

ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS ANALYSIS IN RETNO MARSUDI'S SPEECH AT UNGA 79th SESSION: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

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Abstract:

This study investigates the use of illocutionary speech acts in the speech of Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi during the General Debate of the 79th United Nations General Assembly. Using Searle's (1979) taxonomy, the research categorizes illocutionary acts into representatives, directives, expressive, commissives, and declarations. A qualitative descriptive method was applied to analyze the official transcript of the speech. The findings reveal 40 illocutionary acts: representatives (47.5%), directives (35%), expressive (10%), commissives (7.5%), and no declarations. The dominance of representatives highlights Indonesia's emphasis on presenting facts, political stances, and evaluations, reinforced by directives urging collective global action. These results show how diplomatic speeches strategically combine factual representation, persuasive appeals, and emotional expressions to strengthen Indonesia's position in international diplomacy.



Keyword: *Illocutionary Acts; Speech; Pragmatics; Diplomacy; UN General Assembly;*

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INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics concerned with meaning in context. As Yule (1996) explains, pragmatics studies how speakers communicate meaning and how hearers interpret it, going beyond the literal meaning of words. This perspective allows researchers to examine how language functions not only as a system of signs but also as a form of action shaped by intentions, relationships, and situations.

One of the central concepts in pragmatics is speech act theory. Austin (1962) introduced the idea that utterances are not merely statements but actions, distinguishing between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Searle (1979) further developed this framework by categorizing illocutionary acts into five types: representatives, directives, expressive, commissives, and declarations. Each type represents a way in which language is used to perform actions such as asserting, requesting, promising, or declaring.

In the field of diplomacy, pragmatics is particularly relevant. Diplomatic communication must balance persuasion, negotiation, and politeness, often employing carefully constructed speech acts. Nicolson (1939) described diplomacy as the art of conveying political messages effectively yet tactfully, while Bull (1977) emphasized diplomacy as a mechanism for maintaining order in international society. These perspectives underline that language in diplomacy is strategic, aimed at shaping perception and mobilizing cooperation.

This study investigates

1. What types of Illocutionary Acts used in Retno Marsudi speech at the UNGA 79th session?
2. What is the function of Illocutionary Acts that used in Retno Marsudi speech at the UNGA 79th session?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics

Austin's *How to do things with words* (1962) established the foundation of speech act theory by demonstrating that language is performative. Searle (1969, 1979) refined this theory, offering a taxonomy of illocutionary acts that remains influential in pragmatic studies. Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996) further advanced pragmatic theory, highlighting how meaning depends on context, inference, and shared assumptions.

In political and diplomatic contexts, pragmatic analysis has proven especially insightful. Fairclough (1995) noted that language and society are interconnected in a dialectical relationship, where discourse both reflects and shapes social realities. In diplomacy, Snow (2020) and Tran (1987) emphasized that communication is the lifeblood of international relations, as without communication, negotiation and cooperation would collapse.

Previous studies consistently show that representatives and directives dominate political speeches because they allow leaders to present facts while simultaneously urging action. Expressive and commissives, though less frequent, are equally important for signalling empathy, credibility, and commitment. Declarations are rare in general debates because they typically require institutional authority.

Assertive/Representatives

These acts commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. They include stating, reporting, claiming, concluding, or describing. The function is to represent reality as the speaker perceives it; for example, a diplomat may say, "Indonesia supports the two-state solution", asserting a national position as factual.

Directives

Directives are aimed at making the hearer perform an action. They include requesting, ordering, suggesting, advising, or urging. In diplomatic discourse, directives are often softened through politeness strategies but remain persuasive. For instance, "We urge all nations to act immediately to stop the conflict" is a directive encouraging collective action.

Expressive

Expressive reveal the speaker's psychological state or emotions. These include thanking, apologizing, congratulating, condoling, or criticizing. In diplomacy, expressive are important for demonstrating empathy, solidarity, and shared values. For example, "We deeply mourn the victims of war" expresses compassion and solidarity.

Commissives

Commissive acts commit the speaker to a future course of action. They include promising, offering, pledging, or vowing. In international relations, commissives are significant because they project a country's credibility and responsibility. An example is: "Indonesia will continue to support humanitarian assistance."

Declaratives

Declarations are unique because they bring about a change in reality by being uttered, provided they are spoken by someone with the appropriate authority. Examples include pronouncing a couple married, declaring war, or announcing recognition of a state. In diplomatic contexts, declarations are powerful but limited to institutional authority, such as resolutions or formal agreements.

Scholars such as Nicolson (1939) and Bull (1977) emphasize that diplomacy relies heavily on communication, where speech acts are carefully crafted to achieve political objectives while maintaining international order. Fairclough (1995) further argues that language and society are linked dialectically, meaning speech acts not only reflect but also shape political realities.

From this perspective, analysing the types and functions of illocutionary acts in diplomatic speeches allows us to understand how leaders construct credibility, mobilize support, and project commitments. This study applies Searle's framework to examine how Retno Marsudi's speech at the 79th UNGA strategically combines these acts to advance Indonesia's diplomatic goals.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. The data consist of the official English transcript of Retno Marsudi's UNGA speech (1,813 words), sourced from the United Nations' official channel. Utterances containing illocutionary force were identified, categorized using Searle's (1979) taxonomy, and analyzed for their pragmatic functions in the context of international diplomacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified forty illocutionary acts in Retno Marsudi's UNGA speech, consisting of representatives (47.5%), directives (35%), expressive (10%), and commissives (7.5%), while no declarations were found.

No.	Illocutionary Types	Data	Percentage
1.	Assertive	19	47,5 %
2.	Expressive	4	10 %
3.	Directives	14	35 %
4.	Commissives	3	7,5 %
5.	Declaratives	0	0 %
			100 %

Representatives dominated the speech, as they were used to present facts, report global crises, and evaluate Indonesia's role in international affairs, thereby strengthening credibility. Directives served as appeals for international action, particularly on Palestine and multilateral cooperation, reflecting the persuasive dimension of diplomatic discourse.

Expressives, though less frequent, conveyed empathy and solidarity, while commissives demonstrated Indonesia's commitment to future initiatives. The absence of declaratives is consistent with the institutional context of the UNGA, where individual speeches do not carry the authority to enact change. Overall, the findings show that Retno Marsudi strategically combined factual, persuasive, emotional, and commitment-based acts to project Indonesia as both credible and responsible in global diplomacy.

A. Illocutionary Acts – Representative

1. **“A decade of so many challenges but at the same time a decade of Indonesia many contribution in addressing Global issues.” (D2/UNYTC2024/IAR1/00.46-00.49)**

Foreign Minister Retno conveys a general overview of Indonesia's role over the past 10 years, emphasizing that despite many challenges, Indonesia has still made significant contributions in addressing global issues. This statement functions to strengthen Indonesia's credibility in the eyes of the world by stressing its consistent presence in solving international problems.

2. **“As I speak now more than 41,000 people in Gaza have been killed.” (D5/UNYTC2024/IAR2/01.23-01.27)**

Foreign Minister Retno presents factual numerical data regarding the death toll in Gaza, intended to create a sense of urgency among state representatives. By providing concrete information through numbers, this utterance functions to compel international representatives to take immediate action.

3. **“Yesterday while he was here (Netanyahu), Israel conducted unprecedented massive air attack on Beirut, PM Netanyahu wants the war to continue, we must stop that I repeat we must stop that.” (D9/UNYTC2024/IAR3/02.15-02.20)**

Foreign Minister Retno conveys the fact about Israel's air strike, which contradicts Netanyahu's previous statement, and uses this fact as an argument to encourage the audience to think critically. The function of this utterance is to highlight the inconsistency between Netanyahu's words and Israel's actions, making the international audience aware of Israel's contradictory stance and urging the need to stop the war.

B. Illocutionary Acts – Expressives

1. **“Mr. President this is my last opportunity as the foreign minister of Indonesia to represent my country to speak before the UNGA.” (D1/UNYTC2024/IAE1/00.38-00.40)**

In this utterance, Foreign Minister Retno expresses her personal feelings regarding her final moment standing on the UN stage as Indonesia's Minister of Foreign Affairs in front of representatives from various countries. She confesses that this is her last speech in such capacity, with “confess” meaning to acknowledge something as true or valid. This statement reflects her emotions of amazement and pride for ending her tenure while still representing Indonesia at the UN, revealing the human and emotional side of a diplomat within a formal setting. From a diplomatic perspective, this expressive act also creates an emotional connection with the audience and underscores that Indonesia's presence in international forums is built on personal dedication, not merely protocol.

2. **“Situation in West Bank Lebanon are deteriorating is that not enough? is that not enough?. will the security Council only take action to stop Israel atrocities when all Palestinian are displaced? or when 100,000 Palestinians are killed? or when a regional armed conflict breaks out.” (D6/UNYTC2024/IAE2/00.38-00.40)**

This rhetorical question appeals to emotions and reveals frustration over the ongoing situation, as Foreign Minister Retno expresses shame at the persecution of Palestinians by Israeli forces, with “shame” meaning to feel regret for something wrong or disgraceful. The utterance carries an expressive function, communicating disappointment and frustration with the UN Security Council’s slow response to the humanitarian crisis. The repeated phrase *“is that not enough?”* powerfully emphasizes deep concern over Palestinian suffering, making the audience feel a moral responsibility. From a diplomatic perspective, this rhetorical device serves not only as criticism but also as a way to encourage member states to empathize with one another and be moved to take action.

3. **“Will the security Council only take action to stop Israel atrocities when all Palestinian are displaced? or when 100,000 Palestinians are killed? or when a regional armed conflict breaks out? that will be too late.” (D7/UNYTC2024/IAE3/01.55-01.57)**

This warning is directed at the audience, stressing that delayed action will be meaningless and prompting reflection and compassion. Foreign Minister Retno expresses shame at the persecution of Palestinians by Israeli forces, where “shame” means to feel regret for something wrong or disgraceful, while questioning how much longer the UN Security Council will postpone action. The utterance conveys deep concern and fear about the fatal consequences of inaction, functioning expressively as an emotional statement and sharply as a warning that ignoring the humanitarian tragedy will result in measures taken “too late.” By adopting a predictive tone that reflects widespread anxiety, Minister Retno creates a sense of urgency in the audience. From a diplomatic standpoint, this also serves as a moral reminder, urging other nations to act immediately.

C. Illocutionary Acts – Directives

1. **“Indonesia cannot I repeat cannot sit back and relax seeing the Injustice that continues to be committed against the people of Palestine, Indonesia is and will always stand with the people of Palestine.” (D3/UNYTC2024/IADir1/01.00-01.06)**

Foreign Minister Retno calls on all Indonesian people not to remain passive in facing the ongoing conflict in Palestine, using this utterance to motivate the audience, especially Indonesians, to be more active in global issues. In this statement, she pleads with the people of Indonesia to act immediately and not stay silent, with “plea” meaning an earnest request. Because it carries a moral appeal, the statement functions as guidance for nations not to remain indifferent when injustice occurs. By repeating the phrase *“cannot sit back and relax,”* Retno reinforces the sense of collective responsibility, implicitly stressing that silence means betraying humanity. From a diplomatic perspective, she also urges other countries to join Indonesia in supporting Palestine.

2. **“PM Netanyahu wants the war to continue, we must stop that I repeat we must stop that.” (D10/UNYTC2024/IADir2/02.24-02.26)**

Foreign Minister Retno delivers a direct appeal to stop wrongful actions and to move the audience toward immediate action, urging them to stop Israel’s

actions in order to prevent further destruction. Here, “urge” means to persuade someone earnestly by strong request. By repeating “*we must stop that,*” the instruction becomes very strong, placing responsibility on both Israel and the international community as authorities capable of halting the war. Rhetorically, this style underscores that real action is a necessity and heightens the sense of moral urgency. From a diplomatic perspective, the utterance functions as a call for international action to end the violence.

**3. “We must pressure Israel to come back to a political solution for two-state solution.”
(D11/UNYTC2024/IADir3/02.30-02.32)**

Foreign Minister Retno firmly calls for an immediate solution by requesting the audience to take part in pressuring the Israeli government to follow the Two-State Solution, with “request” meaning to make an earnest demand or plea. Because it encourages the international community to exert political pressure on Israel, the statement functions as an instructive appeal. Retno argues that a peaceful resolution cannot be achieved without collective pressure, making this utterance not only a moral call but also a diplomatic strategy that involves UN member states using their political influence to bring Israel back to negotiations.

D. Illocutionary Acts – Commissives

**1. “Indonesia cannot I repeat cannot sit back and relax seeing the Injustice that continues to be committed against the people of Palestine, Indonesia is and will always stand with the people of Palestine.”
(D4/UNYTC2024/IAK1/01.13-01.17)**

In this utterance, Foreign Minister Retno promises to stand against the injustices faced by the Palestinian people, emphasizing “*Indonesia is and will always stand with the people of Palestine.*” Here, “promise” means to make a solemn pledge. The utterance, though directed at the Palestinian people, is delivered in front of the entire UNGA audience, giving it wider diplomatic weight. By firmly declaring Indonesia’s commitment, the statement fulfills a commissive function. The phrase “*will always stand*” underscores a long-term pledge rather than a temporary stance. Diplomatically, this demonstrates that Indonesia will not easily waver under geopolitical pressure, thereby strengthening the trust of developing nations in Indonesia’s international position.

**2. “The Bandung spirit of equality cooperation and solidarity will always be alive to inspire the global south to gain their rights including their rights to development.”
(D22/UNYTC2024/IAK2/00.38-00.40)**

Foreign Minister Retno promises that the values born in Bandung during the Asian-African Conference, such as equality, cooperation, and solidarity, will never fade, with “promise” meaning to make a solemn pledge. This declaration carries a commissive function as it conveys an implicit commitment to preserve and revive the “Bandung spirit” in Indonesia’s foreign policy. The phrase “*will always be alive*” reflects Indonesia’s dedication to uphold equality, solidarity, and cooperation as the foundation of its diplomacy. From a diplomatic perspective, this not only ties Indonesia to its historical role as a supporter of Asian-African values but also reassures the audience that Indonesia remains faithful to the struggles of the Global South.

3. “Indonesia is committed to contribute to Global Peace by being one of the largest troops contributing countries in UN peacekeeping Mission and remain firm in our proactive role to counter terrorism.” (D34/UNYTC2024/IAK3/07.24-07.28)

In this utterance, Foreign Minister Retno declares Indonesia’s commitment to contribute to global peace, highlighting that Indonesia is one of the largest troop contributors to UN peacekeeping missions and maintains a proactive stance in counterterrorism. The phrase “*Indonesia is committed*” reflects an open and public declaration, with “declare” meaning to state openly and publicly something that has been or will be done. This statement illustrates Indonesia’s tangible commitments to global peace, making it a clear commissive act. Specifically, it stresses two concrete contributions: being one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces and actively participating in counterterrorism efforts. Thus, the commissive act goes beyond symbolic promises by demonstrating accountability through concrete actions. Diplomatically, this strengthens Indonesia’s image as a solution-oriented country that plays a vital role in maintaining global stability.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that among the five types of illocutionary acts, representative acts appear most frequently, indicating that the speech largely emphasizes facts, perspectives, and Indonesia’s political stance on global issues. This strategy highlights Indonesia’s image as an active and consistent actor in international affairs. In addition to representatives, Retno Marsudi also uses directives to urge other countries to act, expressives to show concern or urgency, and commissives to promise Indonesia’s contributions.

Overall, her communication strategy at the UN combines factual statements with appeals for collective action, which not only enhances the credibility of Indonesia’s stance but also strengthens its persuasive power. These findings suggest that Indonesian diplomats can adopt a similar approach by integrating representative and directive acts in their official speeches to ensure their messages are both trustworthy and compelling.

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