A PRAGMATIC CLASSIFICATION OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN ZOHRAN MAMDANI'S VICTORY SPEECH

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify and categorize the many forms and purposes of illocutionary speech acts in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech. As a youthful politician from a minority group, Mamdani's discourse adds a fresh dimension to progressive political communication. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a pragmatic approach. The data were extracted from the transcript of Zohran Mamdani's victory speech and evaluated using Searle's speech act classification theory. The study identified five categories of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Assertive acts dominate the utterances as a strategy of reinforcing identification and establishing political reality. The study indicates that the employment of illocutionary force in this speech is a strategic tool for converting electoral triumph into collective political agency for the working class. The linguistic methods used were successful in creating an inclusive narrative that challenges the existing quo while boosting minority leaders' legitimacy in the public domain.
Keywords: Pragmatics, Illocutionary Acts, Victory Speech, Zohran Mamdani, Speech Act Theory

Abstract

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi dan mengkategorikan berbagai bentuk dan tujuan tindak tutur ilokusioner dalam pidato kemenangan Zohran Mamdani. Sebagai politisi muda dari kelompok minoritas, wacana Mamdani menambahkan dimensi baru pada komunikasi politik progresif. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan pragmatis. Data diekstrak dari transkrip pidato kemenangan Zohran Mamdani dan dievaluasi menggunakan teori klasifikasi tindak tutur Searle. Studi tersebut mengidentifikasi lima kategori tindak ilokusi: asertif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Tindakan asertif mendominasi ujaran sebagai strategi untuk memperkuat identifikasi dan membangun realitas politik. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan kekuatan ilokusi dalam pidato ini adalah alat strategis untuk mengubah kemenangan elektoral menjadi agen politik kolektif bagi kelas pekerja. Metode linguistik yang digunakan berhasil menciptakan narasi inklusif yang menantang status quo sambil meningkatkan legitimasi pemimpin minoritas di ranah publik.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool in social interaction, enabling action and the transmission of information. Speech act theory also known as speech acts is used in pragmatic studies to analyze this phenomenon. This theory posits that every utterance has illocutionary force, reflecting the speaker's intention. Searle's theory (in Purba, 2024) establishes five main categories of illocutionary speech acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. It is very important to understand these speech acts, especially in political communication, because the linguistic strategies used by a figure can influence how well their vision, mission, and influence are conveyed to their constituents (Mardiana et al., 2025).

The use of speech acts by influential figures on various platforms has been discussed in several previous studies. Larasati et al. (2020) investigated Donald Trump's political rhetoric and found that assertive speech acts were the most common way to build public trust in his policies. Maulidiyah et al. (2021) investigated how the social influence of a figure can initiate social movements in society through their words. Additionally, Majeed's (2022) research on presidential speeches during the pandemic indicates that a leader's choice to use illocutionary speech acts, both directly and indirectly, is highly dependent on the specific communicative goals the leader wishes to achieve. This confirms the idea that political language is a well-planned tool of power (Nashmi & Mehdi, 2022).

Not much research has been done on young political figures with strong identity backgrounds like Zohran Mamdani, although a lot of research has been conducted on established political figures. In his victory speech, Mamdani, a democratic socialist and Muslim, used a different communication style. He often uses directive speech acts that are mobilizing and assertive speech acts to reinforce collective identity. These two phenomena are relevant to Dewi et al.'s (2024) research on how language discourse influences listeners' perceptions through implicit messages. Mamdani's rhetorical strategy, which challenges the status quo, brings a fresh perspective to the study of political pragmatics, particularly on how language shapes collective agency (Insyra & Supri, 2024).

The purpose of this study is to create a pragmatic classification of illocutionary speech acts in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech. This research is expected to enhance understanding of how modern political leaders use illocutionary force to build trust, enforce political promises (commissives), and change social reality by announcing victories (Mardiana et al., 2025). This is done by referring to Searle's theoretical framework and considering interpersonal aspects in political communication. This analysis will specifically discuss the type, function, and communicative purpose of each speech utterance.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the pragmatic functions of language in a political context, focusing on the classification of illocutionary acts in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the analysis emphasizes meaning, intention, and communicative function rather than statistical measurement (Dewi et al., 2024; Effendy & Simatupang, 2024). The research design is based on Searle's Speech Act Theory, which classifies illocutionary acts into five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative (Ayu Febri Anitasari et al., 2024;

Mardiana et al., 2025; Searle, 2012). This descriptive-analytical design aims to identify, classify, and interpret the illocutionary force of utterances as they function within the situational and political context of a victory speech. The use of Speech Act Theory is further supported by foundational works in pragmatics which emphasize that utterances must be interpreted with reference to speaker intention and contextual factors (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 2010)

The primary data source is the transcript of Zohran Mamdani's victory speech obtained from an official video recording circulated through digital media platforms and reputable news outlets. The selection of a victory speech is justified by its communicative importance as a political event in which a speaker articulates ideological positions, expresses gratitude, constructs collective identity, and issues commitments or calls to action (Megasari et al., 2024; Nashmi & Mehdi, 2022). The subjects of the study are individual utterances produced by Mamdani that contain identifiable illocutionary force. Each utterance, in the form of a sentence or clause, is treated as a unit of analysis and interpreted in relation to the surrounding discourse and the socio-political context of the speech event. This perspective aligns with pragmatic theory which views meaning as inseparable from context and social interaction (Cutting, 2006; Thomas, 2014).

The researcher served as the primary research instrument because pragmatic analysis requires interpretative competence in identifying speaker intention and contextual meaning. To support systematic analysis, a classification table based on Searle's five categories of illocutionary acts was employed. The table includes columns for the type of illocutionary act, the linguistic form of the utterance, its pragmatic function, and its communicative purpose in political discourse. This analytical framework ensured consistency and transparency in data categorization and has been widely applied in previous studies of political and public discourse (Amalia et al., 2021; Haucsa et al., 2020; Sanusi et al., 2022). The reliance on human interpretation is justified by the nature of pragmatic inquiry, which prioritizes contextual understanding over mechanical coding (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 2010).

Data were collected using documentation and recording techniques. The researcher repeatedly watched the video of Mamdani's victory speech to understand contextual factors such as intonation and emphasis that might influence pragmatic interpretation. The transcript was then read carefully to ensure accuracy and completeness. Utterances relevant to the research objectives were identified and coded according to preliminary illocutionary categories, namely A (assertive), D (directive), C (commissive), E (expressive), and Dec (declarative). The coding process was iterative, involving repeated examination of the data to refine classification and minimize interpretative bias, in line with qualitative procedures in pragmatic and discourse-based research (Baok, 2021; Fadzila, 2023). Such procedures reflect standard methodological practices in qualitative linguistics, which stress repeated engagement with data to achieve analytical rigor (Creswell, 2014).

The data analysis followed a pragmatic procedural flow consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, utterances that did not convey clear illocutionary force were excluded. In the data display stage, selected utterances were organized into a classification table based on Searle's categories and analyzed in terms of their illocutionary type, pragmatic function, and communicative purpose. Conclusions were drawn by identifying dominant patterns of illocutionary use and interpreting their significance within political discourse. To ensure trustworthiness, repeated reading and theoretical triangulation were applied by comparing the findings with Speech Act Theory and relevant

previous studies (Larasati et al., 2020; Maulidiyah et al., 2021; Searle, 2012; Yule, 2010)). Through these procedures, this study aims to produce a systematic and academically accountable description of illocutionary acts in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and interprets the findings of the pragmatic analysis of illocutionary acts in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech. Following the research template, the results are first summarized quantitatively and then discussed qualitatively to explain their communicative functions and theoretical implications.

Illocutionary Act Data Presentation

Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts in Zohran Mamdani's Victory Speech

No	Type of Illocutionary Act	Frequency
1	Assertive	4
2	Directive	3
3	Commissive	1
4	Expressive	1
5	Declarative	1
	Total	**10**

Table 1 shows that assertive acts dominate the speech, followed by directive acts, while commissive, expressive, and declarative acts occur less frequently. This distribution reflects the nature of a victory speech, which primarily aims to establish legitimacy, assert political reality, and define identity. According to Speech Act Theory, assertive acts function to represent the world as the speaker believes it to be. In a political victory context, such acts are crucial to publicly validate success and construct authority. Similar findings were reported by Megasari et al. (2021) in Yoon Suk Yeol's victory speech and by Larasati et al. (2020) in Donald Trump's candidacy speech, where assertive acts were also dominant due to their role in strengthening political credibility.

Classification and Interpretation of Identified Acts

Table 2. Assertive Acts

No	Utterance	Illocutionary Function	Pragmatic Purpose
1	"Tonight, against all odds, we have grasped it."	Claiming victory	To construct collective triumph

2	"I am Muslim. I am a Democratic Socialist."	Identifying self	To affirm political and religious identity
3	"I refuse to apologize for any of this."	Asserting ideological stance	To demonstrate strength and authenticity
4	"This city is your city and this democracy is yours, too."	Transferring symbolic ownership	To empower citizens

Assertive acts function as the core rhetorical strategy in Mamdani's speech. By stating "Tonight, against all odds, we have grasped it," the speaker asserts victory as an indisputable fact, thereby legitimizing his political position. Moreover, the repetition of identity-based assertions such as "I am Muslim. I am a Democratic Socialist" reflects a deliberate strategy of empowerment. These utterances challenge dominant political norms and reposition marginalized identities as central to political leadership. This supports Nashmi and Mehdi's (2022) claim that political discourse often constructs identity through language to influence audience perception. In this case, assertive acts are not merely descriptive but perform ideological work by redefining who can occupy political authority.

Table 3. Directive Acts

No	Utterance	Illocutionary Function	Pragmatic Purpose
1	"New York City, breathe this moment in."	Urging	To create shared emotional experience
2	"Donald Trump… turn the volume up."	Challenging	To confront political opposition
3	"Let us build a shining city for all."	Exhorting	To mobilize collective action

Directive acts aim to influence the audience's behavior and attitudes. Utterances such as "Let us build a shining city for all" transform individual victory into collective responsibility. Rather than functioning as commands alone, these directives create solidarity and participation. From a pragmatic perspective, this demonstrates how directives in political discourse often operate as inclusive invitations rather than coercive orders. This finding aligns with Dewi et al. (2024), who argue that illocutionary force can embed implicit persuasive messages. Mamdani's directives thus function to mobilize listeners and frame political success as a shared movement rather than a personal achievement.

Table 4. Commissive Acts

No	Utterance	Illocutionary Function	Pragmatic Purpose
1	"We will hire thousands more teachers."	Promising	To gain public trust through policy commitment

The commissive act represents a political promise linking electoral victory to concrete future action. Through this utterance, Mamdani commits himself to a specific policy goal, thereby reinforcing accountability and credibility. In pragmatic terms, commissives bind the speaker to a future course of action and function as a mechanism for building trust. This finding is consistent with Mardiana et al. (2025), who argue that commissive acts in political discourse strengthen public confidence by signaling responsibility and governance readiness.

Table 5. Expressive Acts

No	Utterance	Illocutionary Function	Pragmatic Purpose
1	"I must say this. Thank you."	Thanking	To express gratitude and strengthen solidarity

Expressive acts convey the psychological state of the speaker, in this case gratitude. The utterance "Thank you" functions to establish emotional closeness with supporters and reinforce interpersonal bonds. In political communication, expressives play an important role in humanizing leaders and fostering loyalty. Although limited in number, this expressive act complements assertive and directive acts by adding an emotional dimension to Mamdani's rhetoric.

Table 8. Declarative Acts

No	Utterance	Illocutionary Function	Pragmatic Purpose
1	"On January 1st, I will be sworn in as the mayor."	Announcing official status	To establish new institutional reality

The declarative act formally announces a change in institutional status. By stating the inauguration date, Mamdani enacts a social transition from candidate to elected official. This aligns with Searle's definition of declaratives as acts that bring about changes in social reality through language. In this context, the utterance functions not only as information but as a performative marker of authority.

Integrative Discussion

The dominance of assertive acts indicates that Mamdani's primary communicative goal is to assert legitimacy and construct a new political reality. This pattern is comparable to previous studies on political speeches, such as Larasati et al. (2020) and Megasari et al. (2021),

which found assertive acts to be central in establishing authority. However, Mamdani's assertives differ in ideological orientation, as they foreground religious and political identity as tools of empowerment rather than personal dominance.

Directive acts further extend this strategy by transforming victory into collective agency. The audience is not positioned merely as observers but as participants in future political action. This supports the argument that political rhetoric increasingly relies on participatory language to mobilize supporters.

The combined use of assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts demonstrates how Mamdani strategically employs illocutionary force to assert identity, mobilize the public, promise reform, express gratitude, and formalize authority. These findings confirm the applicability of Searle's Speech Act Theory to contemporary political discourse and reveal that illocutionary acts function not only as linguistic categories but also as instruments of political strategy and social transformation.

CLOSING
Conclusion

This research found that the illocutionary speech acts observed in Zohran Mamdani's victory speech can be used as a strategic tool to transform electoral victory into a collective political organization. Rhetorical courage is crucial for legitimizing minority group leaders, as demonstrated by the dominance of assertive speech acts intertwined with personal identity (Muslims and Social Democrats). Confrontationally, directive illocution is used against national leaders, demonstrating that modern political language has evolved from mere persuasion to challenging the current state of affairs.

Additionally, commissive speech acts specifically about working-class issues demonstrate that maintaining political credibility is achieved by committing to tangible public promises. Practically speaking, this speech constructs a new world thru statements that mark the transition of power and redefine the boundaries of citizen engagement in the public sphere. Finally, the illocutionary patterns in this speech confirm that the success of progressive political communication heavily relies on the ability of leaders to unite diverse social backgrounds into a single narrative of struggle that is inclusive yet ideologically firm.

Suggestion

Based on these findings, the researchers suggest that language researchers and linguistics students conduct further research by comparing the illocutionary speech acts of young conservative and progressive political figures. The purpose of this study is to determine how rhetorical strategies change with global political polarization. To have a greater perlocutionary effect in building trust with working-class constituents, political communication practitioners are advised to combine identity-assertive speech acts with field data-based commissions. Finally, discourse analysts need to expand their research to examine non-verbal elements or multimodal contexts in the victory speeches of minority figures. This is done so they can discover how elements outside the text also strengthen the illocutionary force of the message being conveyed.

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