers' forum by using Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech acts classification. In the future, the next researcher can choose a speech act in the classification and then explore it like examining strategies in performing the speech act.

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