



Illocutionary Acts in Religious Discourse: The Pragmatics of Nouman Ali Khan's Speeches

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ABSTRACT

The present inquiry is designed to investigate the use of illocutionary acts in Nouman Ali Khan's speeches and to analyse the functions of the types of illocutionary acts from the speeches. The data were analysed by using the textual analysis and open coding from three speeches by Nouman Ali Khan in a seminar titled "When Muslims Works Together" at the Islamic Association of North Texas (IANT). They are classified into some categories based on Searle's theory. The finding of this study showed that (1) there are four types of illocutionary acts; representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives, (2) the illocutionary type of representatives is the most frequent types of illocutionary act appeared in the speeches, i.e., 306 utterances or 63.22% with five functions; informing, stating, describing, reminding and concluding, (3) then, the second most frequently types of illocutionary act appeared in the speeches was the illocutionary directives, i.e., 144 utterances or 29.75% with five functions; suggesting, commanding, inviting, forbidding and questioning, (4) the illocutionary commissives occurred in 22 utterances or 4.55% with two functions; promising and warning., (5) the illocutionary expressives are found in 12 utterances or 2.48% with two functions; praising and expressing hope or wish. This study implies the need for knowledge distribution of Searle's classic speech acts concept within the scope of other contemporary Muslim preachers.

1. Introduction

Language has an important role in daily life as a medium of communication, and it is interesting to be discussed, as it can be used in many sectors and indirectly can influence the listener or the audience. Holtgraves (2002) defines language as a system that enables people to communicate or transfer propositions among themselves. Effective communication with other people can be achieved in various ways that one of them is by speech. Speech is the ability to speak performed by a person to express opinions or ideas about something important to the audience. A speech must have a purpose, and it functions as transmitting information to the listener as it the very core of human's need (Lindsay et al., 2012).

The study of what utterances mean is very crucial to language learning since understanding is the basis of linguistic communication. Yule (2006) states that the study of utterance's meaning is called pragmatics. Moreover, Akmal (2017) argues that language is frequently defined as an indispensable pragmatic aspect of the human ability to communicate because pragmatics is based on the speakers' intentions and

views, particularly the selections they provided for communications, the limitations they encountered in using the language and the influences of the language they used to the audience. However, listeners can unusually or sometimes misinterpret the utterances of the speaker or failed to make meaning of it.

In achieving communication goals, the speakers do not only convey any utterances but also imply specific actions embedded in their speech. Studies on speeches or speech act analysis have been long regarded as one of the most exciting topics on language, literature/novel and linguistics, especially as an interdisciplinary body of knowledge (Batmang, 2018) (Flanagan, 2013; Mills, 2014). Some experts analysed the pragmatic, social, political, discourse, and critical impact of speeches and its rhetoric (Boromisza-Habashi, 2012; Buysse, 2012; Ellwanger, 2012; Vasaly, 2013), whereas some others preferred to explore the literature, semantic, gestures and its traditional meaning of speech (Bergmann et al., 2011; Nur, 2016; Tur & De Mori, 2011) or the combination of both (Egorova et al., 2013; Fetzner & Bull, 2012; Foucart et al., 2015).

On the side of pragmatics, the analysis emphasises on how people understand and produce communicative acts and to comprehend "the (contextual) meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener" (Yule, 1996, p.3). Pragmatics moreover, analyses the construction and practice of language to the situational context, and it is methodically connected to the mood around the hearer, speaker and the backgrounds, such as, hedging or mitigating the tone of the language (Fraser, 2010). Put merely, pragmatics encourages language users and learners to have communicative competence.

Danao (2015) reports that communicative competence is the skill to practice the language in a communicative circumstance that is in an unprompted exchange. Moreover, pragmatics inquiries also essential to discover how listeners can make inferences about what is said to grasp at an understanding of the speaker's projected implication (Andreas & Klein, 2016). This type of scholarship searches the way a significant part of what is acknowledged can be a meaning, as part of what is talked.

Learning language through pragmatics takes us to be able to distinguish the nature of language. It brings us to a profound examination of what the meaning is brought in an expression uttered by a speaker. As Wilson (2015, p.3) asserts that pragmatics is about the "construction of the meaning of social interaction". It provides the benefits about people's proposed meanings, their expectations, their objectives, and the types of actions accomplished in statements, and more significantly, in the context of English foreign or second language learning, it may facilitate the process of language acquisition (Byon, 2015).

In almost a similar tone, Tatsuki & Houck (2010) elaborate that by teaching pragmatics, we are teaching speech acts at the same time. This argument is moreover supported by Isna and Sari (2017) who believe that people do not only produce grammatical structures of utterances to express themselves, but also to act by using those utterances. Every word enunciated by individuals consists of the speech acts that have many functions such as commanding, warning or expressing the purposes of the speaker. Additionally, in analysing the speech act consisted of the utterances, Austin (1962) states that speech acts are grouped into three categories, which are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. These speech acts are related to each other. The

locutionary act gives a literal and textual meaning of a statement. Furthermore, illocutionary act functions as providing an intentional meaning behind an utterance. Therefore, the illocutionary act affects the certain actions performed by the listeners. These actions are called perlocutionary act.

Following the speech acts, Hashim (2015) argues that illocutionary act is the core of any speech act's theory. It is interesting to analyse illocutionary acts in terms of understanding the function and the anticipated meaning of an expression. Illocutionary act has some different types. Searle (1999) suggested that there are five categorisations of illocutionary act, such as representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Illocutionary acts are used to analyse any statements that the listener and the speaker produce.

The first category is *representative* that includes assertions relating to a true or false value. The words included in the representative are stating, believing, claiming, complaining, concluding, and informing. The second category is *directive* that functions to get the listener to do something. The words included in directives are advising, asking, forbidding, commanding, recommending, requesting and suggesting. The third category is *commissive*, that results in an obligation to a speaker. This category of illocutionary act shows the speaker's commitment to do something. The words included in the commissives are guaranteeing, offering, promising, and threatening. The fourth category is *expressives* that express feelings and attitudes of the speaker. The words included in expressives are apologising, blaming, congratulating, pardoning, praising, thanking and condoling. The last category is *declarative* as a speech act that performs declarative statements such as appointing, dismissing, naming, resigning and sentencing.

Table 1. Searle's speech acts classification (Yule, 1996, p. 53)

Speech Act Type	Direction of fit	S = Speaker; X = Situation
Declarative	Words change the world	S causes X
Assertive	Make words fit the world	S believes X
Expressive	Make words fit the world	S feels X
Directive	Make the world fit words	S wants X
Commissive	Make the world fit words	S intends X

On this ground, the present study will be taking the side of the pragmatics proponents and scrutinising the illocutionary. The study was explicitly emphasised on the illocutionary acts' types used in Nouman Ali Khan's speeches, and the functions of illocutionary act that Nouman Ali Khan used in his speech. In his lectures' videos, Nouman discussed many important issues such as Islam phobia, hypocrisy, parenting, misconceptions about Islam and many other relevant topics that are very interesting to be analysed. This study focuses on three topics of Nouman's speeches; Volunteer Discipline, Giving Opinion & Voicing Concern, and Qualities of a Leader. The study analysed the context underlying Nouman's speeches to achieve a complete

consideration of illocutionary acts consisted of his speeches. Thus, we used illocutionary act based on Searle's theory to analyse the speech. Hence, this study elaborated more about the intention of Nouman's utterances and also identified the function of those illocutionary acts.

2. Method

The present case study used textual analysis to analyse Nouman Ali Khan's videos and transcript of his speeches to be studied and determined which utterances can be classified as the types of illocutionary acts. Following to Frey, Botan & Kreps (2015), textual analysis is a useful method in qualitative design to designate and construe the characteristics of a recorded or visual message. Accordingly, the open coding analysis was used as the technique in this study to examine and analyse the types of illocutionary acts from the selected speeches into the thematic examination (Williams & Moser, 2019).

The data sources in this study used some videos of a speech by Nouman Ali Khan and the transcript of the videos. Nouman Ali Khan was chosen to be the subject of this research since he is one of the most famous Islamic speakers recently, especially for the millennial and young audience. As a well-known American Muslim speaker who grew up in New York City, he gives lectures to spread the universal message of Islam. He was chosen as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Jordan in 2020. Until 2006 Nouman works as an Arabic Professor in the Nassau Community College teaching more than 10,000 students through travelling seminars and programs. Nouman is now one of the most influential young western academics, with two million likes on Facebook and over 21 million YouTube views for his Bayyinah Institute.

The videos had three parts (i.e., part 3; part 4; and part 6) from the videos of a speech in a seminar "When Muslims Works Together" at the Islamic Association of North Texas (IANT) Masjid by Nouman Ali Khan. The videos were published on November 16th, 2012 on IANT Masjid YouTube channel. This seminar provided seven parts of videos discussing different topics. There were three parts of the videos in the seminar that become the focus of this study. The first video was "Volunteer Discipline - Part 3", the second one was "Giving Opinion and Voicing Concerns - Part 4", and the third one was "Qualities of a Leader - Part 6".

3. Findings and Discussion

There were 481 utterances found in the three videos of Nouman Ali Khan's speeches. In these utterances, it is found that Nouman performed four types of illocutionary act in his speeches; representatives, directives, commissives and expressives. The detailed frequency of the findings is presented in the table 2.

Table 2 showed that representatives held the highest frequency of existence. It was employed 306 times or 63.22% out of the total number of utterances. The second highest was directives, which was used in 144 times or 29.75% out of the total number of data. The following was commissives. It was used 22 times or 2.48% out of the total percentage of the data. Last, expressives was exercised 12 times or 2.48% out of the total data.

Table 2. Types of Illocutionary Acts found in Nouman Ali Khan's Speeches

Types of Illocutionary		Frequency		Percentage (%)	
			Total		
Representatives	Informing	59	306	12.19	63.22%
	Stating	186		38.43	
	Describing	53		10.95	
	Reminding	4		0.83	
	Concluding	4		0.83	
Directives	Suggesting	82	144	16.94	29.75%
	Commanding	3		0.62	
	Inviting	2		0.41	
	Forbidding	16		3.31	
	Questioning	41		8.47	
Commissives	Promising	9	22	1.86	4.55%
	Warning	13		2.69	
Expressives	Praising	7	12	1.45	2.48%
	Expressing Hope/Wish	5		1.03	
TOTAL DATA		484	484	100	100%

3.1. Types of Illocutionary

3.1.1. Representative

Nouman mostly used the representatives acts in his speeches. Yule (1996) stated that representatives illustrated what the narrator considers to be the case or not. Since the speech act of representative has dealt with the speaker's conviction, Nouman believed there must be some improvements for the Muslim community by using the representatives act in his speech. The representatives act in Nouman's speeches functioned for several purposes such as: informing, stating, describing, reminding and concluding. The following utterance was an example identified as representative types of illocutionary acts:

(1) "**Zulala in Arabic actually is what you walk over**, like a rug."

The utterance (1) is from the second speech. Yule (1996) states in expressing a representative, a speaker conveyed his conviction that some proposition was accurate. Based on the utterance, it could be identified as representative as it contained information delivered by Nouman about the meaning of an Arabic word. Nouman was talking about how to be humble to other believers which reinforced in the utterance before and after this.

3.1.2. Directives

The second most speech act utilised by Nouman was directives speech act. Directives can be used in mundane conversational such as in workplaces, or in

teaching conversations in communication (Kusumawati, 2014), just like the case of Nouman speeches. The directives speech act in Nouman speech functioned for commanding, inviting, suggesting, forbidding and questioning. The directives type functioned to make the public involved in solving several problems in the Muslim community. Furthermore, the most frequent function used by Nouman in his speech was suggesting with 82 utterances. The directives function of suggesting in Nouman speech was used when he wanted to give some opinions and suggestions for the Muslim community improvements. Most of the suggestions dealt with the effort for the community management problems. However, the least function used by the character was inviting with two utterances. The following utterances were some examples identified as directive types of illocutionary acts:

- (2) **"We have to change the culture of corrupting the meaning of *InshaAllah*, we have to stop that."**

The directive act used by Nouman above was defined by Leech (1996) as an intention to create some effect on the hearer. The function of directive acts in this type of utterance, as has been suggested by Martínez Flor (2005). In this speech, Nouman was discussing on asking and giving permission in Islamic perspective. Nouman was suggesting the audience to not corrupting the meaning of *InshaAllah* as it has become a culture in our society.

3.1.3. *Commissives*

Nouman used the commissives act when he committed Muslim to do some future action according to what Allah saying in the Quran. The following utterances were some examples identified as commissive types of illocutionary acts:

- (3) **"Allah mentions that *if you can control *fawahish* then you will not only be able to control your anger but you'll also be able to forgive.*"**

This utterance identified as commissive acts. Leech (1996) agreed that commissives obligate the speaker to particular forthcoming action. Here, Nouman was talking about Allah's promises in the Quran that we will be able to control the anger and able to forgive others only if we can control ourselves for not doing evil deeds.

3.1.4. *Expressives*

The lesser occurrences number in Nouman speech are expressives. The expressives type's function used by Nouman was praising and expressing hope or wish. In the speech, he mostly expressed the praise for Quran as it provides beautiful *ayat* with seven utterances. Moreover, the least expressives function was expressing hope with five utterances for the Muslim community at the end of his speech. The following utterances are some examples identified as expressive types of illocutionary acts:

- (4) **"*Subhanallah*. 'I've given you Fatimah and the great Quran', I shouldn't go anywhere else, *Subhanallah* it's such an amazing *Kalam* from Allah (swt)."**

The utterance (4) indicated expressives acts with praising as the function. Following to Yule (1996), expressives speech acts stated the feeling of the speaker. Nouman was using an Islamic expression that was *Subhanallah* meaning "Allah is perfect". The terms

of *Subhanallah* used by the Muslims to praise Allah. In the utterance, Nouman was praising Allah for the grand Quran and the Surah Fatihah. It is in line with the finding of Anggraeni & Tajuddin (2018) that praising God in every opportunity for Islamic values-related speeches and texts is useful for building communication in homogenous group bonded with religion.

3.2. The Functions of Illocutionary Acts

Regarding some types of illocutionary acts used by Nouman Ali Khan in his videos, which were representative, directive, expressive, and commissive, the functions of these types are as follows;

3.2.1. Functions of Representatives

The functions of representatives acts used in Nouman's speeches consist of five functions. They were informing, stating, describing, reminding and concluding. Stating defined as something that a speaker says or writes as an official or a legitimate sign of the speaker status, or an action done to express an opinion. In this case, Nouman has broader knowledge about Islam than the audience. As a religious lecturer, Nouman has opinions and beliefs that he assuredly believes to be true according to his experience and knowledge.

(5) **"So what we're learning in Surah Noor is the standard protocol of discipline."**

From the utterances (5), Nouman was stating about what we could understand from Surah Noor was the standard protocol of discipline. In this speech, Nouman was talking about asking and giving permission in every community. Therefore, he used stating function to state that Surah Noor could be our guide in this matter. Stating, in this case, can be used to (implicitly) persuading or convincing the hearer on the subject matter, as argued by Searle, Kiefer and Bierwisch (1980).

In addition to stating, informing functioned to tell and give knowledge, information or fact. Here is the example of informing contained in the speech.

(6) **"This was the first time in Islamic history that it was mandatory on any one capable of fighting to come and join the army. Before that it was voluntary, if you didn't know. *Badr* and *Uhud* were voluntary."**

In this utterance, Nouman informs that the battle of *Tabuk* was the first battle in Islam without voluntary army recruitment system because everyone has to join the battle. Then, he also informs the listener that *Badr*, *Uhud* and every battle before *Tabuk* used the voluntary system to form the army. Thereby, it seems that Nouman uses informing to address a particular notion or proposition (Ilyas & Khushi, 2012).

Thus, describing is to tell or report details about aspects, characteristics, events or features of a subject matter. In delivering a speech, it would be easier for a speaker to provide a sample description of the material so that the listener could better understand it.

(7) **"Nobody takes responsibility, everybody thinks somebody will do it and when you come back next week, you look at each other and X says, 'You didn't do it, but you were nodding your head.' Y replies, 'Yeah, but you were nodding it more than I was.' Nobody gets it done."**

In the utterance, Nouman was describing an event that might happen if there is a diffusion of responsibility in teamwork. Moreover, Nouman was describing a simple description about a team that was given a task that has to be finished in one week. Then, there was nothing done because everyone thought that someone would do it. By giving this description, the speaker expected that the listener would have a better understanding of the importance of responsibility. The use of describing is preferred here instead of pointing (Piwek, 2007), as Nouman is trying to refer to the speech act because the context is very much in verbal means instead of non-verbal ones.

3.2.2. *Functions of Directives*

There are many functions of directives speech acts ranging from forcing to challenging (Pamungkas, Rustono, & Utanto, 2018). In this study, there were five functions of directives that were used by Nouman in his speeches. They were suggesting, commanding, inviting, forbidding and questioning.

The function of suggesting was to give an idea, plan, or action to be considered by someone. As an Islamic speaker, Nouman needed to give many suggestions to the audience in his speeches.

- (8) "But you're a leader, **you have to make *dua* for your people**, the ones that make you that mad, **you have to make *istighfaar* for them absolutely in private**, it's not in public."

From the utterance, Nouman suggests that if we were a leader, we had to pray for people that make us mad in organisation privately. Nouman was giving this suggestion according to what Allah's commandment in the Qur'an. Martínez Flor (2005) argues that suggesting in speech act may well related to politeness strategy of a face-threatening act in a way that it seeks for hearer commitment for future action.

Commanding has a function to give orders to someone to do something directly. In the speeches, we found a commanding function that Nouman directly used to ask the listener to do something.

- (9) "Islamic School teachers, **listen up.**"

Nouman used commanding in this utterance to give suggestion later on the next utterances for the Islamic teachers about the kids that make them mad to make *du'a* for the kids. Consequently, Nouman expected that he would get special attention from the Islamic teacher who might listen to the speech by commanding this directly. By doing so, Nouman is exercising commanding to imply the act of commanding as a typical imperative utterance in the speech (Purnanto & Tarjana, 2018).

From the data, we found the use of inviting utterances by Nouman that asked the audience to do something directly.

- (10) "**Let's push that into contemporary times and imagine we are in a meeting** and it is decided that by the end of this week you three X, Y and Z will get three tasks done."

In this utterance, Nouman was inviting the audience to imagine a situation. The situation that Nouman would bring was about an example of a team in a community that given a task to be done after the meeting. For the next utterances, Nouman described that situation where the team has no responsibility to complete the task. Therefore, in the

utterance above, Nouman was inviting the audience to imagine the situation. In a situation whereby Nouman is acting as the teacher, and the audience is serving as the learners, this type of directive speech act is commonly utilised (Fitriani, 2020).

3.2.3. *Functions of Commissive*

The speaker used commissive to commit the listener to do some future action. These functions can be used in intercultural contexts (Al-Mansoob, Patil, & Alrefaee, 2019), and political settings (Ulum, Sutopo, & Warsono, 2018) or educational circumstances (Basra & Thooyibah, 2017). Commissive acts found in two forms in this data; promising and warning.

Promising is the function of commissives to assure someone that something will happen. Nouman was using promising in some utterances according to the Quran that provides Allah's promises. He also used promising function to commit himself about something that he would do later.

(11) **"If you speak the right word Allah will fix your affairs, if you say the right things Allah will fix your matters."**

According to the utterance, Nouman promised something that he assured would happen. Before this utterance, Nouman had said that we had to think before saying something. Accordingly, in this utterance, he was promising that Allah will fix our problems if we speak in the right way. It is what Yamada (2007) called deontic logic in promising, whereby it implies an obligation for future consequences for present actions.

The function of warning serves as an indication of imminent danger, problem, or in other hostile conditions. Generally, Nouman used warning to the listener to be considered by the listener about a bad situation that might happen.

(12) **"But here's the thing that will save you or destroy you, if you don't remember it, it will destroy you."**

The utterance above used by Nouman for warning the listener about a bad situation that would happen if they did not do the thing that they have suggesting and stating in the several previous utterances. This speech was about giving a sincere suggestion. Here, Nouman was warning the listener if we did not remember the guidelines of giving opinion or suggestion, it would destroy ourselves. In the given context, the warning is made by Nouman to constitute performative speech act pragmatically in prophetic traditions and religious contexts (Hussein, 2005).

3.2.4. *Functions of Expressives*

The expressive act had two functions based on what we have analysed. The functions were praising and expressing hope or wish. Direct literal, direct non-literal and indirect literal and indirect non-literal speech acts are some of the typologies of this function of speech act (Handayani, 2015). This type of speech acts may contextually depend on ages, linguistic proficiency, multiculturalism and group sizes of the conversation (Carretero, Maíz-Arévalo, & Martínez, 2015).

The function of praising is to show appreciation or approval or characteristics of an object. In Nouman speeches, he used praising for the Prophet(s), Allah and the Quran.

(13) **"What an amazing human resource allocation he did, it's incredible."**

Nouman was talking about the Prophet (saw). He was praising the Prophet according to several previous utterances, where he is stating and describing the Prophet's way in allocating talent of people. Hence, in this utterance, Nouman was praising the Prophet as the best example of human resource allocation. Linguistically speaking, (Mahmud, 2017) asserts that this is the type of equivalent compliment response towards the Prophet Muhammad's achievement.

The function of expressing hope or wish is to expecting something possible to happen in the future. Nouman was using this to expressing his wish for the listener.

(14) **"This *ayat* like I said before and hopefully you see now how this is the golden *ayat* of leadership."**

This utterance has a function to express hope or wish. In this utterance, Nouman was expecting the audience to understand the *ayat* of leadership that he has explained before. The *ayat* that he mentioned before could be a guide for the audience in acquiring good leadership. Also, Lamb (2016) argues that wishing or hoping is a type of religious speech act, or at least, often represent as the virtue of magnanimity in religious or theological backgrounds.

4. Conclusion

There are four categories of speech acts that were identified in three videos of Nouman Ali Khan's speeches. They are representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives. Declaration was not found in this study because it needs specific circumstances. This study, thus, has sought to identify the pragmatic of illocutionary acts in the religious discourse of Nouman Ali Khan's speeches.

These findings have given important information and great depth that will allow experts interested in the study of pragmatics and linguistics to introduce this type of speech in their teaching. They can use it not only for linguistics - related subjects or courses such as Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis or the like, but also extend the use to some other interdisciplinary contextual subjects such as English for Islamic Studies, Public Speaking and Speech Analysis. Many other subjects could derive similar implications from the findings accordingly.

Finally, further work is required to examine the developing practices of speech acts in modern-day conversations not limited to one dimensional setting like sermon or lecturing, but also from particular other types of two-dimensional discussions with more participants. Further research can thus shed light on the dynamics of speech act reliability to thrive and survive the seemingly fast-changing world whereby language and its use is at the core of explaining how it practically used in reality.

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