

THE ROLE OF GESTURES IN SHAPING THE INTERPRETATION OF SPEECH ACTS IN COMICS

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Abstract: The importance of this study resides in its contribution to comprehending the complex connection between speech and gestures in influencing the interpretation of speech acts. The findings have implications for enhancing communication tactics in digital comics and other types of discourse. The successful integration of verbal and nonverbal cues is vital for transmitting meaning efficiently. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the primary data for this research consists of the conversations said by the characters in the comic. In addition, the photos depicting the gestures of each character serve as the corroborating data in this study. In order to get the data, the researcher employs the observation method, utilizing three distinct techniques: tapping, non-participatory observation, and note-taking. In addition, the researcher employs a data analysis technique specific to qualitative research in order to analyze the data. Ultimately, the interaction between verbal and nonverbal signals is crucial for comprehending the intended significance of speech acts. Gesture has a vital part in influencing the understanding of speech acts, and it is essential to take into account both verbal and nonverbal signals for successful communication.

Keyword: *Speech act in comic; interplay; gesture and utterance; interpretation; pragmatic.*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, pragmatics is the sole branch of linguistics that acknowledges humans as language users. Although pragmatics and semantics both examine meaning, the specific focus of study in pragmatics differs from that in semantics (Fadillah, & Parmawati, 2020).

Experts have defined numerous terminologies related to pragmatics. Maier (2023) provides four definitions of pragmatics. Firstly, pragmatics is a field that analyzes the meaning conveyed by a speaker. Secondly, it is a field that investigates the meaning of utterances in relation to the context in which they are used. Thirdly, pragmatics goes beyond the study of individual utterances and examines the meaning conveyed or understood by the speaker and the listener. Lastly, pragmatics explores how the social distance between participants in a conversation affects the forms of expression used (Fadillah, & Parmawati, 2020).

Austin (in Thomas, 1995, p.31) contends that a reliable method of making a clear differentiation is not based on whether statements are true or false, but rather on the manner in which language is often employed in daily life. Austin's performative hypothesis, as outlined in the speech-act theory, suggests that when we speak, we not only convey information but also execute acts. This means that our words have the power to accomplish more than just make claims (Fadillah, & Parmawati, 2020).

A speech act comprises three interconnected concepts: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. According to Fadillah, & Parmawati (2020), the locutionary act refers to the act of producing meaningful speech, the illocutionary act focuses on the speaker's intention or purpose, and the perlocutionary act deals with the effects of the listener understanding the speaker's intentions and taking action based on them.

In addition, as elaborated by Searle (in Gunarwan, 2004, p.9), it can be classified as both a direct and indirect speaking act. Direct speech acts have a clear connection between sentence structure and function, but indirect speech acts do not directly use the same form as other speech acts (Fadillah, & Parmawati, 2020).

Furthermore, speech acts can be categorized as either literal or non-literal speech acts depending on their semantic interpretation (Wibowo, Puspita, Nugroho, Mohd Nasir, Probosiwi, Tur, 2024). Literal speech acts refer to utterances that convey their intended meaning directly, while non-literal speech acts involve utterances that have additional or alternative meanings. Speech said by an individual can serve several macro-functions, including declaration, representation, expression, direction, and commitment (Beltrama, 2020). Speech acts are present in various forms of communication. One of them is depicted in a comic as it narrates a tale about human endeavors. A comic comprises numerous dialogues among its characters that can be examined through the speech act theory. Thus, the researcher has selected the comic titled "Milk Cake in the Reflection" by Ootsuki Ichika for analysis in this research.

This is the example of the dialogue in the comic which has speech act in it.



Figure 1. *The example of speech acts*

The image depicts dialogue spoken by the comic's character, Natsuki (the female), to Hiroki (the male). "Cease replicating my actions." You

always observe me through the reflection. What is the matter with you? Do you have any positive feelings towards me? This sentence encompasses two speech act concepts: the Locutionary Act, which pertains to the actual utterance made by the speaker, and the Perlocutionary Act, which refers to the impact or effect of the speaker's utterance. Natsuki uttered the lines in order to compel Hiroki to elucidate the significance of his actions to her, resulting in Hiroki providing an explanation as a consequence of her perlocutionary behavior. Next, the sentences can be classified as directive speech acts, encompassing actions such as ordering and commanding.

Through the aforementioned example, a novel perspective or insight can be discovered when examining speech acts. Many articles discussing speech acts primarily focus on data that is either sentence-based or utterance-based, often in the form of dialogues. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates that speech acts can be examined by analyzing gestures, which encompass the facial emotions and physical movements of a speaker. Additionally, speech acts can take the shape of both monologues and dialogues, depending on the specific circumstances. From this viewpoint, this research makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the characteristics of speech acts in the field of Pragmatics.

The foundation of speech act theory lies within the field of pragmatics and is derived from the British intellectual tradition known as 'Ordinary Language Philosophy'. Oxford philosopher John L. Austin introduced this concept in his renowned publication "How to Do Things with Words" in 1962 (Domaneschi & Bambini, 2020). Austin's conceptual framework, commonly referred to as 'speech act theory', was further expanded upon by the American philosopher, John R. Searle. According to Searle, speech actions occur in real-life language settings when individuals have a specific intention or thought (Rickard, 2021; Sartika, & Pranoto, 2021). According to Searle, the primary concern is determining the necessary conditions (such as sincerity and felicity) that enable communication to occur. From a broader standpoint, it is important to consider how a speech act operates inside society, or if it operates there at all (Altshuler, & Maier, 2022).

Speech acts refer to linguistic actions performed by individuals worldwide (Schlöder & Altshuler, 2023). It refers to the act of expressing something using one's own words through speech. The outcome of an action is a modification in the current condition. The recognition that words have

the power to alter the universe is significant not only within a theological framework (where these alterations may be influenced by personal beliefs or rely on the intensity of one's faith), but also in the context of speech act theory. Consequently, it has emerged as a significant linguistic revelation (Altshuler, & Maier, 2022). This act encompasses a multitude of distinct criteria. There are two types of speech acts: direct speech acts and indirect speech acts. According to J.R. Searle's theory on speech act, speech act also possesses its own idea and function Nurazizah, Tur, Evans, & Jones, 2024). The speech act theory encompasses three main categories: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. In addition, the macro-functions of speech acts include declaration, representational, expressive, directive, and commissive.

There are three speech act notions derived from J.R. Searle's thesis. The three acts are categorized as follows: the first is the locutionary act, the second is the illocutionary act, and the last is the perlocutionary act.

A locutionary act refers to the act of uttering or expressing something verbally. According to this definition, all of the statements made in the comic are considered locutionary acts as long as they are spoken by the speaker. Therefore, a narrative text cannot be classified as a locutionary act. An example of a locutionary deed is the statement 'I am considering the possibility of getting another pastry'.

An illocutionary act refers to the intentional act of speaking or uttering words with a specific intended meaning. An illustration of an illocutionary act:

'Is this coffee?' said the girl

The sentence serves to ascertain if the object she is indicating is indeed coffee or not.

A perlocutionary act refers to the impact or consequence that arises as a result of the speaker's statement. The effect can manifest in several forms, such as running, closing, or throwing. An illustration of a perlocutionary act:

'Give me coffee, please.'

Once a sentence is uttered by someone, it can have a profound impact on the listener, akin to offering a cup of coffee to the speaker.

In examining the speech act and its components, the researcher requires context in order to determine the most suitable one. The context of this research revolves around the analysis of comics as the primary subject of investigation (Tur & Sari, 2019; Tur & Putri, 2020). Consequently, the researcher utilizes the

characters' movements in the comic as a means to examine the context and determine the suitable speaking acts and their components.

Speech is accompanied by a multitude of gestures and visual representations. This type of gesture is an additional component of language, in addition to words, phrases, and sentences. According to Maier (2023) in his publication on Speech and Gesture Integration, a gesture can be described as the movement of the arms and hands in a specific area of space that is used for symbolic expression (Markovsky, & Frederick, 2020; Stets, Aldecoa, Bloom, & Winegar, 2021; Stets, Burke, Serpe, and Stryker, 2020), usually in front of the torso. Both the speaker and listener perceive those gestures to be communicative acts. Gestures encompass a wide range of actions that add to the description (Tur, Ahdiani, Kurniawan, & Fadillah, 2023). Various elements can influence the outcomes of different types of gestures, including the time correlations between the gestures and the accompanying speech (Benítez-Burraco, Ferretti, & Progovac, 2021). According to the explanation, there are two types of gestures: (1) Conventional Gesture, and (2) Unconventional Gesture.

a. Conventional Gesture

A conventional gesture is a type of gesture that follows established standards and norms. These regulations are the conventions employed by particular communities. According to Maier (2023), a convention refers to a set of rules that need to be followed in order for a gesture to be acknowledged. In addition to being referred to as traditional, this type of gesture is also known as symbols. Maier (2023) goes as far as to refer to them as quotable gestures.

Two common gestures in North America that signify approval are the "thumbs up" and the "OK" sign. The hand gesture representing "OK" is universally recognized, although it carries a significantly different connotation in certain regions. For instance, in Tunisia, it is not a symbol of approval but rather a sexual insult (Morris, Collett, Marsh, and O'Shaughnessy, 1979). The presence of cultural variety, even in limited geographical areas, implies the existence of established customs and practices (Maier, 2023).

Speech exhibits a capricious connection between the linguistic expression and the concept it represents. Unlike traditional gestures, which have a direct and meaningful connection, this gesture is distinct and lacks a clear and arbitrary link to its meaning (Heintz & Scott-Phillips, 2023). Conventional gestures are characterized by their dependence on preexisting standards that

determine the connection between their physical form and their intended meaning (Maier, 2023).



Figure 2. *The example of conventional gesture*

The individual's employment of a shoulder shrug gesture signifies a lack of comprehension on a particular matter. Universally, individuals employ this gesture to signify a lack of knowledge or indifference towards a certain matter.

Non-conventional gestures lack particular regulations, unlike conventional gestures. These gestures are not superfluous when used alongside speech. Instead, they provide an additional layer to speech that contributes to its overall meaning (Maier, 2023). These kinds of gestures are spontaneously made by the speaker while speaking.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the utilization of gestures in speech acts depicted in the comic "Milk Cake in the Reflection" by Ootsuki Ichika. The core data comprises the spoken words of the characters, while the secondary data encompasses their physical movements. The data were acquired by the process of observing and recording notes (Yang, 2022). The Data Card was used to characterize motions and verbal activities in each scenario throughout the analysis.

The analysis entailed the interpretation of the monologues and gestures in order to ascertain the speech acts executed (Sabrina & Tur, 2023). Expert opinions and reference materials were used to verify the accuracy and dependability of the interpretations. The study utilizes the principles of descriptive qualitative research and the pragmatics method, notably Speech Acts theory, to clarify the connection between gestures and speech acts.

In summary, the data collection process for this study utilized a note-taking technique to record the monologues and gestures of the characters in the comic. The data analyses involved the application of a descriptive qualitative design, specifically using the Pragmatics approach of Speech Acts theory. Rigorous validation methods were

employed to clarify the connection between monologues and gestures in constructing speech acts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article showcases many images depicting the gestures displayed by the characters Hiroki and Natsuki. These images are used to enhance the analysis of Speech Acts. The characters' motions, which follow their monologues, provide information that is not explicitly expressed through their words.

Locutionary act

Locutionary act is the act of saying something (House & Kadar, 2022; House & Kadar, 2023). Based on this definition, all of the utterances that are contained in the comic are locutionary acts as long as it is uttered by the speaker. Thus, a narrative text cannot be classified as locutionary act. The uttered-dialogue can be classified into locutionary act whether it has a response-dialogue or not.



Figure 3. *Hiroki is speaking with an exciting expression*

Hiroki : "Ahhahhah! Yup, it's definitely different. Ah!"

When viewed from an alternative vantage point, Hiroki noticed Natsuki, the woman in whom he had a romantic interest, seated at a considerable distance from him. He purposefully discussed the flavor of the food he was consuming to break the restaurant's stillness. Hiroki's action is categorized as a locutionary act because, in essence, it does not necessitate a response from the individual with whom he is engaged in conversation. Furthermore, he needs an interlocutor. His action was taken solely to capture Natsuki's interest.

A gaze towards Natsuki signifies a concealed admirer who is both astonished to see the individual they admire and intrigued by their activities. The alteration in Hiroki's countenance additionally symbolizes the elocutionary act, wherein the "different" in question signifies the

positive outcome he derived from the ambiance he was immersed in. This suggests that he frequents the restaurant frequently and perceives the ambiance as regular in light of Natsuki's nonattendance.



Figure 4. Hand gesture to close his mouth

The customary gesture of placing one's hand to one's mouth signifies the occurrence of an error in speech, the concealment of an object, or the manifestation of surprise. Hiroki's use of a locutionary act by covering his mouth with his hand creates the illusion that he is erroneously stating something, specifically that he is speaking too openly regarding the environment he is in at the moment. Even though it was merely a ruse to conceal his humiliation should Natsuki overhear his words, Hiroki intended for that to occur in conjunction with eye glimpses that exude the same twinkle of admiration as in the preceding scene.



Figure 5. The example of locutionary act

Natsuki : "I'm Natsuki."
Hiroki : "H-Hiroki."
Natsuki : "Hiroki, Huh? See you tomorrow, Hiroki."

Witness the locutionary act expression on Hiroki's face (in the upper left corner), which conveys his astonishment at viewing Natsuki's approach. That expression remained on his face until Natsuki departed and bid farewell. A sentiment of profound admiration that is beyond description.

From this standpoint, speech act theory needs to encompass the inherent meaning. More than merely using words to articulate the worth the speaker wishes to impart to the recipient is required. Consequently, it is critical to consider expression and gesture in conjunction with investigating the significance of speech acts (Zou & Wu, 2023).



Figure 6. Bowing gesture by the character

Bows possess a multitude of cultural connotations in Japan (Markovsky & Frederick, 2020). This gesture is considered conventional because the signified meaning is readily comprehensible to the general public and does not require further elucidation.

Given that Natsuki also did not receive a bow, Hiroki's bow can be considered a locutionary act in the context of this study. This bodily expression serves as confirmation that Hiroki holds Natsuki in high regard. Conversely, in an alternative context, a bow may signify an individual expressing remorse to the public or others for an incident under their watch.



Figure 7. Nervousness gesture

The assortment of facial expressions, gaze, body movements, and obeisance executed by Hiroki are an attempt to communicate his apprehension upon reuniting with Natsuki. With this in mind, Hiroki intends to communicate his emotions to Natsuki. Anxiety conveyed nonverbally through gestures is comparable to that of an individual who encounters a close friend or family member. Thus far, the Speech Act theory has yet to assist with this particular speech act.

Illocutionary act

Illocutionary act is the act of uttering something which has a specific meaning behind it.



Figure 8. The whole scene

Natsuki: "Tea, the B sandwich, French fries, and milk cake. Did we get too much? Can we eat it all?"
 Hiroki: "Y-Yeah."

Natsuki: "Oh, good. Here, your milk cake. You like these, don't you? You always order them."

Natsuki's statement, "Can we eat it all?" is an illocutionary act in which he references the established order. In terms of visual presentation, this cuisine exhibits considerable volume. "Here, your milk cake" (the second term) is an additional example of an illocutionary act, signifying that Hiroki will receive the food order.

The statements mentioned above were reinforced by the hand gesture that conveyed the food order to Hiroki. This is referred to as the context of manner or context of the situation in some research. However, a fundamental distinction exists between this particular context and gesture. What distinguishes the two is the role. Constraints and particularizations of the activity that is occurring are influenced by context. However, gesture can be considered the speech act in and of itself, as it is merely an activity that can supplement or substitute for utterance.



Figure 10. Natsuki's gesture

Hiroki: "But you were kicking your legs when you ate it. You weren't happy?"

Natsuki: "My legs? Oh. Well, that was... because you wouldn't come talk to me, so I was irritated."

Hiroki: "Oh!"

No leg-kicking gesture is depicted in the image comparable to the one Hiroki described to Natsuki. However, his sentence "you were kicking your legs" conveys to the reader that the action did indeed transpire. The reader appears to comprehend why Natsuki's expression shifted from usual optimism, characterized by upward-gazing eyes, to anger, delineated by pointed gazes directed at Hiroki.

The limb that swung and struck Hiroki

represented a message delivered by Natsuki to Hiroki. According to Symbolic Interactionism, social culture is characterized by the emergence of prestige differences Serpe, Stryker, & Powell, 2020; Thoits, 2020; Markovsky & Frederick, 2020). As a result of these distinctions, individuals from lower social strata are hesitant to initiate conversations with those from higher social strata. Feminine gender equality is a relative newcomer in patriarchal societies (Degen, 2023). Similarly, within the cultural milieu of Japan, this comic originated. Because Hiroki failed to initiate the conversation and Natsuki was hesitant, Natsuki delivered the message that Hiroki should initiate the conversation with a leg strike.

In response to Hiroki's validation of Natsuki's inquiry, nodding is another speech act-representing gesture (refer to image number two from the upper right).

Nodding has a different meaning in the next scene as seen in Figure 11.



Figure 11. *Another Natsuki's irritated expression*
Natsuki : "Still can't say a thing even after staring at me for so long. Why didn't I just ignore you..."
Hiroki : "Huh? U-um."

This nodding does not serve as validation of the statement made by Natsuki. However, Hiroki felt frustrated because he could not provide the anticipated response to Natsuki, as evidenced by his response, "Still can't say a thing even after staring at me for so long." When the same gesture is performed in a different context, its meaning changes; furthermore, subtle variations in facial expressions indicate more profound distinctions in significance.

Conversely, Natsuki exhibited a facial expression of averting her gaze, which communicated her apprehension regarding her circumstances. "Why didn't I simply ignore you?" indicates that Natsuki is awaiting a discussion with Hiroki regarding a particular matter. While not explicitly depicted in the image, Natsuki's waiting gesture suggests that it is an unrequited illocutionary act when she discovers Hiroki gazing at her for such an extended period of time

without speaking. This implies that Natsuki is also directing her attention towards Hiroki. However, Hiroki was aware that Natsuki was anticipating a topic of conversation.

Perlocutionary act

Perlocutionary act is the effect caused from the utterance that is spoken by the speaker. The effect can be in form of many things, like running, closing, or throwing.



Figure 12. *The context of situation*

Hiroki : "There's something different about it."

The incident above serves as an indirect illustration of a perlocutionary act. The term "perlocutionary act" is frequently defined in the literature as the interlocutor's reaction to the speaker's statement (Candra, et al, 2023). This response may manifest in various ways, including speech, gestures, or objects associated with the speaker's desires (Taguchi, 2023).

However, in this study, the interaction pattern exists in the reader's mind, such that the reader can envision the exchange between the two characters even though it is not depicted in the comic (Razzakberdiyevna, 2023; Boux et al, 2023). Perlocutionary act theory has introduced a novel concept in which a third person is authorized to manifest what is visually apparent.

As shown in Figure 12, Hiroki distinguishes between the two food-related variations in the two compartments. He postulated that the cuisine differed in flavor. His attention is then drawn to the window (bottom right), where he observes that the girl he favors is ordering an identical meal. Although not explicitly stated, Hiroki's inquiry concerning Natsuki's expression after consuming the food was conveyed through his gesture. It could be stated: "If you consume that food, you will certainly observe a distinction in flavor!" Following this, Natsuki appeared to have consumed the food, as evidenced by his joyful expression in response to Hiroki's thoughts.



Figure 13. *The anger of Natsuki's*
 Hiroki: "Ah. Um. Why are you..."
 Natsuki: "Stop copying me. You're always watching me in the reflection. What's with you? Do you like me or something?"



Figure 14. *Response of Hiroki's*
 Hiroki: That's not it all. You've got it all wrong!
 Natsuki: Really? Do I?

The two images above represent the perlocutionary act in its entirety. Natsuki struck Hiroki with an irate and agitated expression and issued the reprimand, "Cease Copying me." Figure 13 depicts Hiroki's reaction, which consists of a startled and anxious expression. Nevertheless, this remark appeared too general, as Hiroki clarified to Natsuki in the following scene, "That is not everything. "Everything is in your wrong!" A perlocutionary act necessitates a linear reaction to the speaker's message. The interlocuter ceases copying after the speaker commands, "Stop

Copying me!" This constitutes a perlocutionary act. It is presumed that the interlocuter comprehends the message communicated by the speaker and provides a response accordingly.



Figure 15. *The scene of perlocutionary act*
 Hiroki : "So I want to eat what you ate."
 Natsuki : "Ah"
 Hiroki : "Um! Next time, want to eat together? Ah. Um"
 Natsuki : "Okay."

The picture describes the situation when Hiroki asks Natsuki to eat together next time after explains the reason of his copying act. His act can be classified into perlocutionary act because beside of asking, it can give another impact for Hiroki and Natsuki to eat together proved from the 'Okay' answer of Natsuki.

The gesture used by Hiroki where he holds his pants shows that he is hesitated in asking Natsuki to eat together with him. This gesture can be classified into conventional gesture. Besides, Hiroki also wears terrified expression when asking Natsuki as if showing a doubtfulness whether she will accept it or not.

CONCLUSION

This study underlines the crucial significance of gestures in understanding and interpreting verbal acts in the comedic "Milk Cake in the Reflection." The research offers a more profound comprehension of how gestures amplify the significance of verbal communication by examining both verbal and non-verbal clues. The

findings indicate that gestures play a crucial role in communication, providing extra context that can modify the understanding of spoken words. Research has shown that listeners are more likely to accurately interpret the message when both speech and gesture are present. This is particularly important in situations where the verbal cue alone may be ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations. The readers are encouraged to employ their imaginations to satisfy their curiosity and uncover the narrative within the comic. By comprehending the notion of engaging with comics, the content of the comics can serve as an assessment of the speech act concept that has thus far been grasped. Literal expressions can communicate less than the scope of gestures in locutionary and illocutionary acts. Conversely, perlocutionary acts, which are not enacted in comic sequences, can be conceptualized and experienced by the reader. Speech acts necessitate context, whereas gestures constitute non-verbal expressions of speech acts.

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