



Analyzing Illocutionary Acts of Netizen Comments in Football: Racism-Related Instagram Post

Danisy Azzura¹, Al Maghvira Chan^{*2}

^{1,2}Universitas Andalas, Padang, Indonesia

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Correspondence :
almaghvirahchan@hum.unand.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the illocutionary acts of comments on Instagram directed towards soccer players, focusing on Vinicius Junior who posted about racism. The theories used in this research are Searle's (1979) illocutionary act types and Leech's (1983) illocutionary act functions. The purpose of this research is to identify and categorize comments based on their types and functions. The data consists of 201 English comments responding to Vinicius Junior's Instagram post on May 22, 2023, when he voiced his opposition to racism in soccer. The research results indicate that the expressive illocutionary act type is the most dominant (44.28%), followed by assertive (31.84%), directive (17.91%), and commissive (5.97%). No declarative illocutionary acts were found in the dataset. Additionally, the most frequently used illocutionary act function is the convivial function (57.71%), reflecting messages of support and moral encouragement, followed by the conflict function (28.36%), representing hate speech and racist comments, then the collaborative function (7.46%) and lastly the competitive function (6.47%). Expressive illocutionary acts include expressions of feelings such as like, sorrow, praise, and reproach.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication tool that everyone uses in daily life to provide information, argument, message, and to express thought, feeling, and goal to others. In the process of communication, speech acts occur when speaker saying something and how listeners understand what they mean. Yule (1996, p. 47) states that speech acts are actions performed through utterances delivered through apologies, complaints, compliments, invitations, promises, and requests. Austin (1962, pp. 103-104) stated that three types of action can be carried out by a speaker, namely locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts.

Illocutionary acts in speech acts do not only occur in direct interaction but also occur in social media, such as Instagram. Instagram users cover a wide range of professions, including football players. After posting pictures or videos to share moment with their fans, football players will get various kinds of positive and negative comments from Instagram users. Illocutionary acts of netizen comments to football players are interesting to discuss because most of the language used in the comments affects the reader.

One of example is the case when black football players speak up about racism on @vinijr's account.

On May 22, 2023, Vinicius Junior was subjected to racist abuse by fans at Valencia's Mestalla Stadium, an incident that drew global attention after he condemned LaLiga's failure to address racism, stating that it had become "normal" in Spanish football. His post sparked massive support as well as debate, with many expressing solidarities while others emphasized the ongoing prevalence of racism. Among the responses, the Instagram account @matheusgils advised him to "get out of this racist country, for your mental health!", which reflects a directive illocutionary act. In this case, the comment functioned as advice, urging Vinicius to leave Spain due to the persistent racial discrimination faced by Black footballers. Based on this example, it becomes clear that illocutionary acts can only be accurately identified and interpreted when analyzed in context.

The author found several previous studies related to illocutionary acts that support this research. Fatika Andhini (2020), a former student of Universitas Sumatera Utara, in her thesis entitled *Illocutionary Acts in Jubilee YouTube Channel*, identified four types of illocutionary acts which are assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive with assertive as the most dominant, and three illocutionary functions which are competitive, convivial, and collaborative. Another study, *An Analysis of Illocutionary Act Found in Kendall Jenner's Captions in Instagram* by Mifta Ardila (2019), analyzed captions written by the celebrity and revealed that assertive was the most frequently used type, while collaborative was the most dominant function. Directive illocutionary acts were the focus of Desi Reflina Sari (2017) in her thesis *An Analysis of Directive Illocutionary Acts Found in Selected Avengers Featuring Special Guest Stars Nova and Totally Awesome Hulk*, which showed that requests, commands, and suggestions were the main forms found in comic dialogues. Meanwhile, Partohap Saut Raja Sihombing et al. (2017) in their article *An Analysis of Illocutionary Act in Incredible 2 Movie* identified all five types of illocutionary acts based on Searle's theory, with directive acts emerging as the dominant type. Lastly, Dilla Ramayanti and Leni Marlina (2018) examined illocutionary acts in the animated film *Tangled*, employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and found variations in speech act types, with certain illocutionary categories appearing more frequently than others.

To fill the gap, this study aims to analyze the classification of illocutionary acts and the function of illocutionary acts through the title of research which is *Analyzing Illocutionary Acts of Netizen Comments in Football: Racism-Related Instagram Post*. Specifically, this research addresses two main questions: (1) What are the types of illocutionary acts found in netizen comments towards Vini's post? (2) What are the functions of illocutionary acts found in netizen comments towards Vini's post? In response to this question, this study has two objectives: first, to analyze the types of illocutionary acts contained in the comments of netizens towards Vini's post. Second, to interpret the functions of illocutionary acts contained in the comments of netizens towards Vini's Post.

The scope of this research focuses on finding out the types of illocutionary acts and functions of illocutionary acts in racist comments on Instagram of football players. The author selects comments on the account of the black football player @vinijr which will be taken in the post of May 2023. In the case of research, the author analyses this research based on the theories of Searle (1979, pp. 12-17) and Leech (1983, pp. 104-105).

METHOD

This study focuses on analyzing illocutionary acts in Instagram comments responding to Vinicius Junior's post on May 22, 2023, where he spoke up against racism in football. The post was chosen because it attracted massive public responses, making it a suitable object to study how online discourse reflects attitudes toward racism. As a well-known Black football player in Europe who often becomes a target of racial abuse, Vinicius Junior (@vinijr) provides a strong case for examining how netizens express their stance through language.

The data of this research were obtained directly from Vinicius Junior's Instagram account, making them primary data. Comments were collected in August–September 2024 from the May 22, 2023 post, which generated over 600,000 responses. From these, only English comments were considered, while emojis, GIFs, advertisements, and unrelated remarks were excluded. After filtering, the researcher compiled a total of 201 comments, which were then stored in screenshots as the final dataset.

The analysis was conducted by classifying each comment according to Searle's (1979) theory of

illocutionary acts which are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative and Leech's (1983) categorization of functions, namely competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. Each utterance was examined in context to determine both type and function. In order to provide a more in-depth discussion, six representative utterances from each category were selected based on their relevance to the issue of racism, clarity of meaning, and representativeness of the speech act.

The findings are presented descriptively and supported with quantitative data in the form of tables. Percentages were calculated to show the distribution of each type and function across the 201 data. To determine the frequency of use, the following formula was applied:

$$\frac{\text{The type of illocutionary act frequency} \times 100\%}{\text{Total of Data}}$$

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses research related to the research question. This research presents identification of five types of illocutionary acts and the functions of illocutionary acts. The five types of illocutionary acts classified include representatives (assertive), directives, commissive, expressive, declaratives. In addition, there are four functions of illocutionary acts that can be identified, namely competitive, convivial, collaborative, conflictive. There are 201 comments responding to racism on Instagram @vinijr that will be analyzed. A table of types of illocutionary acts and functions of illocutionary acts is provided in this study. The data has all types of illocutionary acts and functions of illocutionary acts. From the analysis, the types of illocutionary acts and functions of illocutionary acts can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. The Percentage of Types of Illocutionary Acts found in Instagram Comments on Vini Junior

No	Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Representative (assertive)	64	31,84%
2	Directives	36	17,91%
3	Commissives	12	5,97 %
4	Expressives	89	44,28%
5	Declaratives	0	0%
	Total	201	100%

Based on Table 1 above, the writer categorizes five types of illocutionary acts used in the netizen's comments in replying to Vini Jr Instagram account. They are representative (assertives) with 64 data (31,84%), followed by directives with data 36 (17,91%), commissives with 12 data (5,97%), and expressives with 90 data (44,28%). The writer did not find the use of declaratives in this research. The most frequently used illocutionary acts are expressives to show sympathy, support, or anger. Some people, even act racist towards Vini Junior. Expressive type is more used than the other types. It because many comments contain emotional reactions to the racism experienced by Vini Junior. The people tend to use expressive illocutionary acts to show sympathy, support, or anger. Some people, even act racist towards Vini Junior. The situation of racism in soccer creates strong emotional reactions from fans, both in support and opposition. This leads to more expressive types illocutionary acts than the other. Comments from people who support Vini Junior are usually more in the form of motivation and solidarity, all of which fall into the expressive category. Besides that, comments that show racist behavior towards Vini Junior also fall into the expressive category, because they show hatred for Vini Junior.

Table 2. The Percentage of Function of Illocutionary Acts found in Instagram Comments on Vini Junior

No	Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
1	Competitive	13	6,47%
2	Convivial	116	57,71%
3	Collaborative	15	7,46%
4	Conflictive	57	28,36%
	Total	201	100%

As shown in Table 2 above, the writer found and categorised the functions of illocutionary acts used by netizens in their comments on @vinijr's Instagram. These functions are competitive, convivial, collaborative, and conflictive. Competitive was used with 13 data (6.47%), convivial was used with 116 data (57.71%), collaborative was used with 15 data (7.46%), and conflictive was used with 58 data (28.36%). The most dominant function of illocutionary acts used in netizen comments is convivial. Convivial functions include actions in communication that strengthen social relationships, such as congratulating, comforting, or showing solidarity. This is because most of the comments contain messages of support, empathy, or moral encouragement to Vini Junior

Table 3. The Percentage of Types and Function of Illocutionary Acts found in Instagram Comments on Vini Junior

Types of Illocutionary Acts	Frequency				Total	Percentage
	Competitive	Convivial	Collaborative	Conflictive		
Assertive	6	35	6	17	64	31.84%
Directive	6	21	3	6	36	17.91%
Expressive	0	59	0	30	89	44.28%
Commissive	0	11	1	0	12	5.97%
Declaratives	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Total	12	126	10	53	201	100.00%

The most dominant type is expressive, with a total of 89 occurrences (44.28%), often used to express sympathy, support, anger, or even racist remarks directed at Vini Jr. This is followed by assertive acts with 64 data (31.84%), commonly used to state opinions or beliefs. Directive acts appear 36 times (17.91%), typically to give suggestions or commands. Commissive acts are the least frequent, with only 6 occurrences (5.97%), reflecting promises or commitments. In terms of functions of illocutionary acts, convivial functions appear most frequently (120 times), indicating that many comments were aimed at congratulating, encouraging, or supporting the addressee. Conflictive functions are also relatively high (53), showing the presence of negative or attacking comments. Meanwhile, competitive (12) and collaborative (10) functions are found in much smaller numbers. The dominance of expressive and convivial illocutionary acts aligns with Andhini (2020), who found that participants in digital conversations tend to express emotions and provide moral support rather than directives. However, unlike Ardila (2019), this study did not find any declarative acts, suggesting platform-specific usage differences between captions and comment sections.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the illocutionary acts found in Instagram comments responding to Vinicius Junior's post on May 22, 2023, when he spoke out against racism in football. Using Searle's (1979) classification of illocutionary types and Leech's (1983) categorization of functions, a total of 201 comments in English were analyzed. The findings reveal four types of illocutionary acts: expressive, assertive, directive, and commissive. Expressive acts were the most dominant (44.28%), reflecting sympathy, encouragement, anger, and even racist remarks. Assertive acts (31.84%) were used to state opinions or beliefs, directives (17.91%) to suggest or command, and commissive (5.97%) to express commitments, while no declaratives were identified in the data. In terms of functions, convivial was the most frequent (57.71%), followed by conflictive (28.36%), while competitive (6.47%) and collaborative (7.46%) were less common, showing that most netizens aimed to encourage and support the player, even though some negative and hostile comments also emerged. This research is limited to analyzing the types and functions of illocutionary acts in Instagram comments on Vinicius Junior's account, focusing only on one post and applying the frameworks of Searle (1979) and Leech (1983). It only examined English comments, which narrows the scope of the findings, and no declarative acts were identified, indicating further limitations in the dataset. Future research is suggested to expand the data by including multiple posts, other social media platforms, or different languages to provide more comprehensive insights. Further studies could also focus on the role of declaratives or explore how digital speech acts contribute to broader discussions on racism, identity, and social justice.

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