

## Illocutionary Act on Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream” Speech”

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**Abstract**--This research aimed at analyzing illocutionary acts found in Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream” Speech. This research implemented a descriptive qualitative method. The data source of this research was the speech of Martin Luther King Jr. uploaded on YouTube. The data were collected through note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed descriptively through data presentation and elaboration. The finding shows that there are five classifications of the illocutionary act, namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Furthermore, the finding shows that there are twelve functions of the illocutionary acts found in the speech entitled “I Have a Dream” delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. They are claiming, reporting, complaining, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, promising, expressing pleasure, expressing dislike, expressing sorrow, and naming.

**Keywords:** illocutionary act, classification, function, speech

**Abstrak**--Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tindak ilokusi yang terdapat dalam Pidato Martin Luther King Jr. “I Have a Dream”. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Sumber data penelitian ini adalah pidato Martin Luther King Jr yang diunggah di YouTube. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan teknik mencatat. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif melalui penyajian dan elaborasi data. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ada lima klasifikasi tindak ilokusi, yaitu representatif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Selanjutnya, temuan menunjukkan bahwa terdapat dua belas fungsi tindak ilokusi yang ditemukan dalam pidato berjudul “I have a dream” yang disampaikan oleh Martin Luther King Jr. Mereka mengklaim, melaporkan, mengeluh, memerintah, meminta, menasihati, merekomendasikan, menjanjikan, mengekspresikan kesenangan, mengekspresikan ketidaksukaan, mengekspresikan kesedihan, dan penamaan.

**Kata kunci:** tindak ilokusi, klasifikasi, fungsi, ucapan

## 1. Introduction

Language is essentially a means of communication among the members of a society (Sirbu, 2015). Language plays an important role as a medium to convey meaning. Language is how people communicate which makes connecting with other people. It does not merely depend on knowledge, grammatical, and lexical but also on contextual situations, and conventions. Language can be used for many things, with a language we can communicate with each other, get information, and others.

People use it in communication where they produce some utterances based on a particular context. Context refers to an immediate linguistic environment in which particular words occur (Dash, 2008). The utterance must have a certain context underlying the utterance to provide meaning. An utterance can also activities such as informing, commanding, requesting, and others which have been which are known as speech acts.

Austin divided three types of acts into speech acts; they are locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary act is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain utterance with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to meaning in the traditional sense. An Illocutionary act is performed via the communicative force of an utterance, such as promising, apologizing, offering, etc. Perlocutionary act refers to the effect the utterance has on the thoughts or actions of the other person (Hidayat, 2016).

Speech acts are commonly implemented in verbal communication, especially in delivering a speech. The purpose of a speech is to invite and persuade the audience to do something. One of the well-known public speeches entitled "I have a dream" was delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963. In the speech, King called for civil and economic rights and an end to racism in the United States. Delivered to over 250,000 civil

rights supporters from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The speech was a defining moment of the civil rights movement and among the most iconic speeches in American history.

In this study, the research intends to analyze illocutionary acts in Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech entitled "I have a dream". Furthermore, the in-depth analysis of this study is to classify the illocutionary act into five categories namely directive, commissive, representative, declarative, and expressive.

## 2. Research Method

Research methods are the strategies, processes, or techniques utilized in the collection of data or evidence for analysis to uncover new information or create a better understanding of a topic. The research method consists of data source, method, and technique of collecting data, analyzing data, and presenting data.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Result

There are found five classifications of the illocutionary act, namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Furthermore, the finding shows that there are twelve functions of the illocutionary acts found in the speech. They are claiming, reporting, complaining, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, promising, expressing pleasure, expressing dislike, expressing sorrow, and naming.

### 3.2. Discussion

#### Respentative

Data 1

*his momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope* to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice.

Data 1 shows the utterance which can be categorized as representative. The illocutionary act states what the speaker believes. The utterance "*This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope...*" shows King's belief in the sign of

decree on emancipation. He believes that the decree will motivate Negro slaves to speak on justice. King claims that the decree can be the spirit of breaking discrimination against Black Americans and fighting against injustice that they experience in society. Another data representative can be seen in the following chunk where King reported how Black Americans lived after one hundred years of the decree. Another data of representative illocutionary act can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Directive

#### Data 2

*Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.* Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

The utterance "*Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy*"

Data 2 shows the implementation of the directive classification of speech act. The speaker recommends the audience realize the democracy promises. He advises the Black-American to rise from the racial injustice and segregation between Black and White. Moreover, he invites everyone to live in brotherhood to the color of their skin. The utterances uttered by King show the directive speech act; the utterances aim at getting someone to do something. Through the utterance, King gets the audience to rise from injustice to make life, especially for Black-American. The utterances inform of requesting which requests the audience to carry out an action. Another example of the directive illocutionary act can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Commissive

#### Data 3

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And *there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.* The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

King asks that Black-American slaves should be presented a justice and security. Discontent experienced by Black-American should be ended immediately. He promises that the tranquility will be never perceived by America until Black Americans get their citizenship right. It can be inferred that the speech's chunk in Data 20 can be considered a commissive illocutionary act which can be clearly seen from "*there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights*". It shows that the speaker commits to always speaking for justice or disappointment of Black-American until they get their justice as citizens of the United States of America. It can be categorized as commissive since the statement shows the speaker's intention which shows his commitment to do something in the future. Further data on the implementation of the commissive function can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Expressive

#### Data 4

*I am happy to join with you today* in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Data 4 show the speech's chunk which can be classified into the expressive classification of illocutionary act. The utterance "*I am happy...*" shows the pleasure and joy of King to join the march and deliver the monumental speech before a thousand of Black-American. The expressive speech act can be identified since the utterance psychological state of King. The pleasure is due to the opportunity of joining a historical march and speech. Other data on expressive function can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Declarative

Data 5

I am happy to join you today in what will go down in history as *the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation*.

The speech chunk in Data 25 shows the utterance "*the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation*" of Martin Luther King Jr. which can be categorized as a declarative illocutionary act. It is categorized as declarative because the utterance he produced tries to change the world; in this situation, the world refers to the demonstration. He declares the demonstrations as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of the United States of America. This utterance makes some values of the demonstration as one of historical demonstration in the world.

### Claiming

Data 6

*This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves* who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice.

Data 6 is speech chunk which aims at claiming the meaning of decree as a hope of Black-American slaves. It can be seen in the utterance "*This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves*". King claims that the decree can be a great beacon light

of Negro slaves for he justice; even though he could not prove it and other people might not believe it. The utterances show what the speaker believes as fact even though there is no evidence or proof of his belief. Another example of claiming can be seen in the following data.

### Reporting

Data 7

*But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled* by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. *One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty* in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. *One hundred years later, the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society* and finds himself an exile in his own land. And so, we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

The utterances in Data 7 show that King has informed that Black Americans do not find freedom yet after one hundred years of the decree. The function of his utterance is the report the true condition of the life of Black Americans. He reports that they still find segregation and discrimination. Furthermore, Black Americans still suffered in poverty. The utterances in Data 30 provide information about Black-American life; thus, they can be categorized as reporting functions. Another data on reporting function can be seen when King informs the rationale of Black-Americans' demand on the event. The data can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Complaining

Data 8

*But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt*. We refuse to believe that there are

insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so, we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now.

In Data 38, King expresses his complaints about the injustice experienced by Black-American at that time. It can be seen in the utterance “*we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt.*” He refuses for the inability to provide justice to Black Americans. He argues that America should have more chances to provide freedom and security justice to all citizens, especially Black-American. It can be inferred that the utterances aim at complaining about America which belongs to both Black and White men. Another data of the complaining function can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Commanding

Data 9

We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, *we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead.* We cannot turn back.

King has asked the audiences to act together both within a group of Black-American and with white as well. The utterance proposed in Data 9 contains the force of doing something; it has been marked by “must” which shows the obligation. It can be inferred that the utterance can be classified as commanding. The speaker, in his authority, delivers the utterance which carries out the hearers to do something in an obligation.

### Requesting

Data 10

*Continue to work* with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive. *Go back to* Mississippi, *go back* to Alabama, *go back* to South Carolina, *go*

*back* to Georgia, *go back to* Louisiana, *go back to* the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed

The utterance of **Continue to work...** and “**go back...**” shows the implementation of the request function. The speaker asks the audience of the demonstration to return to their place of origin. He requests them to continue their work and wait for the change of situation. He assures the audience to wait for the change in the situation.

In Data 10 King requests the audiences to realize that not all white men commit injustices. It has been proved by the attendance of white people at demonstrations for justice for Black Americans. The utterance “*Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people*” can be inferred as requesting function. King employed the utterances to make a request to his people not to blame all whites. The utterance is delivered in a polite and formal way. Further data on requesting function of the directive illocutionary act can be seen in the following speech’s chunk.

### Advising

Data 11

*Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.* We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again, and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

Data 11 especially the utterance “*Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred*” can be categorized as an advising function. King advises the audiences of the march and his people to stand on the creative protest. He remains with his people to avoid physical violence which will tarnish the meaning

of the struggle they made. The utterances can be inferred as the presence of advice; it can be considered as an advising function. King presents the utterances to carry out the hearers to perform his advice to make struggle in creative protest. Another data of advising function can be seen in the following speech's chunk.

### Recommending

Data 12

*Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.* Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. The utterances "*Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy*"

Data 12 provides a better way of living for Black Americans as well as White men. King recommends leaving segregation and racial justice and living in brotherhood as God's children. Thus, Data 12 can be classified as recommending function because the utterances aim to get someone to perform something erred as the best option by the speaker.

### Promising

Data 13

it would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And *there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.* The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

Speech's chunk in Data 13 shows King's promise. The utterance "*there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights*" can be considered as promised. He asks for justice and security for Black-American because they are also a citizen of America which must be considered as same as white. If the condition is not met, he does not promise tranquility in America. The utterance can be inferred as a promising function because the speaker proposes the commitment to do something in the future to the hearers. Another data on the promising can be seen in the following speech chunk.

### Expressing Pleasure

Data 14

*I am happy to join you today* in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

King is excited to join the monumental march on the history of America. It was his pleasure to be a part of the move of Black-American freedom which can be seen in the utterance "*I am happy to join with you today*". Thus, the utterance in Data 14 can be categorized as expressing pleasure function; the speaker utters the utterance as a reflection of his feeling. Furthermore, it reflects the psychological feeling of the speaker toward the event of the demonstration and the move of Black-American.

### Expressing Dislike

Data 15

*We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.* We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels on the highways and the hotels of the cities.

King conveys his dislike of how white treat Black Americans which

can be seen in the utterance "***We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality***". He feels disappointed in what Black-American experiences. It can be inferred that the utterances aim at expressing dislike of the speaker based on his experience. He claims that his people frequently find brutality from the police. Furthermore, he claims that Black Americans are hard to find a place to stay on the highways and cities. Further implementation of expressing dislike can be seen in the following example.

### Expressing Sorrow

Data 16

***I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations.*** Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. And some of you have come from areas where your quest - quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering.

The utterance "***I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations***" in Data 16 reflects the King's feeling of sorrow due to the efforts and the inconvenient experiences of Black Americans. He knows that Black Americans still often received brutality from police officers as well as persecution. This fact makes him feel sad; it can be inferred that the utterances show expressing sorrow. The speaker expresses his psychological states of sorrow due to the inconvenience and violence for Black-American.

### 4. Conclusion

A Speech delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the monumental speeches in the history of freedom in the United States of America.

The analysis of the speech finds out five classifications of the illocutionary act, namely representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Furthermore, the finding shows that there are twelve functions of the illocutionary acts found in the speech entitled "I have a dream" delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. They are claiming, reporting, complaining, commanding, requesting, advising, recommending, promising, expressing pleasure, expressing dislike, expressing sorrow, and naming.

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