

Directive Speech Act Strategies In Investigator Interrogations Of Witnesses In The Film “*Dendam Malam Kelam*”

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the use of directive speech acts in the interrogation dialogues of the film Dendam Malam Kelam. The study aimed to identify the types of directive speech acts employed by the investigator and to explain the linguistic strategies used to influence and guide the witness's responses. The method applied was a descriptive qualitative approach, utilizing a listen-and-record technique to analyze the interrogation dialogues in the film. The results indicated that the investigator employed several types of directive speech acts, including commands, requests, leading questions, and indirect coercive expressions that implicitly constrained the witness's responses. Furthermore, the investigator systematically applied politeness strategies and structured turn-taking control to regulate the flow of conversation, ensuring that the interaction remained aligned with the objectives of the interrogation.

Keywords: *Pragmatics, Directive Speech Acts, Interrogation, Film, Witness Testimony.*

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1. Introduction

Language is the primary means of human communication, serving not only as a tool for conveying messages or information but also as an instrument for maintaining and managing social relationships in various contexts of life. In modern linguistic studies, particularly in pragmatics, language is understood as a speech act, wherein every utterance made by a speaker possesses the power to influence their addressee (Weda et al., 2021; Pertiwi et al., 2024; Adinda et al., 2025). One type of illocutionary speech act that plays a crucial role in social interaction is the directive speech act. This speech

act has unique characteristics because it aims to direct, request, or command the addressee to perform a specific action in accordance with the speaker's wishes. In formal and high-pressure communication situations, the effectiveness of directive speech acts is key to successfully achieving communication goals (Sosrohadi et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2025; Ananda et al., 2025).

The most intense and strategic communicative context for the use of directive speech acts is the interrogation process. An interrogation is an asymmetrical speech event in which there is a power imbalance between the investigator, as the authority figure, and the witness or suspect, as the person being questioned. In this situation, the investigator does not merely ask questions but employs various linguistic strategies to elicit information, verify facts, and control the course of the conversation to ensure it remains aligned with the investigation's objectives. The directive strategies employed often range from direct commands and polite requests to leading or trick questions. Therefore, analyzing communication patterns in interrogations is crucial for revealing how power and psychological influence are exercised through language.

This complex practice of interrogative communication is often dramatized in film, as seen in the movie *Dendam Malam Kelam* (2025). This film offers an intriguing subject of study because it depicts the highly intense dynamics of the dialogue between the investigator, Arya Pradana, and a witness named Jefri. In these interrogation scenes, we see how the investigator uses a systematic variety of directive speech acts to penetrate the witness's psychological defenses in order to uncover the truth behind a criminal case. The depiction of the interrogation in this film provides a rich visual and auditory portrayal of how language strategies and linguistic politeness are applied in high-conflict or high-pressure situations—scenarios that are often inaccessible in the real world due to the confidential nature of legal investigative processes.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on directive speech acts, research that specifically examines directive strategies in the context of interrogations in contemporary Indonesian films still requires further exploration. This study is important to understand how the construction of dialogue in films reflects the sociopragmatic realities of law enforcement, as well as how politeness strategies are used as tools of manipulation or persuasion in formal interactions. Based on this background, this study aims to identify the types of directive speech acts and analyze the politeness strategies used by investigators toward witnesses in the film *Dendam Malam Kelam*. The results of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to the development of pragmatic studies, particularly in the analysis of legal and media discourse, and to provide insights into the power of language in controlling human responses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Research on directive speech acts in audiovisual media has been widely conducted by linguists to examine how commands, requests, and other directive forms

are constructed in film dialogue. Several previous studies have generally focused on identifying and classifying types of directive speech acts and politeness strategies in everyday interactions between characters in films, social media, and other public communication platforms. These studies mainly analyze the forms and functions of speech acts as part of general communication patterns.

However, this study offers a specific novelty because it examines directive speech acts in the context of police interrogation. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on surface linguistic forms and politeness strategies, this research analyzes how directive strategies are used in asymmetrical situations in which the speaker has institutional and legal authority over the addressee. The focus on the film *Dendam Malam Kelam* provides a new contribution to the study of pragmatics, particularly in understanding the linguistic representation of legal procedures, power relations, and interrogation strategies in contemporary Indonesian cinema.

2.2. Theoretical Basis

2.2.1 The Concept of Pragmatics and Speech Situations

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of utterances based on their context. According to Yule (2006), pragmatics examines not only what is literally said but also what the speaker intends behind their words. In an interrogation, the speech situation is the most decisive element because it involves external factors such as place (the interrogation room), time, and the social status of the participants. Chaer (2010) asserts that the context of the speech situation includes the background knowledge possessed by the speaker and the addressee. Therefore, in analyzing this film, a pragmatic approach is used to examine how every question or command posed by investigator Arya Pradana is always tied to the goal of law enforcement and the effort to establish the facts with witness Jefri.

2.2.2 Searle's Theory of Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts are a category of illocutionary acts aimed at causing the addressee to perform an action in accordance with what is stated in the utterance. According to the theory developed by Searle (1979), directive speech acts encompass various functions such as commanding, requesting, suggesting, instructing, and asking. In the context of interrogation, these functions are not used randomly but rather as strategies to control the flow of information. Commands are used to assert dominance, while questions serve as tools for fact-finding. This study adopts Searle's classification to analyze how each of these directive categories operates within the film's dialogic structure, from the opening stage of the interrogation through to the stage of data confrontation.

2.2.3 Politeness Strategies and Leech's Maxims

During interrogations, despite power imbalances, investigators often employ politeness strategies to ensure that witnesses remain cooperative. This strategy involves efforts to preserve the "face" or self-esteem of the conversation partner so they do not feel unduly threatened, which could cause the witness to remain silent. Leech (1983) proposed the principle of politeness, which consists of several maxims, including the maxim of prudence and the maxim of acceptance. These maxims are used in this study to analyze how investigator Arya Pradana formulates his speech to appear more persuasive and humane, even though the ultimate goal is to obtain a confession or crucial information from the witness. The use of politeness here is viewed as a strategic and functional linguistic tactic.

2.2.4 The Representation of Interrogations in Film Narratives

Films are a reflection of social reality constructed through screenplays and acting. According to Nurgiyantoro (2018), dialogue in films serves a strategic function in bringing characterization to life and driving the plot forward. In the film *Dendam Malam Kelam*, every directive speech act that appears in interrogation scenes functions not merely as a narrative complement but as the core of conflict resolution. The linguistic strategies employed by the investigator reflect how law and power are represented in popular culture (Sosrohadi & Wulandari, 2022; Abbas et al., 2023; Junaid & Andini et al., 2025). The integration of pragmatic theory and film narrative analysis enables this study to reveal how language is used tactically to create dramatic tension while simultaneously simulating realistic criminal investigation procedures.

3. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach as its methodological framework to analyze language use in specific situations. According to Sugiyono (2020), qualitative methods focus on in-depth observation of the research subject to generate descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from participants and observed behaviors. In this study, this method was applied to systematically analyze how directive speech acts are constructed in interrogation dialogues. The use of a descriptive approach allows the researcher to provide an accurate picture of the language strategies used by investigator Arya Pradana to influence witness Jefri, without intervening in the natural data found in the film footage.

The data in this study consists of all utterances containing elements of directive speech acts—both direct and indirect—that appear in interrogation scenes. The primary data source for this study is the film *Dendam Malam Kelam* (2025) by a renowned director, which specifically depicts legal interactions in an interrogation room. This research subject was chosen because the quality of its dialogue represents psychological pressure and complex linguistic tactics. Data sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, in which the researcher selected only utterances relevant to

the research question—namely, directive speech acts possessing illocutionary force to command, request, ask, or instruct within the context of legal fact-finding.

Data collection was conducted using the observation method, supplemented by note-taking. This process began with repeated viewings of the film *Dendam Malam Kelam* to understand the plot and the context of each interrogation scene. The researcher then transcribed the dialogue into text to facilitate the identification process. Every utterance classified as directive according to Searle's theory was then marked and entered into data cards. These data cards included information regarding the form of the utterance, the illocutionary function, and the politeness maxim applied, ensuring that the data was collected in a structured manner for the subsequent analysis phase.

The data analysis phase was conducted using a flow analysis model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the reduction phase, the researcher filtered the data from the total corpus of utterances into data units focused solely on directive strategies. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of descriptive analyses and frequency tables to reveal patterns in the language use of the investigating officer. Finally, a verification process and conclusion-drawing were conducted to reveal how these directive speech act strategies successfully guided the witnesses' answers. To ensure the validity of the results, the researcher performed theoretical triangulation by comparing field findings with relevant pragmatic literature, to ensure the accuracy of the sociopragmatic interpretation in this study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result

Based on an analysis of the interrogation scenes in the film *Dendam Malam Kelam*, a total of 63 instances of directive speech acts were identified, used by the investigator Arya Pradana in his interactions with the witness Jefri. These findings were classified into two main aspects: categories of directive strategies according to their illocutionary functions and the application of politeness principles based on Leech's maxims.

4.1.1. Distribution of Directive Speech Act Strategies

This study identified five directive strategies used by the investigator to control the course of the interrogation and elicit information from the witness: probing/questioning, commanding, requesting, instructing, and suggesting. The distribution of these strategies can be seen in Table 1.1. However, the data are not only presented in numerical form but also supported by examples from the dialogue to provide clearer evidence of how each directive strategy is used in the interrogation context.

The most dominant strategy is probing/questioning, with 39 data (61.9%). This strategy is primarily used by the investigator to obtain information, clarify statements, and test the consistency of the witness's answers. For example, in the utterance "*Jadi,*

bagaimana cerita jenazah istri saya bisa menghilang?” (D2.DMK/12:59), the investigator uses a question to direct the witness to provide an explanation. Similarly, the question *“Apakah istri Anda punya musuh?”* (D6.DMK/13:45) shows how the investigator guides the witness to provide specific information relevant to the investigation.

The second most frequent strategy is commanding, with 17 data (27.0%). This strategy appears in direct imperative forms used to control the witness’s actions during the interrogation. For instance, the utterances *“Angkat tangan.”* (D22.DMK/29:06) and *“Diam!”* (D28.DMK/29:16) show that the investigator uses direct commands to maintain control over the situation and ensure the interrogation proceeds according to procedure.

The requesting strategy appears in 5 data (7.9%). This strategy is used to direct the witness more politely and reduce the level of coercion in the interaction. An example can be seen in the utterance *“Boleh saya lihat obat sakit kepala yang Anda beli.”* (D16.DMK/15:26), which shows a polite request used to obtain evidence or information from the witness.

Meanwhile, instructing and suggesting strategies appear only once each (1.6%). The instructing strategy is shown in the utterance *“Tanpa kebohongan.”* (D129.DMK/1:12:41), which functions as a clear instruction directing the witness to tell the truth. The suggesting strategy appears in the utterance *“Anda bisa baca sendiri.”* (D98.DMK/1:03:06), where the investigator indirectly directs the witness to read the document related to the case.

These examples indicate that directive speech act strategies in the interrogation are not only used to give orders but also to manage the flow of conversation, obtain information, and influence the witness’s responses in a controlled and strategic manner.

Table 1. Distribution of Directive Speech Act Strategies

No	Directive Strategy	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Probing/Questioning	39	61.9%
2	Commanding	17	27.0%
3	Requesting	5	7.9%
4	Instructing	1	1.6%
5	Suggesting	1	1.6%
Total		63	100%

Source: Processed by the Author, 2026

4.1.2 Distribution of Politeness Maxim Usage

In addition to directive strategies, the researcher also analyzed the use of politeness maxims employed by the investigator during the interrogation. The distribution of politeness maxim usage can be seen in Table 1.2. However, to provide clearer evidence, several examples from the data are presented to illustrate how each maxim is realized in the interrogation dialogue.

The most dominant maxim is the tact maxim, with 57 data (90.5%). This maxim is used by the investigator to minimize pressure on the witness while still directing the conversation. For example, in the utterance “*Boleh saya lihat obat sakit kepala yang Anda beli.*” (D16.DMK/15:26), the investigator uses a polite request form to reduce the burden on the witness. Another example can be seen in the question “*Apakah istri Anda punya musuh?*” (D6.DMK/13:45), where the investigator asks in a controlled and polite manner to obtain information without directly accusing the witness. These utterances show that the investigator tends to use indirect and polite forms to maintain cooperation during the interrogation.

The generosity maxim appears in 3 data (4.8%). This maxim reflects the investigator’s effort to position himself in a less dominant and more cooperative manner during the interrogation. For instance, in data D54, the investigator says “*Boleh saya tebak?*”, which shows that the investigator minimizes his authority and gives conversational space to the witness, indicating a cooperative communication strategy.

The modesty maxim is also found in 3 data (4.8%). This maxim is used when the investigator lowers his position or avoids appearing dominant in order to maintain a cooperative interaction. For example, in data D48 and D128, the investigator uses statements that do not directly impose authority but instead guide the witness more subtly, showing that the investigator does not explicitly display power even though he has institutional authority in the interrogation.

These examples indicate that politeness maxims are strategically used by the investigator not only to maintain politeness but also to control the interaction, reduce resistance, and encourage the witness to provide more open and cooperative responses during the interrogation process.

Table 2. Distribution of Politeness Maxim Usage

No	Politeness Maxim	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Tact Maxim	57	90.5%
2	Generosity Maxim	3	4.8%
3	Modesty Maxim	3	4.8%
Total		63	100%

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1 The Dominance of Probing Strategy in Tracing Legal Facts

Data in Table 1.1 show that the probing/questioning strategy is the most dominant technique, with a frequency of 61.9%. This indicates that the primary role of the investigator in the interrogation process is to obtain and verify information through structured questioning. The extensive use of questions serves to test the consistency of the witness's statements, clarify unclear information, and guide the witness toward specific topics relevant to the case. Pragmatically, this strategy shows that the investigator uses questions not only to gather information but also as an investigative tool to reconstruct the chronology of events and control the flow of information during the interrogation.

4.2.2 Commanding Strategy as an Assertion of Legal Authority

The commanding strategy accounts for 27.0% of the total data, making it the second most frequently used strategy. This strategy reflects the institutional authority held by the investigator during the interrogation process. Commands are used to regulate the witness's behavior, control the situation, and ensure that the examination proceeds according to procedural rules. The use of imperative forms such as commands to remain silent, raise hands, or provide direct answers indicates a clear power asymmetry between the investigator and the witness. This shows that language in interrogation functions not only as a communication tool but also as a means of exercising legal authority.

4.2.3 Tact Maxim as a Strategic Linguistic Tactic

The findings in Table 1.2 show that the tact maxim is the most dominant politeness maxim, with 90.5% of the total data. This high percentage indicates that the investigator tends to deliver directives in a way that minimizes pressure on the witness. In the context of interrogation, this politeness can be considered a form of strategic politeness, where politeness is used not only to maintain social harmony but also to support investigative objectives. By using polite questions, indirect requests, and controlled intonation, the investigator can build rapport and reduce the witness's resistance, making it easier to obtain accurate information.

4.2.4 Summary of Discussion

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that directive speech act strategies are used by the investigator to control the course of the interrogation and to obtain information from the witness. The most dominant strategy is probing/questioning, indicating that the interrogation process mainly relies on questioning techniques to explore and verify information. The commanding strategy reflects the investigator's

authority in regulating the interrogation, while requesting, instructing, and suggesting are used to maintain cooperative communication.

In terms of politeness principles, the tact maxim is the most dominant, showing that the investigator tends to use polite language to minimize pressure on the witness. The use of generosity and modesty maxims also supports a cooperative interaction during the interrogation. Overall, the findings show that interrogation discourse is a form of strategic communication involving directive strategies, politeness principles, and power relations to achieve investigative goals.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the use of directive speech acts in the interrogation process in the film *Dendam Malam Kelam* serves as a strategic instrument employed by the investigator to control the flow of information and systematically uncover legal facts. Based on the data analysis, the dominance of the probing/questioning strategy (60.9%) demonstrates that the main activity of investigator Arya Pradana is to trace material truth through a series of structured and continuous questions. This strategy functions as the primary investigative tool to reconstruct the chronology of events and test the consistency of the witness Jefri's statements. Meanwhile, the commanding strategy (26.6%) represents a manifestation of clear power asymmetry within the investigation room, where the investigator uses legal authority to enforce rules and regulate the witness's behavior to ensure the smooth conduct of formal examination procedures. The use of requesting (7.8%), instructing (1.6%), and suggesting (1.6%) strategies indicates that the investigator also employs cooperative approaches to maintain communication effectiveness during the interrogation.

From a sociopragmatic perspective, this study reveals a unique phenomenon regarding the application of "strategic politeness." The use of the tact maxim, reaching 90.5%, indicates that the investigator consciously minimizes direct verbal pressure to build rapport with the witness. This finding confirms that in a legal context, politeness functions not only as social ethics but also as a persuasive tactic to reduce the witness's psychological resistance. By framing commands and questions in more considerate forms, the investigator creates a communicative space that appears safer for the witness, ultimately facilitating the extraction of crucial information without excessive verbal intimidation. The use of generosity and modesty maxims (4.8% each) also supports the creation of cooperative interaction, although their occurrence is relatively limited.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of pragmatic studies, particularly regarding how directive speech acts and politeness principles operate within asymmetrical legal discourse. Practically, the representation of interrogation in the film *Dendam Malam Kelam* provides insight for both the public and legal practitioners into the importance of linguistic competence in investigative processes. The success of uncovering truth in a case does not solely depend on physical evidence, but also on the

investigator's ability to employ appropriate speech strategies. Therefore, future research is recommended to analyze the responses or defensive language strategies used by witnesses or suspects, such as expressive and commissive speech acts, in order to obtain a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of interrogation communication dynamics.

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