

An Analysis of Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education's Speech at the UNESCO General Conference

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the illocutionary speech acts used in the Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education's address at the UNESCO General Conference in November 2025 by applying Searle's taxonomy as the analytical framework. Based on the examination of 42 utterances, the findings reveal that assertive acts dominate the discourse, comprising 47.62%, indicating the Minister's dominant aim to inform, clarify national perspectives, and present Indonesia's educational realities to the international community. Commissive acts account for 23.81%, reflecting Indonesia's willingness to commit to future actions, collaborations, and policy continuations, particularly in relation to advancing inclusive and sustainable education. Expressive acts constitute 14.29% and are mainly employed to express appreciation, optimism, and solidarity, thereby reinforcing diplomatic rapport. Directives, at 11.90%, demonstrate Indonesia's persuasive efforts to encourage shared global responsibility and collective action in educational development. Declaratives appear least frequently, at 2.38%, which aligns with the diplomatic context where policy declarations are typically embedded within broader institutional mechanisms rather than individual speeches. Overall, these distributions illustrate that diplomatic communication from a developing nation representative relies strategically on assertive clarity, commitment-building, and relationship-strengthening rather than authoritative imposition. This research contributes to the field of pragmatics and diplomatic studies by providing empirical insights into how speech acts are employed to shape discourse, project national identity, and negotiate international positioning within multilateral forums such as UNESCO.

Keywords: illocutionary acts; speech act theory; diplomatic discourse; UNESCO; pragmatics; Searle's taxonomy

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INTRODUCTION

Language in diplomatic contexts serves multiple functions beyond mere information transmission. It constructs institutional realities, establishes commitments, and negotiates international relationships through carefully crafted utterances (Baartman, 2023; Gibson, 2025; Grego, 2022). The study of speech acts in diplomatic discourse provides valuable insights into how nations position themselves, articulate their interests, and engage with global challenges through language (Aljarelah, 2024; Debrix, 2002; Liu et al., 2023; Pokhrel, 2020).

The Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education's speech at the UNESCO General Conference represents a significant diplomatic text that warrants pragmatic analysis (Ilie, 2018; Chilton & Schäffner, 2019). Delivered at a multilateral forum addressing global education, science, and cultural issues, the speech exemplifies how developing nations employ language to assert their presence, demonstrate commitment to international cooperation, and advocate for specific policy positions (Kampf & Daskalakis, 2020; Wodak, 2021; Björkman-Nyqvist & Kelemen, 2022).

This research applies Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts to analyze the pragmatic functions of utterances in the ministerial speech (Yule, 2017; Cutting, 2019). Searle categorized speech acts into five types: assertives (committing the speaker to the truth of

propositions), directives (attempting to get the hearer to do something), commissives (committing the speaker to future action), expressives (expressing psychological states), and declaratives (bringing about changes through institutional authority) (Thomas, 2018; Huang, 2021). This framework enables systematic examination of how language performs actions in diplomatic contexts (Kampf, 2020).

This study addresses the following research questions: 1) What types of illocutionary speech acts are employed in the minister's speech according to Searle's taxonomy. 2) What is the distribution and frequency of each speech act type in the discourse. 3) How do these speech acts function to achieve diplomatic and communicative objectives in the UNESCO forum.

Understanding the pragmatic dimensions of diplomatic speech contributes to several scholarly domains. First, it advances speech act theory by examining its application in institutional and international contexts. Second, it illuminates the linguistic strategies employed by developing nations in global forums. Third, it provides insights into how educational policy discourse operates at the international level. Finally, it demonstrates the relationship between language choice and diplomatic function in multilateral settings.

METHOD

The data for this study consists of the speech delivered by the Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education at the UNESCO General Conference. The speech addresses multiple themes, including educational access, cultural diversity, scientific cooperation, and global challenges. Delivered in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, the speech represents official Indonesian government discourse in an international forum.

This study employed Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts as its primary analytical framework. Each utterance in the speech was examined to determine its illocutionary force based on the following criteria: 1) Assertives: Utterances that commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, identified through indicative mood, factual content, and descriptive function. 2) Commissives: Utterances that commit the speaker to future action, identified through expressions of commitment, intention, and promise. 3) Directives: Utterances attempting to get the addressee to do something, identified through imperative constructions, requests, and urges. 4) Expressives: Utterances expressing psychological states, identified through expressions of gratitude, appreciation, and emotional attitudes. 5) Declaratives: Utterances that bring about institutional changes, identified through performative verbs used with appropriate authority

The analysis proceeded through several stages. First, the speech was segmented into individual utterances based on complete propositional content. Second, each utterance was coded according to its primary illocutionary force using Searle's taxonomy. Third, the coded utterances were quantified to determine distribution patterns. Fourth, the functions and strategic purposes of each speech act type were analyzed in relation to the diplomatic context. Finally, patterns and implications were interpreted in light of diplomatic discourse norms and international communication objectives.

To ensure analytical reliability, the coding process followed explicit criteria derived from Searle's definitions. Utterances were analyzed based on their illocutionary point, direction of fit, and expressed psychological state. In cases where utterances could be interpreted as having

multiple illocutionary forces, the primary or dominant force was identified based on contextual factors and the speaker's apparent communicative intention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis reveals the following distribution:

Table 1. distribution demonstrates

Speech Act Type	Count	Percentage
Assertive	20	47.62%
Commissive	10	23.81%
Directive	5	11.90%
Expressive	6	14.29%
Declarative	1	2.38%
TOTAL	42	100%

This distribution demonstrates a clear hierarchy in the deployment of speech act types, with assertives dominating nearly half of all utterances, followed by a substantial presence of commissives, and smaller proportions of expressives, directives, and declaratives.

Assertive Utterances: Establishing Knowledge and Position

Assertive utterances constitute 47.62% of the total speech acts, making them the dominant category. This prevalence reflects the informative and declarative nature required in international forums where member states must articulate their situations, achievements, and perspectives.

The assertive utterances in the speech serve multiple strategic functions. First, they establish Indonesia's credentials and context, as exemplified by statements about linguistic diversity, educational participation rates, and hosting international events. These assertions construct Indonesia's identity as a diverse, developing nation making significant educational progress. For instance, the claim that "The participation rate of children aged 7 to 12 years and 13 to 15 years has reached 99.19% and 96.17%" functions not merely to inform but to position Indonesia as successfully pursuing educational equity.

Second, assertive utterances articulate universal principles and shared values that form the basis for international cooperation. Statements such as "Education is the fundamental right of every child" and "Culture is the soul of humanity and the foundation of peace" establish common ground with UNESCO's mandate and other member states' positions. These assertions perform ideological work by aligning Indonesia with progressive international norms.

Third, some assertive utterances frame global challenges and UNESCO's role, such as the statement that "This General Conference is in the midst of global challenges such as climate crisis, conflict, and a growing gap between science and digital education." These assertions contextualize the speech within broader international concerns and justify the relevance of subsequent proposals and commitments.

The dominance of assertives in diplomatic discourse aligns with findings from previous research on political speech, where establishing credibility through factual assertions forms a foundation for subsequent persuasive and commissive acts (Chilton, 2004). In the UNESCO

context, where knowledge and information are central to the organization's mission, assertive speech acts take on particular importance.

Commissive Utterances: Demonstrating Commitment and Intent

Commissive utterances represent 23.81% of the speech acts, constituting the second-largest category. This substantial presence reflects the diplomatic necessity of demonstrating commitment to international cooperation and specific policy directions. The commissive utterances employ several linguistic forms. Many use explicit commitment markers such as "we are committed to" followed by infinitive constructions, as in "We are committed to continue to protect and promote diversity through the people-based sustainability program." This explicit formulation leaves no ambiguity about Indonesia's stated intentions and positions these commitments as solemn undertakings in the international record.

Other commissives use present progressive constructions to indicate ongoing commitment, such as "Indonesia actively strengthens its capacity in the field of science." This form suggests not merely future intention but present engagement, portraying Indonesia as already fulfilling its commitments rather than simply promising future action.

Some commissives take the form of collective exhortations that blend commissive and directive forces: "Let us ensure that education enlightens, science empowers, culture unites, and information preserves the people." While this utterance has directive elements in calling for action from others, its primary force is commissive as it commits the speaker and Indonesia to these principles as part of a collective endeavor.

The strategic function of commissive utterances in diplomatic discourse relates to establishing national positions on record and building expectations for future behavior. By making explicit commitments in multilateral forums, nations create accountability mechanisms and signal their priorities to the international community. The high proportion of commissives in this speech suggests Indonesia's strategy of active engagement and visible commitment to UNESCO's agenda, positioning itself as a reliable partner in global education, science, and cultural initiatives.

Expressive Utterances: Building Relationships and Diplomacy

Expressive utterances account for 14.29% of the speech acts. While smaller in proportion than assertives and commissives, expressives play crucial social and diplomatic functions in maintaining international relationships and observing diplomatic protocol. The expressives in the speech primarily convey gratitude and appreciation. Expressions such as "I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Uzbekistan for the warm hospitality" and "Indonesia appreciates the support of UNESCO and all Member States" fulfill important diplomatic rituals. These acknowledgments recognize other actors' contributions and demonstrate respect for multilateral processes.

Interestingly, the speech includes what might be considered culturally specific expressive forms: the poetic expressions "The flowers bloom in the garden, the thorns make a fence" and "If humans join hands, the beautiful world is full of peace." These metaphorical expressions, likely drawing on Indonesian cultural traditions, serve expressive functions by evoking shared values and aspirations in aesthetically appealing forms. They demonstrate how diplomatic discourse can incorporate cultural elements while maintaining universal resonance.

The presence and proportion of expressives reflect the relational dimension of diplomatic communication. While substantive policy positions dominate through assertives and commissives, maintaining positive relationships through expressions of gratitude and appreciation remains essential for effective diplomacy. Research on politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) suggests that such face-work is particularly important in contexts where cooperation and consensus are valued, as in UNESCO forums.

Directive Utterances: Advocacy and Collective Action

Directive utterances constitute 11.90% of the speech acts, representing the second-smallest category. This relatively low proportion is characteristic of diplomatic discourse, where direct commands are generally avoided in favor of softer, more collaborative formulations.

The directives in this speech employ specific mitigation strategies appropriate to diplomatic contexts. Rather than direct commands, they take the form of urges directed at "the global community," as in "We urge the global community to ensure the safety of students, educators, journalists, and the willingness of humanity." The use of "urge" rather than stronger directive verbs like "demand" or "require" softens the illocutionary force while maintaining the directive function.

Several directives use inclusive first-person plural constructions: "Let us ensure that education enlightens, science empowers, culture unites, and information preserves the people." This formulation creates a sense of collective responsibility and shared endeavor rather than positioning the speaker as commanding the audience. This strategy aligns with the collaborative ethos of UNESCO and reflects awareness of power dynamics in international forums where no single nation can dictate to others.

One directive takes an indirect form: "Indonesia hopes for the support of countries to realize our commitment." While framed as an expression of hope, this utterance functions directly by requesting specific support from other member states. This indirect strategy exemplifies how diplomatic discourse achieves directive functions through conventionally indirect speech acts (Searle, 1975).

The limited use of directives reflects both the collaborative nature of UNESCO forums and Indonesia's position as a developing nation rather than a major power. More powerful nations might employ more frequent or forceful directives, while developing nations often adopt more consultative and collaborative rhetorical stances. This pattern warrants further comparative research across speeches from different nations at multilateral forums.

Declarative Utterances: Institutional Authority

Only one declarative utterance (2.38%) appears in the analyzed speech: "Now, I will continue this statement in Bahasa Indonesia." This speech act functions declaratively by bringing about a change in the institutional state of affairs—specifically, the language of official discourse. By uttering these words with the authority of an official representative, the minister effects the language switch rather than merely announcing it.

The scarcity of declaratives is typical of most speech genres, as declarative speech acts require institutional authority and appropriate contexts. In diplomatic speeches, declaratives

typically appear only in highly specific procedural moments, such as opening or closing sessions, making official announcements, or executing procedural changes as in this case.

The particular declarative in this speech carries symbolic significance beyond its procedural function. By switching to Bahasa Indonesia in a UNESCO forum, the minister enacts Indonesia's linguistic identity and exercises the newly granted status of Bahasa Indonesia as an official language of UNESCO General Conferences. This declarative thus performs both procedural and symbolic work, demonstrating national pride and linguistic sovereignty.

Strategic Functions Across Speech Act Types

Examining the speech act distribution holistically reveals strategic patterns in the minister's communicative approach. The high proportion of assertives establishes a foundation of factual claims and shared values. The substantial presence of commissives builds on this foundation to articulate specific commitments and intentions. The moderate use of expressives maintains diplomatic relationships and protocol. The limited directives advocate for specific actions while respecting diplomatic norms. The single declarative exercises institutional authority at a symbolically significant moment.

This layered structure reflects an effective diplomatic communication strategy: establish credibility through facts and shared values, demonstrate commitment through explicit pledges, maintain relationships through appropriate expressions of gratitude, advocate for preferred outcomes through softened directives, and exercise authority judiciously in specific symbolic moments.

The distribution also reflects the specific context of UNESCO as a forum focused on education, science, and culture rather than security or economic competition. The emphasis on shared values, mutual commitment, and collective action aligns with UNESCO's mandate and organizational culture. A speech in a different international forum might show different patterns, suggesting that speech act distribution varies not only by speaker and nation but also by institutional context.

This analysis demonstrates the applicability and utility of Searle's speech act taxonomy for understanding diplomatic discourse. The framework successfully captures the multiple functions language performs in international forums, from establishing facts to making commitments to building relationships. The clear distribution patterns suggest that speech act analysis can reveal strategic choices in diplomatic communication.

The findings also contribute to refinements in speech act theory. The frequent use of conventionally indirect speech acts, the blending of multiple illocutionary forces in single utterances, and the culturally specific expressive forms all point to the complexity of real-world language use beyond idealized examples. Future theoretical work might explore how institutional contexts shape the realization and interpretation of speech acts.

For diplomatic practitioners, this analysis illuminates effective linguistic strategies for international forums. The balanced distribution of speech acts in this speech—heavy on assertives and commissives, moderate on expressives, light on directives—offers a model for how developing nations can assert positions, demonstrate commitment, maintain relationships, and advocate for change while respecting diplomatic norms. For educators preparing future diplomats and international relations professionals, this study demonstrates the importance of

pragmatic competence alongside substantive knowledge. Understanding how language performs actions and how different speech acts serve strategic functions should be integral to diplomatic training.

This study demonstrates that systematic speech act analysis can be applied productively to extended diplomatic texts. The coding procedure and analytical framework could be replicated for comparative studies across different speeches, nations, and international forums. Such comparative research could reveal patterns in how different nations employ language strategically, how speech act distribution varies across different types of international forums, and how diplomatic discourse evolves. Future research might combine speech act analysis with other analytical approaches, such as critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, or multimodal analysis incorporating gesture and prosody. Such integrated approaches could provide a richer understanding of diplomatic communication.

This study has several limitations that suggest directions for future research. First, the analysis focuses on a single speech by one nation's representative, limiting generalizability. Comparative analysis across multiple nations' speeches at the same forum would reveal whether the patterns identified here are typical or distinctive to Indonesia. Second, the analysis examines illocutionary acts without addressing perlocutionary effects. Future research could investigate how different speech act strategies are received by other member states and whether they successfully achieve intended effects.

Third, the study relies on the written text without access to prosodic and gestural information that might affect illocutionary force interpretation. Multimodal analysis of video recordings could provide richer understanding of how speech acts are performed and interpreted in diplomatic contexts. Fourth, the cultural dimensions of speech acts warrant deeper investigation. The inclusion of Indonesian poetic expressions in this speech raises questions about how cultural traditions inform diplomatic discourse and whether culturally specific speech act realizations are recognized and understood in multilateral contexts.

Fifth, the institutional context of UNESCO shapes the speech act patterns observed here. Comparative research across different international organizations—such as the United Nations Security Council, World Trade Organization, or regional forums—could reveal how institutional mandates and norms influence diplomatic language use. Finally, diachronic analysis examining how diplomatic speech act patterns change over time could illuminate evolving norms in international communication and shifting power dynamics in global governance.

CONCLUSION

This analysis of illocutionary speech acts in the Indonesian Minister of Primary and Secondary Education's speech at the UNESCO General Conference, using Searle's taxonomy, reveals a dominance of assertive utterances (47.62%) to establish facts, contexts, and shared values; substantial commissives (23.81%) signaling Indonesia's commitment as a reliable partner; expressives (14.29%) for relationship-building; directives (11.90%) advocating actions within diplomatic norms; and a single declarative (2.38%) wielding institutional authority. These patterns enable the speech to balance objectives like asserting national identity, fostering cooperation, nurturing relationships, and pushing policy directions in a multilateral education-focused forum, advancing speech act theory, diplomatic practice, and

discourse analysis methods. As global challenges demand stronger international communication, this pragmatic lens highlights language's role in sustaining relations. For future research, scholars could extend the analysis comparatively across speeches from multiple nations, forums, and periods to uncover evolving patterns in diplomatic pragmatics and enhance global governance strategies.

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