



AN ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS IN MICHELLE OBAMA'S SPEECH AT THE 2020 DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

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Abstract

Many speakers convey the message to make the speech partner do something according to what the speaker intended through his/her utterance, which is called an illocutionary speech act. This study aims to analyze the types and functions of illocutionary acts in Michelle Obama's speech at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. This study was conducted by using a qualitative method and the data is analyzed descriptively. The data is the utterances of Michelle Obama in her speech video at the 2020 Democratic National Convention which was transcribed into words. Data can be in the form of sentences uttered by the speaker. Assertive illocutionary acts were employed to convince the audience of the message conveyed, through actions such as stating, informing, claiming, expressing opinions, providing information, convincing, assessing, and describing. Directive illocutionary acts were used to influence the listener to take certain actions, such as through invitations, advice, and expressions of desire. On the other hand, expressive illocutionary acts were utilized to express emotions towards the actions of the listener and the situations at occur, such as expressing gratitude, appreciation, respect, and disappointment. This research provides a deeper understanding of the use of illocutionary acts in political speech and Michelle Obama's contribution to influencing and inspiring the audience.

Keywords: Illocutionary acts, political speech, speech acts

INTRODUCTION

The language ability of a speaker to deliver something is one of the factors in the occurrence of speech acts. To convey messages, thoughts, ideas or feelings, people use language as one of the tools (Kuswoyo, 2016; Kuswoyo & Susardi, 2016; Marzuki, 2019; Suprayogi et al., 2021). Many speakers convey the message to make the speech partner do something according to what the speaker intended through his/her utterance, which this is called an illocutionary speech act. Austin (1962) defined that speech act as a statement that not only describes a situation or states some facts, but also automatically performs certain types of actions. While an illocutionary act is an action performed by saying something. Illocutionary acts often occur when a speaker delivers a speech to many people with certain intentions and goals, such as inviting and asking listeners to jointly take an action that is in line with the speaker's utterances to listeners so that the desired goal can be achieved. In this regard, pragmatic skills are needed to interpret meaning accurately and acceptable (Hutauruk and Puspita, 2020).

Concerning the issue above, the writer finds an interesting discussion delivered by Michelle Obama who is the former first lady of the United States, and she has strong authority and trust in the eyes of society. Her speech has received a lot of attention in the media and public because it has the power to convey political, social, and emotional messages to listeners. The speech is a political speech regarding the election of the new president of the United States and was delivered at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. In this opportunity, Michelle Obama delivered her arguments and called for Joe Biden to be jointly elected as the new president of the United States. Unggul and Gulö (2017) argue that one of the functions of language is to convey arguments. Michelle Obama issued a scathing argument in assessing Donald Trump that he was the wrong president for the United States. There have been many bad incidents caused by government officials, so that citizens of this country are increasingly divided, even people with black skin still get insults from their own country. Drezner (2020) states that one of Trump's failures is convincing the American people of the correctness of his policies. Thus, the people of the United States must be wise in choosing the next leader because it will have an impact on the progress of the country. This speech shows how the speaker use language effectively so that her messages can reach a wider and

more emotionally connected audience. Furthermore, this speech contains various statements of illocutionary acts such as convincing, inviting, and providing moral support which are conveyed by the speaker to listeners.

Then, at that moment, Michelle Obama has performed illocutionary acts and the utterances delivered will have an effect to her listeners. In times of increasingly heated politics, especially during the election of a new president for the United States, the role of an influential person or politician is very important in this situation. Related to the study that the writer studied, language is essential especially to politicians. Language is a means of forming arguments, and political arguments originating from a series of beliefs (Beard, 2000). Therefore, politicians carry out most of their activities by using language as a tool to influence their listeners. This is interesting because in her speech she has used language to achieve certain communicative goals and this becomes an interesting aspect to be analyzed using the types of illocutionary act theory. Thus, the writer takes Michelle Obama's speech for analysis because it is related to the research objective which is to analyze the types of illocutionary acts and their functions in Michelle Obama's speech on August 17, 2020 at the Washington Post YouTube Channel.

Related to this research, studies of illocutionary acts were done several times previously. First, Sameer (2017) analyzed the speech acts produced by two Egyptian politicians and tried to compare the two utterances. Further, Haucsa et al. (2020) analyzed the illocutionary acts of interviewer and interviewee. They found that illocutionary acts have a function to state and describe something according to reality and this is often used in an interview. Another study by Amalia, Hidayat, and Alek (2021) tried to find out the types of illocutionary acts in Nadhira's speech. This study provides an overview of the speaker's position that can determine the impact of utterances. Likewise, if the position is as a student speaker, the speaker does not have the authority to change the world through utterances. Meanwhile, Maulidiyah et al. (2021) analyzed illocutionary acts in Sherly Annavita's arguments. This study shows that to strengthen an argument, one must pay attention to language that is appropriate to the context and situation. Lastly, Yusanti et al. (2022) discussed speech acts and visual elements in Joe Biden's speech. This study proves that in delivering a speech with the context of social issues, often most of the utterances are likely to be promising to the listeners.

In line with the explanation above, it can be concluded that previously there have been several studies that have been conducted on speech acts or illocutionary acts, but most of these studies use objects that are different from the current research such as interviewer, interviewee, student speakers at graduation, and Joe Biden's speech about Covid-19. While the object used in this study is Michelle Obama's speech. To see and understand how speakers convey messages or wishes to speakers, we can look through a speech text (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019). Furthermore, several previous studies have focused on speech acts produced by two speakers, contrasted the two, and analyzed the visual elements used by speakers. Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this knowledge gap by identifying the types and functions of illocutionary acts produced by different individuals in different contexts. Current study can help to broaden understanding of illocutionary acts in the context of Michelle Obama's speech, contributing to linguistic and pragmatic research. Thus, the writer uses speech from Michelle Obama and this study focused on the types and the functions of illocutionary acts found in Michelle Obama's speech.

METHOD

This study conducted by using qualitative method and the data is analyzed descriptively. According to Creswell (2018) qualitative method use text and image data, have several unique steps in data analysis, and use a variety of designs to conduct research. Then, descriptive approach aims to describe something or a phenomenon that is currently happening and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). Further, the data analyzed also uses a relevant descriptive approach and to answer questions on the problems studied in the study (Gulö & Rahmawelly, 2018; Puspita & Pranoto, 2021; Amelia et al., 2022; Sari & Pranoto, 2022; Afrianto & Widiyanto, 2022). Thus, the analysis of the data contained in this study explained descriptively to analyze the types and the functions of illocutionary acts that contained in Michelle Obama's speech, the writer chooses to use descriptive qualitative research. In this study, the data is the utterances of Michelle Obama in her speech video at the 2020 Democratic National Convention which transcribed into words. Data can be in the form of sentences uttered by the speaker. In this study, the writer uses a video of Michelle Obama's speech delivered on August 17, 2020 at the 2020 Democratic National Convention.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The writer analyzes the types and the functions of illocutionary acts performed by Michelle Obama in delivering her speech at the 2020 Democratic National Convention based on Searle's theory (1969). The findings of the types of illocutionary acts produced by the speaker are presented in the table below.

No.	Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Assertive	15	60%
2	Directive	5	20%
3	Commissive	0	0%
4	Expressive	5	20%
5	Declarative	0	0%

Based on the table above, the writer finds three types of illocutionary acts found in Michelle Obama's speech. From the three types of illocutionary acts, assertive is the most dominant. This is different from previous studies, where the most dominant appears to be commissive and expressive (Sameer, 2017; Amalia, Hidayat & Alek, 2021). This analysis provides a deeper understanding of how the speaker use illocutionary acts to achieve communicative goals in the context of political speech. Through assertive, directive and expressive statements, Michelle Obama managed to convey her beliefs, desires, feelings and empathy for the current situation. The speech is not only a vehicle for conveying a message, but also for building an emotional connection with the audience, inspiring them, and encouraging active participation in creating change. The following is an explanation of the types and functions of illocutionary acts produced by Michelle Obama.

3.1 Assertive

The writer finds assertiveness in Michelle Obama's speech which is used by the speaker to convince the listener of something that the speaker believes is true. In other words, assertiveness functions as a tool for conveying an argument by the speaker in a political speech. All assertive have a word fit with the state of the world (Searle, 1969). A previous study Yusanti et al. (2022) revealed that to strengthen an argument, one must pay attention to language that is appropriate to the context and situation. In the current study, the writer can see that Michelle Obama uses assertive illocutionary acts because it is by the speaker's goal as a speaker at the Democratic National Convention to campaign for Joe Biden as the best candidate in the 2020 presidential election. The writer finds that the assertive function used by the speaker is in the form stating, notifying, claiming, expressing opinion, informing, convincing, assessing, and describing. There is the most basic way to identify assertive is to literally ask whether the utterance is true or false (Searle, 1969). Then, the following are some data classified into assertive.

Data 1. Assertive (notifying)

*"I am one of a handful of people living today who have seen firsthand the immense weight and awesome power of the presidency. And let me once again tell you this: **the job is hard. It requires clear-headed judgment, a mastery of complex and competing issues, a devotion to facts and history, a moral compass, and an ability to listen—and an abiding belief that each of the 330,000,000 lives in this country has meaning and worth.**"*

Data 2. Assertive (claiming)

*"**A president's words have the power to move markets. They can start wars or broker peace. They can summon our better angels or awaken our worst instincts. You simply cannot fake your way through this job.**"*

Data 3. Assertive (expressing opinion and reporting)

*"As I've said before, **being president doesn't change who you are; it reveals who you are. Well, a presidential election can reveal who we are, too. And four years ago, too many people chose to believe that their votes didn't matter. Maybe they were fed up. Maybe they thought the outcome wouldn't be close. Maybe the barriers felt too steep. Whatever the reason, in the end, those choices sent someone to the Oval Office who lost the national popular vote by nearly 3,000,000 votes.**"*

Data 4. Assertive (informing)

*"In one of the states that determined the outcome, **the winning margin averaged out to just two votes per precinct—two votes.** And we've all been living with the consequences."*

Data 5. Assertive (informing)

*"Four years later, **the state of this nation is very different.** More than 150,000 people have died, and **our economy is in shambles because of a virus that this president downplayed for too long.** **It has left millions of people jobless.** Too many have lost their health care; too many are struggling to take care of basic necessities like food and rent; too many communities have been left in the lurch to grapple with whether and how to open our schools safely. Internationally, we've turned our back, not just on agreements forged by my husband, but on alliances championed by presidents like Reagan and Eisenhower."*

Data 6. Assertive (stating)

*"And here at home, as George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and a never-ending list of innocent people of color continue to be murdered, **stating the simple fact that a Black life matters is still met with derision from the nation's highest office.**"*

Data 7. Assertive (describing)

*"Because **whenever we look to this White House for some leadership or consolation or any semblance of steadiness, what we get instead is chaos, division, and a total and utter lack of empathy.**"*

Data 8. Assertive (stating)

*"And I know that regardless of our race, age, religion, or politics, when we close out the noise and the fear and truly open our hearts, we know that **what's going on in this country is just not right.** This is not who we want to be."*

Data 9. Assertive (expressing opinion)

*"So, what do we do now? What's our strategy? Over the past four years, a lot of people have asked me, "When others are going so low, does going high still really work?" My answer: **going high is the only thing that works,** because when we go low, when we use those same tactics of degrading and dehumanizing others, we just become part of the ugly noise that's drowning out everything else. We degrade ourselves. We degrade the very causes for which we fight."*

Data 10. Assertive (evaluating)

*"So let me be as honest and clear as I possibly can. **Donald Trump is the wrong president for our country.** He has had more than enough time to prove that he can do the job, but he is clearly in over his head. He cannot meet this moment. He simply cannot be who we need him to be for us. It is what it is."*

Data 11. Assertive (stating)

*"I know Joe. **He is a profoundly decent man, guided by faith.** He was a terrific vice president. He knows what it takes to rescue an economy, beat back a pandemic, and lead our country. And he*

listens. He will tell the truth and trust science. He will make smart plans and manage a good team. And he will govern as someone who's lived a life that the rest of us can recognize."

Data 12. Assertive (describing)

*"When he was a kid, Joe's father lost his job. When he was a young senator, Joe lost his wife and his baby daughter. And when he was vice president, he lost his beloved son. So **Joe knows the anguish of sitting at a table with an empty chair**, which is why he gives his time so freely to grieving parents. **Joe knows what it's like to struggle**, which is why he gives his personal phone number to kids overcoming a stutter of their own."*

Data 13. Assertive (convincing)

*"**His life is a testament to getting back up**, and he is going to channel that same grit and passion to pick us all up, to help us heal and guide us forward."*

Data 14. Assertive (convincing)

*"Joe Biden wants all of our kids to go to a good school, see a doctor when they're sick, live on a healthy planet. And **he's got plans to make all of that happen**. Joe Biden wants all of our kids, no matter what they look like, to be able to walk out the door without worrying about being harassed or arrested or killed. He wants all of our kids to be able to go to a movie or a math class without being afraid of getting shot. He wants all our kids to grow up with leaders who won't just serve themselves and their wealthy peers but will provide a safety net for people facing hard times."*

Data 15. Assertive (stating)

*"And when the horrors of systemic racism shook our country and our consciences, millions of Americans of every age, every background rose up to march for each other, crying out for justice and progress. **This is who we still are: compassionate, resilient, decent people whose fortunes are bound up with one another. And it is well past time for our leaders to once again reflect our truth.**"*

Overall, based on the assertive data above found in Michelle Obama's speech, it indicates that the appropriate and effective use of assertive illocutionary acts can influence and inspire the listeners. In her speech, Michelle Obama employs assertive actions such as stating, notifying, claiming, expressing opinions, providing information, convincing, assessing, and describing. She is able to convince the listeners of her commitment to the country and the goals she aims to achieve. By using strong and clear statements, she builds trust and influences the audience to consider her perspective.

3.2 Directive

The writer finds directives in the utterances delivered by Michelle Obama in her speech. When the writer analyzes her speech, the speaker uses the directive to convey his wish for the listener to do something. In the directive, the direction of fit is 'word to the world,' and the condition of psychological sincerity is always 'desire' (Searle, 1969). Some of the utterances have the intention to encourage listeners to participate and support the person the speaker mentions as the candidate for the new president of the United States, which is Joe Biden. based on the findings of a previous study by Maulidiyah et al. (2021) revealed that speakers use few directives, namely only three directive data. Whereas in the current study, the authors found that the directive contained more than three statements because, in addition to Michelle Obama's status as a former first lady, she was also the first speaker at the convention. The writer finds that the directive function used by the speaker is in the form of invitation, advising, expressing the speaker's wish for the listener to do something. Then, the following are data classified into directive.

Data 16. Directive (inviting)

*“So, if you take one thing from my words tonight, it is this: if you think things cannot possibly get worse, trust me, they can; and they will if we don’t make a change in this election. If we have any hope of ending this chaos, **we have got to vote for Joe Biden like our lives depend on it.**”*

Data 17. Directive (inviting)

*“And if we want a chance to pursue any of these goals, any of these most basic requirements for a functioning society, **we have to vote for Joe Biden in numbers that cannot be ignored.** Because right now, folks who know they cannot win fair and square at the ballot box are doing everything they can to stop us from voting. They’re closing down polling places in minority neighborhoods. They’re purging voter rolls. They’re sending people out to intimidate voters, and they’re lying about the security of our ballots. These tactics are not new.”*

Data 18. Directive (inviting)

*“But this is not the time to withhold our votes in protest or play games with candidates who have no chance of winning. **We have got to vote like we did in 2008 and 2012.** We’ve got to show up with the same level of passion and hope for Joe Biden. We’ve got to vote early, in person if we can. We’ve got to request our mail-in ballots right now, tonight, and send them back immediately and follow-up to make sure they’re received. And then, **make sure our friends and families do the same.**”*

Data 19. Directive (advising)

*“We have got to grab our comfortable shoes, put on our masks, pack a brown bag dinner and maybe breakfast too, because **we’ve got to be willing to stand in line all night if we have to.**”*

Data 20. Directive (instructing)

*“And if we want to keep the possibility of progress alive in our time, if we want to be able to look our children in the eye after this election, **we have got to reassert our place in American history. And we have got to do everything we can to elect my friend, Joe Biden, as the next president of the United States.**”*

Overall, based on the directive data above found in Michelle Obama's speech, it indicates that she has the ability to influence and motivate the listeners through the appropriate use of directive illocutionary acts such as inviting, advising, and expressing desires to the listeners. It also demonstrates that the effective use of directive actions can inspire the listeners to take action and, in the speaker's influence, persuade the audience to do something in line with the speaker's desires. Through her passionate speech, Michelle Obama successfully encouraged the listeners to participate in efforts for positive change, creating momentum for change that can have a significant impact on society and the nation.

3.3 Expressive

The writer finds expressive in the utterances conveyed by Michelle Obama in her speech. Searle (1969) defines a speech act as expressive when it expresses the speaker's emotions and attitudes. In the statement made by the speaker, the writer can reveal that Michelle Obama uses expressiveness to build emotion for the listener so that the speaker can easily convince them of something and invite them to do something. Meanwhile, in a previous study, Amalia, Hidayat and Alek (2021) revealed that expressive is used to inspire listeners at graduation ceremonies. The writer finds that the expressive function used by the speaker are in

the form of thanking, appreciating, respecting, and expressing disappointment. Then, the following are data classified into expressive.

Data 21. Expressive (expresses emotion)

*“Good evening, everyone. It’s a hard time, and everyone’s feeling it in different ways. And I know a lot of folks are reluctant to tune into a political convention right now or to politics in general. Believe me, I get that. **But I am here tonight because I love this country with all my heart, and it pains me to see so many people hurting.**”*

Data 22. Expressive (thanking)

*“I’ve met so many of you. I’ve heard your stories. And through you, I’ve seen this country’s promise. And **thanks to so many who came before me, thanks to their toil and sweat and blood,** I’ve been able to live that promise myself.*

Data 23. Expressive (expresses belief)

*“Sadly, this is the America that is on display for the next generation. A nation that’s underperforming not simply on matters of policy but on matters of character. And **that’s not just disappointing; it’s downright infuriating, because I know the goodness and the grace that is out there in households and neighborhoods all across this nation.**”*

Data 24. Expressive (expresses emotion)

*“Now, **I understand that my message won’t be heard by some people.** We live in a nation that is deeply divided, and I am a Black woman speaking at the Democratic Convention. But enough of you know me by now. You know that I tell you exactly what I’m feeling. **You know I hate politics. But you also know that I care about this nation. You know how much I care about all of our children.**”*

Data 25. Expressive (expresses appreciation)

*“Look, we have already sacrificed so much this year. **So many of you are already going that extra mile. Even when you’re exhausted, you’re mustering up unimaginable courage to put on those scrubs and give our loved ones a fighting chance. Even when you’re anxious, you’re delivering those packages, stocking those shelves, and doing all that essential work so that all of us can keep moving forward.**”*

Overall, based on the expressive data above found in Michelle Obama's speech, she used expressive illocutionary acts to express her feelings towards the actions taken by the audience and the situation occurring in the country. Michelle Obama employed expressive actions such as expressing gratitude, appreciation, respect, and disappointment. Through these expressive acts, she aimed to show appreciation to the audience who contributed, provided support, or engaged in commendable actions. She also sought to express her disappointment towards the situation in the country.

Furthermore, the data above indicates that the appropriate use of expressive actions can build an emotional connection with the audience. Through authentic and heartfelt expressions, Michelle Obama successfully inspired the listeners to move forward, advocate for positive change, and encouraged them to actively participate in creating a better future for the country.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of an analysis of the types and the functions of illocutionary acts in Michelle Obama's speech at the 2020 Democratic National Convention, the writer finds that speakers use a lot of illocutionary acts through their utterances. First, the speaker uses assertive illocutionary acts to convince listeners about what the speaker is saying. The assertive actions used by the speaker are in the form of stating, notifying, claiming, expressing opinion, informing, convincing, assessing, and describing. Second, the speaker uses directive illocutionary acts to influence the listener to do something in line with the speaker's desires. The directive action used by the speaker is in the form of invitation, advising, expressing the desire of the speaker to the listener to do something. Third, the speaker uses expressive illocutionary acts as a tool to express her feelings both for the actions taken by the listeners and for the situation that is currently happening in the country. The expressive actions used by the speaker are in the form of thanking, appreciating, respecting, and expressing disappointment. Based on the classified utterances, the amount of data obtained by the writer is 60% assertive, 20% directive, and 20% expressive.

Through this analysis, the use of assertive actions is more often used by the speaker. It shows that Michelle Obama aims to invite and encourage listeners to support Joe Biden as the new president of the United States. The speaker does not aim to promise to do something and change the situation because in a political speech what she delivers is a tool for campaigning for someone. In other words, the speaker conveys her statements to build the speaker's trust in Joe Biden. Furthermore, this analysis also provides a deeper understanding of how speakers use illocutionary acts to achieve their communicative goals. Through assertive and expressive statements, Michelle Obama managed to convey her beliefs, feelings and empathy for the current situation. The speech is not only a vehicle for conveying a message, but also for building an emotional connection with the audience, inspiring them, and encouraging active participation in creating change. Last but not least, this analysis provides a broader insight into the power of language in Michelle Obama's speech and how illocutionary acts can be used as an effective tool to achieve communicative goals in the context of political speech.

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