

Speech Act Strategies of Twelfth-Grade Students at *Bunda Kandung* Senior High School in Communicating Choices Between College or Work

Dea Puspita

Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: deap060604@gmail.com

Hena Mulyawati

Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: henamuliawati12@gmail.com

Siti Pauziah

Universitas Nasional Jakarta, Indonesia

E-mail: pauziah2278@gmail.com

Citra Andini

Hasanuddin University, Indonesia

E-mail: andinicitra773@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

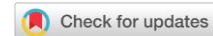
This study is motivated by the crucial role of language as the primary means of communication in social interactions, particularly in the high school environment. The focus of this study is on twelfth-grade students in their final semester, who are in a critical transitional phase of deciding whether to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. This study aims to describe the functions and strategies of speech acts used by students in class XII.2 at Bunda Kandung High School in communicating these future choices. The method used is qualitative descriptive. The results of the study indicate the presence of various illocutionary speech act functions, including: the assertive function (stating and concluding), the directive function (giving advice), the commissive function (promising), and the expressive function (complaining and expressing gratitude). In addition, four types of speech act strategies were found to be applied by the students, namely: direct speech act strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, and indirect or ambiguous speech act strategies. The use of these varied functions and strategies reflects the students' efforts to assert their personal choices while maintaining harmony in peer interactions.

Keywords: *Speech Acts, Speech Act Strategies, High School Students, Grade 12.*

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1. Introduction

Language is the primary tool humans use to communicate, express opinions, ideas, desires, and feelings in daily life. In a school setting, communication among students is frequent, ranging from casual conversations to serious discussions about their future. One way to understand how students express their intentions and goals is through a pragmatic analysis—a branch of linguistics that studies language use in context (Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Andini et al., 2021; Sosrohadi et al., 2024; .Prihandoko et al., 2019; Karubaba et al., 2024). Twelfth-grade students, particularly in the second semester, are in a critical developmental phase as they face a major decision: continuing their education in college or entering the workforce directly. This situation often sparks discussions, advice, and even minor debates among them. In this communication process, specific speech act functions and strategies are necessary to ensure messages are conveyed without offending others or damaging friendships.

According to Pratama & Utomo (2020), speech acts are a part of pragmatics that involve interaction between the speaker and the listener regarding what is being discussed. Furthermore, Searle (in Wijana, 2009) divides speech acts into three types of actions: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. In the context of future choices, students use various forms of illocutionary speech acts—such as assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive—to provide information, offer advice, and express commitment to their choices. Beyond speech functions, the aspect of maintaining social relationships is also crucial, which can be analyzed using Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies. Politeness strategies—whether direct (bald on record), positive politeness, negative politeness, or indirect (off record)—are essential to ensure that opinions remain tolerant and non-patronizing. This is crucial because discussions about the future often touch on sensitive issues such as family economic conditions.

Previous research on speech acts has generally focused more on qualitative analysis of literary works and often merely described the forms of speech acts without considering the strategies employed. Therefore, this study aims to map how the functions and strategies of these speech acts manifest in students' speech through a qualitative descriptive method. Based on this background, this study aims to describe the speech act functions of students in Class XII.2 at SMA Bunda Kandung in their communication regarding college or career choices, as well as to map the speech act strategies they employ. This study is expected to provide theoretical benefits for the development of pragmatic studies and practical benefits for educators in understanding patterns of student interaction at school.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Research on speech acts and politeness strategies has been extensively conducted in various contexts, but there is a significant difference in focus compared to this study. Most previous studies have tended to focus on qualitative analysis of formal

texts or literary works, such as novels and plays, to examine language use in structured scenarios (Rahardi, 2005). Furthermore, research by Pratama and Utomo (2020) has explored the dynamics of adolescent communication, but it placed greater emphasis on the negotiation of meaning in general without specifically examining the dichotomy of choice between continuing education or entering the workforce. Then, a second study was conducted by Reza Suryani (2024). This study focused solely on speaking strategies. The third study, conducted by Meyita Savitri Gonanda (2023), focused solely on speech acts. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of Searle's illocutionary speech act analysis with Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies to capture how adolescents mitigate social risks when discussing topics that determine their future.

2.1.1 Theoretical Basis

a. The Pragmatic Paradigm in Communication (Levinson & Wijana)

Pragmatics is understood as the study of the relationship between language and context, which forms the basis for a comprehensive explanation of language meaning (Ananda et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2026). Levinson (1983) asserts that pragmatics focuses on the speaker's ability to align linguistic structures with the appropriate situational context so that meaning can be effectively conveyed. In line with this view, Wijana (2009) explains that meaning in pragmatic studies goes beyond traditional semantic analysis because it involves the process of deconstructing the meaning communicated by the speaker to the addressee in real speech events. In the interactions of students at Bunda Kandung High School, the pragmatic approach serves as an analytical framework for dissecting how speech acts are used as social instruments in negotiating complex future choices.

b. Speech Act Theory and Illocutionary Force (John R. Searle)

One of the main pillars of pragmatic analysis is speech act theory, which conceptualizes every utterance as a form of actual action. Searle (1969) posits that every utterance contains three simultaneous dimensions of action: locution as the basic form of the utterance, illocution as the force or intention underlying the utterance, and perlocution as the effect produced on the listener. The analysis in this study focuses on illocutionary force, which Searle (as cited in Wijana, 2009) classifies into functional categories such as assertive (to state a decision), directive (to give advice), commissive (to make a promise or commitment), and expressive (to manifest psychological states such as gratitude or complaint).

c. Politeness Strategies and Face Management (Brown & Levinson)

Social interaction among 12th-grade adolescents involves not only the exchange of information but also the management of public self-image, known as the concept of "face." Brown and Levinson (1987) developed a theory of politeness strategies as a mechanism to mitigate face-threatening acts. These strategies include the use of direct, no-nonsense strategies for communication efficiency; positive politeness to build

solidarity; negative politeness to respect the privacy and freedom of the interlocutor; and indirect or ambiguous strategies to convey meaning implicitly. The use of these various strategies reflects students' sociopragmatic competence in managing sensitive topics so that opinions remain acceptable without triggering interpersonal conflict (Haryanto & Sosrohadi, 2023; Adinda et al., 2025; Yaumi et al., 2024).

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore and describe language use in depth. According to Sugiyono (2016), qualitative methods are used to study subjects in their natural settings, where the researcher acts as the key instrument. In this study, the descriptive method was chosen due to its relevance in systematically presenting the speech acts and politeness strategies that emerge in the utterances of students in Class XII.2 at SMA Bunda Kandung without imposing any treatment or manipulation on the research subjects.

The data in this study were sourced from students' written utterances generated through two main instruments: essays and questionnaires. The use of essays aimed to obtain open-ended speech data, in which students were asked to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the choice between continuing their studies or entering the workforce. Meanwhile, the questionnaire instrument, which uses a Likert scale, was employed to measure the tendency to use politeness strategies in a more quantifiable manner. The selection of research subjects was conducted using purposive sampling, focusing on students in Class XII.2 because they are at a crucial stage in making decisions about their future.

The data analysis procedure was conducted through several stages, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the initial stage, the researcher transcribed and identified the results of the essays and questionnaires to classify speech units based on Searle's illocutionary function categories (assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive). Subsequently, the data were further analyzed using Brown and Levinson's theory to map the politeness strategies employed (direct, positive politeness, negative politeness, or ambiguous). Data triangulation was conducted to ensure the validity of the research findings, so that the conclusions drawn could provide a concrete picture of the sociopragmatics of adolescent communication in the school environment.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Findings on Speech Act Functions Among Students

Based on the analysis of data obtained through essays and written observations, various categories of illocutionary speech act functions used by students in Class XII.2 at Bunda Kandung High School were identified. These functions were classified based on Searle's theory, which includes assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive

functions. The data indicate that the assertive function was the most dominant, with students actively stating the reasons behind their choices to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. Additionally, the directive function appears significantly in the form of peer-to-peer advice. The commissive function was found in students who expressed promises or commitments regarding the future, while the expressive function was used to manifest feelings of doubt, fear, or gratitude.

Table 1. Classification of Students' Speech Act Functions

Function Category	Description of Use	Data Example
Assertive	Stating decisions and reasons for future choices.	"Saya memutuskan untuk kuliah karena ingin mengejar cita-cita."
Directive	Giving suggestions or advice to friends.	"Saran aku sebaiknya kamu ambil jurusan yang sesuai hobi."
Commissive	Expressing promises or commitments by oneself/family.	"Saya berjanji akan bekerja giat untuk membantu orang tua."
Expressive	Expressing complaints, doubts, or gratitude.	"Aku merasa bingung harus pilih yang mana."

Data Source: Compiled by the Author, 2026

4.1.2. Findings on Speech Act Strategies (Politeness Strategies)

Politeness strategies were measured using a Likert-scale questionnaire to assess students' tendencies to mitigate social risks during communication. The results indicate that students tend to employ varying strategies depending on the sensitivity of the topic under discussion. Positive politeness strategies were the most frequently used to build solidarity among friends. However, on topics touching on personal matters such as economic conditions, students were more likely to use negative politeness strategies or indirect (vague) strategies to maintain a safe distance and respect the privacy of their conversation partners.

Table 2. Results of the Student Politeness Strategy Questionnaire

Strategy Type	Average Score	Dominant Category	Usage Tendency
Direct	High	Assertive	Used when stating personal decisions.

Positive Politeness	Very High	Solidarity	Used to support friends' choices.
Negative Politeness	Moderate	Formal/Respectful	Used when giving advice to avoid sounding patronizing.
Off-record (Indirect)	Low–Moderate	Implicit	Used to discuss economic constraints.

Data Source: Compiled by the Author, 2026

Based on Table 1.2, it can be seen that the most dominant politeness strategy used by students is positive politeness, with a very high average score. This indicates that students tend to build solidarity and maintain interpersonal relationship, especially in the context of friendship. Meanwhile, direct strategies also have high scores and are generally used when students express personal decisions firmly. On the other hand, negative politeness is used moderately, especially when giving advice to remain polite and not offend the interlocutor. Off-record (indirect) strategies tend to be used less frequently indicating that students only use them in certain situations, such as when discussing sensitive issues like the economy. These findings indicate that the choice of politeness strategy is strongly influenced by the conversation and the purpose of the communication.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Analysis of Speech Act Functions in Student Communication

The research findings indicate that the illocutionary speech act functions used by students reflect their psychological state as they navigate this transitional period. The high frequency of assertive functions demonstrates that 12th-grade students have a strong need to affirm their self-identity through career choices. From a pragmatic perspective, the directive function in the form of advice indicates a dynamic of mutual support within the Bunda Kandung High School environment. Students do not focus solely on themselves but also act as motivators for their peers. This aligns with Searle's theory that speech acts serve as a means to perform social actions (in this case, actions that positively influence a friend's future).

4.2.2. Analysis of Politeness Strategies and Face Management

The application of politeness strategies by students in Class XII.2 is heavily influenced by the need to manage "face" (face management) as proposed by Brown and Levinson. The dominance of positive politeness indicates that even while discussing serious matters, the values of solidarity and camaraderie as schoolmates remain prioritized. Students strive to make their conversation partners feel valued by supporting their choices. On the other hand, the use of negative politeness and ambiguous

strategies on certain topics demonstrates the students' sociopragmatic competence. They realize that forcing or asking overly personal questions regarding financial capabilities can threaten a friend's "face." Therefore, the use of subtle and indirect language is chosen as a form of conflict mitigation.

4.2.3. Relevance of Findings to the Social Context of Adolescents

Overall, the results of this study provide concrete evidence that adolescent communication in major decision-making involves complex negotiations of meaning. The combination of assertive speech acts with subtle speech strategies (negative politeness) as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) creates a balance between achieving personal goals and maintaining social relationships. These findings underscore the importance of pragmatic understanding in daily school interactions to prevent misunderstandings, as effective communication relies not only on linguistic competence but also on sociopragmatic awareness Lech and Thomas (1983

Collectively, the results of this study indicate that students in Class XII.2 at Bunda Kandung High School possess strong linguistic adaptability. They are able to distinguish when to speak directly to demonstrate assertiveness and when to employ politeness strategies to spare others' feelings. These findings suggest that pragmatic studies should be more extensively applied in character education at schools to enhance students' interpersonal intelligence through language.

5. Conclusion

This study successfully provides a comprehensive description of the dynamics of language use among students in Class XII.2 at Bunda Kandung High School in the context of post-graduation decision-making. Based on the data analysis conducted on speech act functions and strategies, several key conclusions can be drawn.

First, regarding the illocutionary function of speech acts, students actively employ various speech categories to achieve their communicative intentions. The assertive function was the most dominant, as students used it to affirm their personal choices and provide logical reasons behind their decisions to pursue higher education or enter the workforce. Additionally, the directive function emerged as a form of interpersonal support through the provision of advice, while the commissive and expressive functions served as means of expressing personal commitment and reflecting students' emotional states as they navigated this life transition.

Second, regarding speech act strategies, the research findings indicate a high level of sociopragmatic competence among the students. The very high use of positive politeness strategies reflects strong values of solidarity and efforts to maintain harmony within the peer group. However, students also demonstrate flexibility by employing negative politeness strategies and ambiguous strategies when addressing sensitive topics, such as economic constraints, to mitigate the risk of threatening the "face" or self-esteem of the addressee.

This study offers a theoretical contribution by enriching pragmatic research on adolescents' linguistic behavior in real-life settings. Practically, these findings highlight the importance of understanding speech strategies for students in developing interpersonal intelligence. Although this study is limited to a single class at Bunda Kandung High School, the results can serve as a reference for educators in understanding students' interaction patterns. For future research, further exploration with a broader subject scope or comparisons across educational levels is recommended to obtain a more general sociopragmatic picture.

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