



---

## SPEECH ACTS IN POLICE INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS

Ricky Drimarcha Barus

Amrin Saragih

Thyrhaya Zein

*Diterima September 2017; Disetujui Oktober 2017; Dipublikasikan Desember 2017*

---

### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at exploring the speech acts in police investigative interviews. The objectives of the study were to discover, to explain how types of speech acts used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case and to elaborate the reasons. This research applied descriptive qualitative method. The data were the utterances gathered from the interviewers and the interviewees in two different investigative interviews. They were then analyzed by using Searle's Speech Acts theory. The findings revealed that the five types of speech acts, namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative were found in the first investigative interview. However, declarative was not found in the second investigative interview. The most dominant type from the two investigative interviews was representative speech act. The most dominant speech act performed by the detectives and special agents as the interviewers was directive speech act. The most dominant speech act performed by the suspect and the witness as the interviewee was representative speech act. The interviewers and interviewees performed them in two ways, direct - literal way and indirect - literal way, in which the direct - literal way was the most dominant one. The main reason why the interviewers performed directive speech act in the form of questioning, clarifying questioning and confirming questioning was to find facts and information. On the other hand, the interviewees performed the representative speech act in order to inform, explain, describe, affirm or deny. The direct - literal way was dominantly performed because all the participants want to avoid misunderstanding through ambiguous words or sentences since the investigative interviews are serious things.

**Keywords:** interview, investigative interviews, speech acts

**How to Cite:** Barus, R.D. (2017). Speech Acts in Police Investigative Interviews. *Jurnal Linguistik Terapan Pascasarjana Unimed*, 14(3): 1-9

ISSN 2407-7410

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking as a productive skill helps people to utter everything they want to share either opinions, thoughts and feelings. These are represented in various forms. It is clearly defined by Searle (2000) who is an American language philosopher stating that speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions or making promises. Moreover, he states that all linguistic communication involves linguistic (speech) acts. It means that

the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication are speech acts and their understanding together with the acquaintance of context in which they are performed are often essential for decoding the whole utterance and its proper meaning. In order to deliver the messages or asking for information in speaking, a speaker must use appropriate speech acts to perform or else the purpose will not be reached and the worst, it will lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. The speakers and the listeners are usually helped by the circumstance around the environment of the utterances. One circumstance where conversation takes place is in police interviews as part of investigation or simply said police investigative interviews. These interviews will be conducted when there are incidents in order to find out the facts.

Knowing speech acts helps speakers and listeners in order to comprehend each other's utterances beyond words. Utterances in speaking from speech acts perspective are more than just arrangement of words, there are acts in them. Therefore it is indeed important to know speech acts especially in investigative interviews to find out facts through understanding intentions inside the utterances produced during the interview. In further purpose, it will be basic decisive materials in order to indict suspects in incidents. Thus, as previously stated, in performing a speech act, a speaker must select words, sentence structures, and modes of communication. This includes the role as interviewers and interviewees. Therefore, the phenomena interests the researcher to investigate the use of speech acts in the police investigative interviews.

Based on the the background of the study, the problems of the study are formulated as : (a) what types of speech acts are used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case? (b) how are those types of speech acts used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case? and (c) why are those types of speech acts used in the ways they are? In line with problems, the objectives of the study are intended to (a) discover the types of speech acts used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case, (b) explain how those types of speech acts are used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case and (c) explain the reasons why those types of speech acts used in the ways they are.

This study investigated speech acts used by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews on Michael Brown's case in two interviews. The first interview was among detectives and the suspect of the case who is also a police officer, Darren Wilson and the second interview was among special agents and a witness who is labelled as witness 54. The focus was on types of speech acts, namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative. Furthermore, it also included the realizations of speech acts and reasons for their occurrences.

Austin (2009) explains that while using the language, people do not only produce an isolated series of sentences, but also perform an action. In other words, by using the language they either do something or make others do something. This is the basic concept of speech acts. He, then, proposed three dimensions that usually consist in speech acts, namely (1) locutionary act which is the real meaning of the words in an utterance separated from their social context, (2) illocutionary act which is defined as an utterance which has a certain (conventional) force and (3) perlocutionary act which is simply defined as the effect of the utterance which the speaker said to the hearer. Searle (2000) then developed five basic kinds of illocutionary acts that are used to express someone's intention in speaking, namely; (1) representatives, (2) directives, (3) commissives, (4) expressives and (5) declaratives.

**Representative** deals with states or events in the world such as an assertion, a description, a claim, a statement of fact, a report, and a conclusion. Searle says that the purpose of this is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition.

**Directive** refers to an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. Searle adds it includes some actions, such as commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, and suggesting.

**Commissives** refers to an illocutionary act whose point is to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action, such as promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing, and volunteering. Further, Kreidler (1998) explains that commissive verbs are illustrated by agree, ask, offer, refuse, swear, all with following infinitives.

**Expressive** includes acts in which the words are to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. It can be a statement of pleasure, pain, like, dislike, joy and sorrow. Searle adds the paradigms of expressive verbs are thank, congratulate, apologize, regret, deplore, and welcome.

**Declarative** is a kind of speech acts that changes the world via utterance (Yule, 1996). Moreover, Leech (1996) adds that declaration are the illocution whose successful performance brings about the correspondence between propositional content and reality. Christening or baptizing, declaring war, abdicating, resigning, dismissing, naming, and excommunicating are the examples of declaration.

Interviews/interrogations yield the most information in investigation. Roberts (2012) states that the interview is one of the primary methods used by police to obtain information from witnesses, victims and suspects of crime and plays a significant role in the majority of police investigations. He further explains that the witness interview may give police new information about a crime such as a description of an offender, an account of events or useful background information. The suspect interview may allow the police to ascertain an individual's level of involvement in an offence, implicate others or may help exonerate the suspect.

The investigative interviews discussed in this study are the case of Michael Brown. The shooting of Michael Brown took place on August 9, 2014, in Ferguson, Missouri, a northern suburb of St. Louis. Brown was fatally shot by Darren Wilson, a Ferguson police officer. The shooting sparked tensions in Ferguson. On the night of November 24, Prosecutor McCulloch reported in a 20-minute press conference that the grand jury had reached a decision in the case and would not indict Wilson. Following his announcement, McCulloch released thousands of pages of grand jury documents, with materials published on the Internet for public perusal.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study applied qualitative method with descriptive design which is basically interpretative research to purposefully select informants either document or visual materials that might be the best answer to the research problem. Descriptive design simply describes what is going on what data shows; because it focuses on the natural characteristics of the data. It is chosen due to qualitative research has the natural setting, as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument (Bodgan and Biklen, 1982).

The source of data in this research were the interviewees and interviewees of the investigative interviews based on Michael Brown's case. The interviewees are detectives and special agents while the interviewees are the suspect police officer Darren Wilson and a witness who is labeled as witness 54. The interview is available in the form of transcription which was taken from New York Times. The data of this research were the appropriate utterances gathered from the conversation between the interviewees who are detectives and special agents and the interviewees who are the suspect police officer Darren Wilson and a witness who is labeled as witness 54 from two different events.

The data were collected by using documentary method. In this research, the two transcription, the investigative interview with the suspect police officer Darren Wilson and a witness who is labeled as witness 54 were downloaded from the internet.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) assert that there are three main components in analyzing the data, namely data condensation, data display, drawing and verifying conclusions. After getting the data from the transcription, the researcher is going to proceed to data condensation. The techniques of data analysis in this study are formulated as the following.

#### 1) Data condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of (1) selecting, (2) focusing, (3) simplifying, (4) abstracting, and/or (5) transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials.

During the process of data condensation, in the process of selecting, the researcher selected the appropriate data related to this study. In line with this study, the researcher selected text of police investigative interviews that contain speech acts based on John Searles' concepts of speech acts.

In the process of focusing, the researcher paid attention to the appropriate data. The utterances were categorized whether they belong to the interviewers or the interviewees. Therefore, the list or table of the interviewers and interviewees' utterances were separated and analyzed differently.

Afterwards, in the process of simplifying, the researcher focused on the five speech acts performed by the interviewers and interviewees in the police investigative interviews and the way the speech acts performed. In doing so, the analysis was done per utterance. However, in some utterances, there were more than one speech acts found.

Then, in abstracting process, the participants' utterances were analyzed and labelled based on the the types of speech acts, their forms and the way they are performed.

Finally, in the process of transforming, the researcher transformed the data that were analyzed into the form of table. Afterwards, the researcher found out the percentage of each types of speech acts performed by the participants and also the percentage of the way the speech acts performed to display in the next process.

#### 2) Data display

Afterwards, the process continued to data display. It is the part where the researcher displays the data he gets from data condensation. This process is done in order to display more organized and selected data so that the researcher finds it easier to comprehend and plan the next part of research analysis to achieve the purpose of the research. In this step, after the types of speech acts had been identified and the data had been analyzed in order to get broader explanation about the types, processes and reasons of occurrence, the data were displayed in the form of table.

#### 3) Conclusion drawing

The next step was drawing conclusion. In this step, the researcher drew conclusion from the data. The conclusion can be temporary and updated if the researcher finds verification in order to make the conclusion even more credible. In this step, based on the dominant type of speech used by each participant, the researcher described the reason and discussion about how those types of speech acts performed and why they were performed so by referring to the realizations types of speech acts.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

From the two investigative interviews which were analyzed, the five speech acts can be found. They were performed by the participants. The speech acts performed by all participants are presented in table 1.

**Table 1 The Speech Acts Used by the Participants**

No	Types of Speech Acts	Number of Utterances				Total	Percentage (%)
		Detectives	Special Agents	Suspect	Witness		
1	Representative	18	5	169	53	245	50.94
2	Directive	133	42	3	-	178	37.01
3	Commissive	1	-	4	1	6	1.25
4	Expressive	37	14	-	-	51	10.60
5	Declarative	1	-	-	-	1	0.21
Total						481	100

Table shown that representative speech act is the most dominant type used, namely 245 out of 481 or 50.94%. The second dominant one is directive speech act, while the third most dominant is expressive speech act.

Basically, since investigative interview is about finding facts throughout the process, it is clear that the main role of the interviewer is obtaining as much information as possible through questioning. However, the detectives also performed representative speech act in the process of the investigative interview. The forms performed were informing, concluding, assuming, affirming, reminding and stating. The two most dominant forms performed were informing and reminding. Then, the rest were concluding, assuming, affirming and stating. One example is as the following.

*DET :Today is Sunday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and the time is 10:16 a.m. This is Detective with the St. Louis County Police Department, Bureau of Crimes Against Persons, (Representative - Informing, Direct - Literal).*

Directive speech act was the most dominant type of speech acts performed by the detectives. The directive speech act was performed in some forms. They were performed in some forms, namely requesting, questioning, clarifying, asking for permission, commanding and confirming. The most dominant form performed was questioning. The following is one of the examples.

*DET : And Darren, what is your DSN? (Directive - Questioning, Direct - Literal)*

There was only one commissive utterance performed by the detective. The utterance can be seen below.

*DW : Can I draw on this for you?*

*DET : Absolutely. (Commissive-Consenting, Direct - Literal)*

It came in the form of consenting. This was performed when the suspect asked for permission to draw something.

Expressive speech act came as the second most dominant type performed by the detectives. The most dominant form used was acceptance. This form was used to accept the suspect's explanation or information. One example can be seen below.

*DET :Okay. (Expressive - Acceptance, Direct - Literal)*

The second form performed was the form of surprised. It was used when the suspect told things that did not match the detectives' assumption. The final form used was apologizing.

In the investigative interview, there was only one declarative speech act. This was performed while the detective was ending the interview. It can be seen from the utterance below.

*DET : Alright. If there's nothing else, a, the time is 10:47 a.m. and this concludes the interview. (Declarative - Stopping, Direct - Literal)*

The special agents performed representative speech act in three different forms. They were performed in the form of informing, concluding and denying. One example is as the following.

SA : *Ok. Alright, um, I, I don't have any questions. (Representative - Informing, Direct - Literal)*

Directive speech act is the most dominant illocutionary acts performed by the special agents. This is the same as the first investigative interview performed by the detectives as the interviewer. The three dominant forms are confirming questioning, clarifying questioning and questioning. The first form, confirming questioning, can be seen from the following example.

SA : *ok. Um, did you capture any type of video a, on your phone or anything like that? (Directive - Confirming, Direct - Literal)*

The other forms performed were requesting, asking for permission, warning and commanding.

Expressive speech act also came as the second most dominant speech act performed by the special agents as the interviewer. There were only two forms performed, namely acceptance and thanking. The utterances can be seen as the following.

W54 : *That's what I said. I can't...it was on, the other side of the street.*

SA : *Ok. (Expressive - Acceptance, Direct - Literal)*

In the second investigative interview about the case of Michael Brown, the special agents did not perform commissive and declarative speech acts.

The suspect of the case, police officer Darren Wilson performed only three types of illocutionary acts. They were representative, directive and commissive. Expressive and declarative speech acts were not performed by the suspect himself. The most dominant one performed was representative in the form of informing. The second most dominant was commissive speech acts in the form of consenting.

In total, there were 169 out of 176 utterances performed in representative speech acts. The most dominant form performed was informing, namely 83 out of 176 representative speech acts. This was because the main role of the suspect in the investigative interview was informing the things he knew to the interviewers or simply answering the questions that the interviewers had asked. One utterance can be seen below.

DW : *A, duty boots, a dark navy cargo pants, a duty belt, a uniform police department short-sleeve shirt, badge, radio. (Representative - Informing, Direct - Literal)*

The second dominant form performed was affirming. The suspect did the affirming if the clarifying and confirming seemed to be true or correct. On the other hand, the suspect used the denying form in order to deny or say that the answers of the clarifying and confirming questions were not true or incorrect. Explaining appeared to be the third most dominant form performed by the suspect. The other minor forms performed were describing, believing, stating, asserting, assuming, revising and repeating.

There were only three forms of directive speech act performed by the suspect. The first form performed was confirming questioning in order to confirm or make clear the question that the detective had previously asked to the suspect. The second form was asking for permission when the suspect wanted to have permission from the detectives to draw something. The third form was questioning in order to ask the detective about the unclear question he previously asked to the suspect. The following is one example of the directive speech act.

DW : *After he hit me the second time? (Directive - Confirming, Indirect - Literal)*

The commissive speech act was performed four times by the suspect in this first investigative interview. The four of them came in the form of consenting. This form was performed by the suspect to give permission to the detectives to do something, for example recording the interview, talking to the other detective and so on. One example is as the following.

*DET : Right. Okay. Um, this is a, obviously a follow-up interview a, to that interview and, a, this portion is obviously being recorded. You're okay with us recording this, is that okay?*

*DW : Yes sir. (Commissive - Consenting, Direct - Literal)*

The speech acts performed by the witness as the interviewee included only representative and commissive speech acts. From 54 utterances, the witness performed 53 representative speech acts and one commissive speech act.

As the interviewee, the witness performed representative speech act as the most dominant one. There were some forms performed by the witness while the investigative interview took place. They were the form of informing as the dominant one, and affirming as the second most dominant. Some of the examples are as the following.

*W54 : Well what I seen, um Mike Brown and the dude with the jersey was coming out of Canfield. They went from West Florissant. (Representative - Informing, Direct - Literal)*

*W54 : But the whole street was Canfield, West Florissant is the main street. (Representative - Informing, Direct - Literal)*

The form of denying became the third most second dominant because it is also related to the clarifying and confirming questions. The other forms came in the form of explaining, describing, asserting, assuming and revising.

The witness only performed one commissive speech act in the investigative interview. The utterance can be seen below.

*SA : ... . And are aware that this conversation is gonna be recorded? And you consent to allow us to record it?*

*W54 : Yes. (Commissive - Consenting, Direct - Literal)*

The commissive speech act came in the form of consenting. This was performed when the special agent asked for permission to record the interview and then the witness consented.

There are four ways in performing speech acts, namely direct literal, direct non literal, indirect literal and indirect non literal. After the researcher analyzed the utterances performed by all speakers, he then presented the data about the ways how the speech acts performed in Table 2.

**Table 2 The Ways How the Speech Acts Performed**

No	The Ways How the Speech Acts Performed	Number of Utterances				Total	Percentage (%)
		Detectives	Special Agents	Suspect	Witness		
1	Direct - Literal	138	38	174	54	404	83.99
2	Direct - Non Literal	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Indirect - Literal	52	23	2	-	77	16.01
4	Indirect - Non Literal	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total						481	100

It can be concluded that direct - literal is the most dominant form performed by the participants. The second most dominant way was indirect - literal, while direct – non literal and indirect - non literal were not found from the two investigative interviews.

Having analyzed the data, the researcher came up with some findings which are presented as follows:

- a) The five types of speech acts were found from the first investigative interview. However, in the second investigative interview, commissive and declarative speech acts were not found. The most dominant speech act performed by all of the participants is representative speech act. The second

most dominant is directive speech act. The third most dominant is expressive speech acts. The fourth one is commissive and the last is declarative. The detectives performed all types of speech acts while the suspect only performed representative, directive and commissive speech acts. Moreover, the special agents performed representative, directive and expressive speech acts. The witness performed only two speech acts, namely representative and commissive. The most dominant speech act performed by the detectives and special agents as interviewers is directive speech act. It comes in some dominant forms, namely questioning, clarifying and confirming questioning, and requesting. The second most dominant speech act is expressive speech act in the form of acceptance. On the other hand, the most dominant type performed by the suspect and the witness as the interviewee is the representative in the form of informing, affirming, denying and explaining.

- b) There are two ways in performing the speech acts in the investigative interviews. They are direct - literal and indirect literal ways. The most dominant way is direct - literal way. This dominant way was performed dominantly by all participants.
- c) The participants perform the speech acts the way they are because of some reasons. Representative speech act is performed by all participants. It is performed by the detectives and special agents when they want to inform the interviewees or the third person about something, especially when they start recording, answer the interviewee's questions or remind about the previous information. For the suspect and witness as interviewees, representative is performed dominantly in order to inform, explain and describe what they know, they see or they experience about the case, especially when they are asked by the interviewers. Directive speech act is used by the interviewers to find facts about the case generally through questioning, clarifying and confirming questions, request and commands. Moreover, it is performed by the suspect to ask not only about questions or unclear questions from the interviewers but also permission to do something. Commissive speech act is performed by the detectives, suspect, and witness to consent. Expressive speech act is performed by the detectives and the special agents mainly to express their acceptance, understanding or welcoming the information they get. Declarative is only performed by the detective at the end of the session of the investigative interview to declare or end the investigative interview.

From the two investigative interviews held in different occasion, the five speech acts are performed by the participants. However, not all participants and not in those two sessions they are actually performed. The five types are performed only in the first investigative interview. Specifically, they are performed by the detectives. It is because the detectives have the most possible requirements to perform all the speech acts. The suspect and the witness as interviewees performed representative speech act to inform, explain, describe what they know, see, or experience. Both suspect and witness do not perform expressive because basically they are questioned without affecting their psychological state. Declarative is not performed because basically they do not have power to declare something and they do not have something to declare.

On the other hand, Romdlon (2014) who explained about an analysis of speech acts in the interview script of "Obama on Partisanship and Getting Things Done in Washington" between Michael Scherer and Obama on August 30th, 2012 found out that in the interview, there are no expressive and declarative speech acts. In these two investigative interviews, expressive speech act is performed, while declarative is performed in the first one. Expressive speech act is the key to make the interviewees feel accepted about the information they deliver. It will make them comfortable with the speaking situation and encourage them more in delivering the information. The difference is probably because of the degree of formality, the setting and the participants.

The way how the speech acts performed is another thing to discuss. From this two investigative interviews, there are only two ways of performing the speech acts. They are direct - literal way and



indirect - literal way. The direct - literal appears to be the most dominant way. It means they use declarative form to inform, interrogative form to question and imperative form to command with the true meaning or literal meaning. In line with Arief's study (2012), Speech Acts used in Courtroom Text in Langsa, the judge performed his speech acts directly and literally to avoid the use of ambiguous words and sentences. All the participants in the investigative interviews tend to perform direct - literal way also to avoid misunderstanding through ambiguous words or sentences since the investigative interviews are serious things.

## CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the data in the investigative interviews of Michael Brown's case, the researcher draws the conclusions as follows:

- a) The five types of speech acts were performed in the investigative interviews. They are specifically performed in the first investigative interview among the detectives and the suspect. In the second investigative interview, there are no declarative speech act found.
- b) There were two ways used by participants in performing their speech acts in the investigative interviews, namely direct - literal way and indirect - literal way. The interviewers performed both way, but the direct - literal way was the most dominant one. On the other hand, the interviewees, the suspect, performed both ways but direct - literal way is still the most dominant one.
- c) The representative speech act was performed by the interviewers to inform or answer the interviewees' questions, while the interviewees mainly performed it to inform, describe, explain or answer the interviewers' questions. The directive was used by the interviewers mainly to ask questions in order to find facts, while the interviewees used it to ask about unclear questions or ask for permission. The commissive was mainly performed by all participants to consent. The expressive was mainly performed by interviewers to show acceptance. The declarative was performed by the detective to stop the interview session.

## REFERENCES

- Arief, M. R. 2012. *Speech Acts Used in Courtroom Text in Langsa*. An Unpublished Thesis. Medan: English Applied Linguistics Study Program, State University of Medan.
- Austin, J. L. *Soylemek Ve Yapmak*. (R. Levent Aysever, Trans.). Istanbul: Metis.
- Bodgan, R & Biklen, S. 1982. *Qualitative Research for Education (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*. Boston: Allan and Bacon.
- Kreidler, C. W. 1998. *Introducing English Semantics*. London: Routledge.
- Leech, G. 1996. *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, M. A., & Saldana, J. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis (3<sup>rd</sup> edition)*. London: Sage Publication.
- Roberts, K. 2012. Police Interviewing of Criminal Suspects: A Historical Perspective. *Internet Journal of Criminology*. Accessed from [http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Roberts\\_Police\\_Interview\\_Criminal\\_Suspects\\_IJ\\_C\\_Dec\\_2012.pdf](http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/Roberts_Police_Interview_Criminal_Suspects_IJ_C_Dec_2012.pdf) on October, 20, 2016.
- Romdlon, A. M. 2014. *An Analysis of Speech Act in the Interview Script of "Obama on Partisanship and Getting Things Done in Washington" between Michael Scherer and Obama on August 30th, 2012*. An Unpublished Thesis. Kudus: Universitas Muria Kudus.
- Searle, J. R. 2000. *Soz Edimleri*. (R. Levent Aysever, Trans.). Ankara: Ayrac Yaymevi.
- Yule, G. 1996. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.