

## **Speech Act Strategies in Social Media Interactions Pragmatic Analysis of TikTok Comments**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze speech act strategies in social media interactions, particularly in TikTok's comment section, using a pragmatic approach. TikTok, as a short video-based platform, functions not only as an entertainment medium but also as a discursive space where users perform various social actions through language. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with data in the form of user comments on TikTok posts that have a high level of interaction. Data collection was carried out through non-participant observation and documentation, while data analysis included reduction, classification, pragmatic interpretation, and drawing conclusions. The theoretical framework used includes Austin and Searle's speech act theory, Grice's cooperative principle, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and Fairclough's critical discourse perspective. The results show that expressive speech acts and indirect directives are the most dominant strategies, manifested through implicature, humor, and politeness strategies. These strategies are used to convey criticism, build solidarity, negotiate identity, and reproduce and challenge power relations in political discourse, education, entertainment, and da'wah. These findings confirm that speech acts in TikTok comments are not neutral, but rather function as ideological and contextual social practices in digital culture, particularly among Generation Z.

**Keywords:** speech acts; pragmatics; TikTok comments; politeness strategies; implicature; digital discourse; Generation Z

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## **I. Introduction**

The development of social media has significantly changed the pattern of language interaction in digital society. Platforms such as TikTok not only function as entertainment spaces, but also as public communication arenas that allow users to build meaning, identity, and social relations through short texts, emojis, and visual multimodality ( Hayatunpupus, SM (2025) ). In this context, TikTok comments become a form of digital speech that is full of pragmatic strategies, because they are produced in fast, spontaneous, and often anonymous communication situations. Linguistically, TikTok comments can be understood as speech acts that not only convey information, but also carry out social actions, such as praising, criticizing, satirizing, provoking, or building solidarity ( Delisnawati, D. (2023).

The speech act theory proposed by Austin and developed by Searle provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding how digital utterances function illocutionarily and perlocutionarily ( Muthmainnah, I., Sari, NN, Febriani, S., & Saleh, M. (2025) ). However, the social media context presents new complexities, such as the loss of nonverbal cues, the use of non- standard language , and the involvement of a massive and heterogeneous audience. TikTok, with its algorithmic characteristics and participatory culture, strengthens the pragmatic dynamics in the comment column. Interaction is no longer two-way, but polylogical, where a single utterance can trigger a series of responses, negotiations of meaning, and discourse conflicts. Therefore, a pragmatic analysis of speech act strategies in TikTok comments is important for understanding how language is used as a social practice in contemporary digital space ( Aulia, Lubis, NA, Siagian, Lumbanraja, (2025).

This research has high academic and social urgency. Academically, pragmatics studies are still dominated by the analysis of oral speech in face-to-face contexts or conventional written texts, while linguistic practices on social media, particularly TikTok, have not received much in-depth study from a speech act perspective. Yet, digital interactions present new linguistic patterns that challenge classical concepts of context, politeness, and speaker intention. Socially, TikTok comments often become a space for the reproduction of symbolic power, hate speech, sarcastic humor, and even digital bullying. The speech act strategies used in comments can influence public perception, shape opinions, and trigger broad emotional responses.

By understanding these speech act strategies, this study can contribute to improving digital pragmatic literacy, especially in building more ethical and responsible communication on

social media ( Usman, U., & Chaidir, M. (2025)). In addition, this study is relevant in the context of Indonesia's multicultural and multilingual society, where variations in language, dialect, and register often appear in TikTok interactions. Pragmatic analysis can reveal how speech act strategies operate in this diversity, while reflecting the social and ideological values that develop in the digital space.

Although there has been extensive research on language in social media, several gaps underlie the importance of this research. First, most previous studies have focused on sentiment analysis, critical discourse analysis, or general linguistic phenomena, while specific studies on speech act strategies in TikTok comments are still limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. Second, existing pragmatics research generally utilizes spoken speech data or formal texts, thus failing to fully accommodate the multimodal, ephemeral, and contextual characteristics of TikTok comments, which are visual content. Consequently, understanding the illocutionary functions and perlocutionary effects in digital interactions remains incomplete. Third, few studies have linked speech act strategies to the dynamics of user interactions, such as response patterns, conflict escalation, or the formation of solidarity in the comments section. Therefore, this research offers novelty by holistically integrating speech act analysis and the context of TikTok social media interactions.

## **II. Method**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a pragmatic framework ( Sholikhah, A. (2016) . This approach was chosen to deeply understand the meaning, function, and speech act strategies used by users in the TikTok comment column. Qualitative research allows researchers to interpret linguistic practices in the social, cultural, and situational contexts that underlie digital interactions ( Sukmana, Machmud, Basri, Khoirurrosyidin, (2025)). The object of the study is speech acts in TikTok user comments . The data sources for this study are written comments on TikTok video uploads that meet the following criteria: 1). The video is public and can be accessed openly. 2). The video has a high level of interaction (significant number of comments). 3). Comments contain interactive communication practices (responses, debates, support, criticism, or humor). The data is in the form of comment text , including replies, emojis, and other linguistic symbols that function as pragmatic markers.

non-participant observation techniques , namely researchers observed interactions without being directly involved ( Hasanah, H. (2016) . Documentation techniques , by archiving

comments through screenshots or digital text copies. Data collection was carried out purposively, namely selecting comments that represent variations in speech act strategies in social media interactions. Data analysis was carried out through several stages: 1). Data reduction , by selecting comments that are relevant to the research objectives. 2). Data classification , based on the type of speech act (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) and speech act strategy (direct/indirect, literal/non-literal). 3). Pragmatic interpretation, by analyzing the speaker's intentions based on the context of the situation, relationships between users, and digital communication norms. 4). Drawing conclusions, by formulating dominant speech act strategy patterns in TikTok comments. Data validity was maintained through theoretical triangulation, by comparing the results of the analysis using several pragmatic concepts. Thorough context analysis, which takes into account the upload situation, video topic, and the relationships between commenters. Data trail audit, which involves documenting original comments as evidence for the analysis.

### III. Results and Discussion Results

TikTok comment interactions show the dominance of expressive speech acts and indirect directives packaged through implicatures, humor, and politeness strategies (Sulistianah, S., Nurhasanah, F., & Rohbiah, TS (2025). This practice reflects the fluid, reflective, yet ideological character of Gen Z communication, while also showing how social media has become a space for the articulation of political discourse, education, entertainment, and da'wah in the context of Indonesian digital culture.

**Table 1.** Results of Analysis of TikTok Comment Speech Act Strategy

| No | TikTok Comments  | Types of Speech Acts (Searle) | Pragmatic Function             | Strategy                                   |
|----|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1  | <i>"If campaign promises continue like this, the people will just be spectators, right?"</i> | Indirect directive            | Criticizing policies           | Implicature (Grice), Off-record            |
| 2  | <i>"I totally agree! Educational content like this should appear more often."</i>            | Expressive                    | Giving appreciation            | Positive politeness                        |
| 3  | <i>"It's funny, but why does it feel like you're sarcastic about the government?"</i>        | Representative                | Expressing an implied opinion  | Implicature + humor                        |
| 4  | <i>"MashaAllah, the preaching is light but it touches the heart."</i>                        | Expressive                    | Praise and affirm              | Positive politeness                        |
| 5  | <i>"Gen Z is like this, if you don't relate, skip it."</i>                                   | Representative                | Building generational identity | In-group marker                            |
| 6  | <i>"Maybe before talking about morals, check the data first?"</i>                            | Indirect directive            | Reprimand / correct            | Face-threatening act (FTA) with mitigation |
| 7  | <i>"Content like this makes you think, not just entertain you."</i>                          | Representative                | Positive evaluation            | Cooperative principle                      |

|    |  |                     |                             |                        |
|----|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 8  | "Relaxed but effective, very Gen Z style preaching."                     | Expressive          | New style legitimacy        | Positive politeness    |
| 9  | "If all officials were like this, Indonesia would be safe."              | Implicit commissive | Political hopes             | Optimistic implicature |
| 10 | "Those who commented negatively probably haven't watched it to the end." | Representative      | Delegitimize other comments | Discursive-ideological |

Comments on TikTok often use conversational implicatures, particularly violations of the maxim of clarity. And relevance for conveying criticism indirectly (examples 1 & 9). Humor and irony (example 3) function as *low-risk criticism strategies* to remain socially cooperative. This shows that TikTok users maintain cooperation while remaining critical, typical of Gen Z digital communication culture. Politeness strategies appear dominant through positive politeness with praise, solidarity, and group affiliation (examples 2, 4, 8). Off-record strategies for political or moral criticism (examples 1 and 6) to avoid direct *face-threatening acts*. *This confirms that the TikTok comment space is an arena for face negotiation, not just free expression.*

TikTok comments function as discursive practices with rapid, collective, and repetitive production and consumption of meaning. Social practices shape ideologies (pro/con of the government, new styles of preaching, Gen Z identities). Example 10 demonstrates symbolic power relations, where certain comments attempt to delegitimize other voices. Thus, speech acts on TikTok are not neutral, but operate within structures of power, ideology, and social representation.

## Discussion

### 1. Types and Distribution of Speech Act Strategies in TikTok Comments

Based on the analysis of TikTok user comments, it was found that the dominant speech act strategies include representative, directive, expressive, and commissive speech acts, with varying frequencies according to the context of the content and the dynamics of digital interactions (Wardhayani, Sarastiwi, Almaas, (2025)). Expressive speech acts appear most dominant, especially in the form of praise, mockery, sarcasm, and spontaneous emotional expressions. The dominance of these speech acts indicates that the TikTok comment space

functions as an arena for fast and reactive affective expression. Meanwhile, directive speech acts are widely used in the form of suggestions, indirect commands, and implicit requests, such as invitations to follow an account, support a particular opinion, or direct the creator's behavior. Representative speech acts appear in the form of opinion statements, truth claims, and interpretations of video content (Putriyani, A., Febrianti, DN, Sari, (2025). As for commissive speech acts, although more limited in number, they are present in the form of promises of support, symbolic threats, or collective commitments that are often performative. This finding is in line with Searle's classification of speech acts which shows that the type of speech act does not only function to convey linguistic meaning, but also reflects the speaker's social goals in a particular communication context.

## 2. Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies in Digital Contexts

Analysis shows that TikTok comments tend to blur the lines between politeness strategies and impoliteness, (Susanti, NR, & Shofiyuddin, H. (2024). Many expressive and directive speech acts are delivered directly without mitigation, which in the context of face-to-face communication can be considered face-threatening acts. However, in the digital space of TikTok, these strategies are often accepted as a normal form of communication style. This phenomenon can be explained through Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, where the concept of *face* is redefining in the digital context.

TikTok's relative anonymity, relaxed social distancing, and participatory culture allow users to engage in more direct and confrontational speech acts without significant social consequences (Amalia, I., 2025). Thus, the digital context creates new pragmatic norms that modify the application of classical politeness strategies. The meaning of speech acts in TikTok comments cannot be separated from the multimodal digital context, which includes comment text, video visuals, audio, captions, emojis, and the use of hashtags. A lexically neutral utterance can function as satire or sharp criticism when linked to the visual context and video narrative.

This reinforces the contextual pragmatics view that utterance meaning is situational and interactional. In the TikTok context, context is not only linguistic but also algorithmic and performative. Certain comments are deliberately designed to elicit further interaction (likes,

replies, or controversy), so speech acts function simultaneously as communication strategies and visibility strategies.

### **3. Speech Acts as Social Practice and Identity Negotiation**

The analysis results show that speech acts in TikTok comments serve as a means of negotiating users' social identities . Through expressive and representative speech acts, users position themselves as supporters, opponents, critical observers, or members of a particular community ( Ramadhan, AK (2024)) . This strategy demonstrates that speech acts not only represent individual attitudes but also social and ideological affiliations.

Within the framework of critical pragmatic theory, this speech act practice can be understood as a form of social action that is intertwined with digital power relations ( Wibowo, W. (2022) . Content creators, users with many followers, and comments prioritized by the algorithm have stronger illocutionary power than other users. Thus, the effectiveness of speech acts on TikTok is not only determined by the structure of the language, but also by the speaker's position in the digital ecosystem.

The findings of this study confirm that classical speech act theory (Austin and Searle) remains relevant, but needs to be recontextualized in the digital communication landscape ( Prahesti, RI (2025). TikTok as a fast and multimodal interaction space shows that the boundaries between locution, illocution, and perlocution are becoming increasingly fluid. Audience responses are often non-linear and influenced by external factors such as trends, algorithms, and viral culture ( Fatmawaty ,, Ramli Hatma, Reski Fausia Putri, (2024). Thus, pragmatic analysis of social media needs to integrate linguistic approaches with digital media and sociocultural studies. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of speech act strategies as dynamic, performative, and visibility-oriented communicative practices.

## **IV. Conclusion**

This study shows that TikTok user comments constitute a complex and strategic linguistic practice, where speech acts function not only as a means of conveying messages but also as social actions that reflect power relations, identity, and ideology in the digital space. The results of the pragmatic analysis reveal that expressive, indirect directive, and representative speech acts dominate comment interactions, especially on political, educational, entertainment, and da'wah issues that are widely consumed by Generation Z. The dominance of these speech acts confirms

that the TikTok comment column functions as an arena for affective expression, veiled social criticism, and negotiation of meaning that takes place quickly and polylogically.

Speech act strategies in TikTok comments are often packaged through implicature, humor, irony, and the use of contextual politeness and impoliteness strategies. From the perspective of Grice's cooperative principle, users often intentionally violate the maxims of clarity and relevance to convey criticism or evaluation indirectly. Meanwhile, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory suggests that the concept of *face* in digital communication is shifting, with *off-record* and *positive politeness strategies* being used flexibly in accordance with more fluid and egalitarian social media interaction norms.

Furthermore, from Fairclough's critical discourse perspective, speech acts in TikTok comments can be understood as discursive and social practices intertwined with digital power dynamics. Comments not only reproduce or challenge dominant discourses, but also play a role in building legitimacy, delegitimizing other views, and shaping collective identities, particularly those of Generation Z. Thus, the effectiveness and illocutionary power of speech acts are not solely determined by linguistic structure, but also by the algorithmic context, the speaker's social position, and the viral culture inherent in the TikTok platform.

Theoretically, the findings of this study confirm that Austin and Searle's classical speech act theory remains relevant, but requires contextual adaptation in the analysis of multimodal and visibility-oriented digital communication. Practically, this study contributes to the development of digital pragmatic literacy by demonstrating the importance of understanding speech act strategies in building more ethical, critical, and responsible communication on social media. Thus, a pragmatic analysis of TikTok comments not only enriches linguistic studies but also provides a broader understanding of the dynamics of interaction and discourse in contemporary digital society.

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