

AN ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS AND FELICITY CONDITIONS IN THE DOCUSERIES TAYLOR SWIFT: THE END OF AN ERA

Reenad¹, Anisa Alawiyyah², Anisa Septia Megawati³
^{1,2,3}English Education Program, STKIP Bina Mutiara Sukabumi
¹rannudahshannah@gmail.com, ²nisaalawi@gmail.com,
³septiaanisa9393@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the categories of illocutionary acts and how their corresponding felicity conditions are fulfilled as observed in the docuseries Taylor Swift: The End of an Era. Unlike traditional linguistic studies, this qualitative research deliberately confines its scope strictly to the production of illocutionary forces and the essential criteria that render these communicative acts valid and successful, without including politeness or perlocutionary effects. To systematically analyze the language phenomena, this study employed a descriptive qualitative method as the research methodology. Data were collected from the utterances spoken by the main subject across six episodes through comprehensive transcribing, note-taking, and categorizing based on John R. Searle's theoretical framework. The findings revealed a total of 522 analyzed utterances spread across the categories. Among these classifications, assertive acts emerged as the absolute dominant illocutionary acts with 330 utterances, driven by the biographical nature of the docuseries to state facts, explain creative processes, and report past memories. Furthermore, the analysis of felicity conditions demonstrated that the sincerity condition was the most dominant criterion fulfilled with 358 utterances, establishing the linguistic validity, social contract, and psychological authenticity of the spoken utterances. In conclusion, this research highlights how pragmatic competence operates within public narratives. The results imply that understanding illocutionary structures enables a deeper comprehension of how public figures construct meaning, project authentic personas, and maintain communicative efficacy in contemporary media.

Keywords: *Illocutionary acts, felicity conditions, docuseries*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kategori tindak tutur ilokusional dan bagaimana kondisi keserasian yang koresponden dipenuhi sebagaimana diamati dalam dokuseri Taylor Swift: The End of an Era. Berbeda dengan studi linguistik tradisional, penelitian kualitatif ini secara sengaja membatasi ruang lingkupnya hanya pada produksi daya ilokusional dan kriteria penting yang membuat tindakan komunikatif tersebut valid serta berhasil, tanpa memasukkan kesantunan atau efek perlokusi. Untuk menganalisis fenomena bahasa secara sistematis, penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif sebagai metodologi penelitian. Data dikumpulkan dari ucapan-ucapan yang dituturkan oleh subjek utama di sepanjang enam episode melalui transkripsi komprehensif, pencatatan, dan pengkategorian

berdasarkan kerangka teoretis John R. Searle. Temuan mengungkapkan total 522 kalimat yang dianalisis tersebar di berbagai kategori. Di antara klasifikasi tersebut, tindak asertif muncul sebagai tindak ilokusional yang dominan mutlak dengan 330 kalimat, yang didorong oleh sifat biografis dokuseri untuk menyatakan fakta, menjelaskan proses kreatif, dan melaporkan ingatan masa lalu. Selanjutnya, analisis kondisi keserasian menunjukkan bahwa kondisi ketulusan merupakan kriteria paling dominan yang dipenuhi dengan 358 kalimat, menetapkan validitas linguistik, kontrak sosial, dan autentisitas psikologis dari ucapan yang diucapkan. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana kompetensi pragmatik beroperasi dalam narasi publik. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa memahami struktur ilokusional memungkinkan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang bagaimana tokoh publik mengonstruksi makna, memproyeksikan persona autentik, dan mempertahankan efikasi komunikatif dalam media kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Tindak ilokusi, kondisi keserasian, dokuseri

A. Introduction

Language serves not merely as a medium for exchanging information but as an instrument through which speakers perform actions. This function is the central concern of pragmatics, the branch of linguistics that examines how utterances are used to accomplish specific communicative purposes within context. Speech Act Theory, initiated by Austin (1975) and later systematized by Searle (1979), provides the most comprehensive framework for analyzing this phenomenon by conceptualizing every utterance as consisting of a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act. Among these three, the illocutionary act, the

actual communicative force behind an utterance such as promising, requesting, or asserting, has received the most sustained scholarly attention because it most directly reveals the speaker's intention.

Traditionally, illocutionary acts have been examined within scripted or face-to-face conversational data. However, the growth of streaming platforms has introduced docuseries as a new and underexplored genre of semi-naturalistic discourse, one that captures unscripted, high-stakes professional communication rather than fictional dialogue. The docuseries Taylor Swift: The End of an Era (Argott & Joyce, 2025) exemplifies this genre. It documents the behind-the-scenes interactions between a globally recognized artist

and her production team during an unprecedented commercial undertaking, offering rare access to spontaneous verbal acts produced under considerable operational pressure. Because every instruction, commitment, or statement made in this environment carries direct consequences for the technical execution of a large-scale tour, the docuseries constitutes a rich corpus for investigating how illocutionary force operates in real, non-fictional professional discourse.

Beyond identifying the type of illocutionary act performed, this study also investigates the felicity conditions that determine whether an illocutionary act is valid and successfully executed (Searle, 1979; Allan, 1997). These conditions, namely propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential condition, function as the internal criteria that must be satisfied for a speech act to be considered non-defective. Given that Taylor Swift's utterances in the docuseries operate simultaneously as personal expression and professional instruction, examining how these conditions are fulfilled offers insight into how she constructs a coherent,

trustworthy, and authentic public persona.

Previous pragmatic studies applying Searle's taxonomy have largely focused on scripted cinematic dialogue or fictional narratives, such as illocutionary acts in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (Ramadhani & Matoyah, 2026) and in the entertainment talk-show setting of *The Tonight Show* (Giasi et al., 2026). While these studies confirm the applicability of Searle's framework to media discourse, they leave underexplored the realization of illocutionary acts within non-fictional, biographical media that blend personal narrative and professional leadership. This study addresses that gap by examining a real-world, high-stakes docuseries in which language simultaneously performs emotional expression and operational coordination.

Based on this background, the present study is directed by two research questions: (1) what types of illocutionary acts are performed by Taylor Swift in the docuseries *Taylor Swift: The End of an Era*, and which category is the most dominant; and (2) how are the felicity conditions

fulfilled to ensure the success of her communication within the docuseries. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the categories of illocutionary acts realized by the subject based on Searle's (1979) theoretical framework and to determine which felicity condition is most consistently satisfied to guarantee communicative success. It is expected that this study will contribute both theoretically, by extending Speech Act Theory to the underexplored genre of professional docuseries, and practically, by providing empirical insight for linguistics students, media practitioners, and communication trainers into how public figures construct valid and authentic communicative acts in contemporary global media.

To maintain analytical focus, this study is limited to the illocutionary acts and felicity conditions realized in Taylor Swift's own utterances across the six episodes of the docuseries; perlocutionary and locutionary dimensions, as well as the utterances of other speakers such as crew members or family members, are excluded from the analysis. This scope allows for an in-depth, systematic classification of a

substantial dataset while preserving the pragmatic focus of the study.

B. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, selected because its core objective is to interpret and describe communicative phenomena as they naturally occur rather than to measure them statistically (Lim, 2025). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a research design functions as the overall structural blueprint used to address research questions, providing the tools to collect, organize, and analyze information in order to draw valid conclusions. The design integrates library research as the primary strategy for data acquisition, treating the docuseries video and its transcript as a stable, pre-recorded corpus (Sowers, 2024). Pragmatic analysis serves as the analytical framework used to examine the five categories of illocutionary acts and the four felicity conditions proposed by Searle (1979).

The primary data source is the docuseries Taylor Swift: The End of an Era (Argott & Joyce, 2025), consisting of six episodes. In

qualitative research of this kind, the researcher functions as the primary instrument, responsible for observing, transcribing, classifying, and interpreting the data (a human instrument). A laptop and media player software were used to support high-definition viewing and precise timestamping, while a structured data classification table was developed to organize each transcribed utterance according to its illocutionary act category and its fulfillment of the four felicity conditions.

Data collection was carried out through several systematic steps. The docuseries was viewed at least four times for different technical purposes: transcribing dialogue verbatim, recording precise timestamps, cross-checking audio accuracy, and verifying paralinguistic cues such as facial expression and tone that support the evaluation of felicity conditions. All utterances produced by Taylor Swift herself, excluding song lyrics, filler talk, and utterances by other speakers, were then transcribed, timestamped, and organized into a structured data matrix.

The collected data were analyzed following the interactive qualitative model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three concurrent stages. First, data reduction involved filtering the raw transcripts to retain only utterances that carry a clear illocutionary force. Second, data display involved organizing the reduced data into a systematic matrix containing the utterance, timestamp, illocutionary act category, and evaluation of the four felicity conditions. Third, conclusion drawing and verification involved calculating the frequency of each illocutionary act sub-type and felicity condition, then cross-checking these patterns against the theoretical framework to ensure the validity of the interpretation.

Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts Performed by Taylor Swift across Episodes

Epis ode	Asse rtive	Dire ctive	Commi ssive	Expre ssive	Declar ation
E01	70	3	2	25	-
E02	46	3	1	28	-
E03	54	3	1	34	-
E04	61	-	3	35	-
E05	38	2	-	25	-

Epis ode	Asse rtive	Dire ctive	Commi ssive	Expre ssive	Declar ation
E06	61	3	1	23	-
Tota l	330	14	8	170	0

Source: Research data, 2026 (N = 522
utterances)

C. Results and Discussion

1. Illocutionary Acts Performed by Taylor Swift

The analysis of six episodes of Taylor Swift: The End of an Era yielded a total of 522 utterances carrying identifiable illocutionary force, classified according to Searle's (1979) five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declaration. The distribution of these categories across episodes is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, assertive acts overwhelmingly dominate the data, occurring 330 times (63.2%) across the six episodes, followed by expressive acts with 170 occurrences (32.6%), directive acts with 14 occurrences (2.7%), and commissive acts with only 8 occurrences (1.5%). No declarative acts were found throughout the docuseries, a result consistent with the non-institutional,

interpersonal setting of the production, since declarations typically require conventional or institutional authority to be validly performed (Searle, 1979).

The dominance of assertive acts reflects the biographical and reflective nature of the docuseries genre. As a documentary chronicling Taylor Swift's professional journey, the narrative is structurally dependent on stating facts, reporting past experiences, and explaining creative decisions. For instance, in Episode 1 Taylor states, "I think about every single one of you as little kids," an utterance in which she commits herself to the truth of an internal belief about her audience. Following Searle's (1979) criteria, this utterance satisfies the illocutionary point of an assertive act, that is, committing the speaker to the truth of a proposition; it exhibits a words-to-world direction of fit; and it fulfills the sincerity condition through her visibly affectionate delivery. This pattern is consistent with previous findings that assertive acts function as a primary tool for speakers to project their commitment to truth and to build credibility with an audience (Putri et al., 2025).

Expressive acts, appearing 170 times, form the second most frequent category. These acts, such as expressing gratitude, exhaustion, or apology, anchor Taylor Swift's professional narrative to genuine psychological states, humanizing her public persona and fostering emotional connection with viewers. In contrast, the comparatively low frequency of directive acts (14 occurrences) suggests that backstage coordination in this docuseries relies more on collaborative suggestion than on explicit command, consistent with Trihanto et al.'s (2022) observation that directive force in media discourse is closely tied to the interpersonal dynamics between speakers rather than to rigid authority alone. Commissive acts, though rare (8 occurrences), reflect strategic promises directed at building long-term trust with the crew and the audience, a function similarly noted in commissive analyses of scripted media dialogue (Devi & Degaf, 2021).

Table 2. Distribution of Felicity Conditions Fulfilled by Taylor Swift across Episodes

Source: Research data, 2026 (N = 522 utterances)

Episode	Propositional Content	Preparatory	Sincerity	Essential
E01	24	3	71	2
E02	25	4	48	1
E03	24	3	63	3
E04	19	-	65	15
E05	16	2	44	3
E06	15	3	67	2
Total	123	15	358	26

2. Fulfillment of Felicity Conditions

To determine the pragmatic validity of these illocutionary acts, each utterance was further evaluated against Searle's (1979) four felicity conditions: propositional content, preparatory, sincerity, and essential condition. The distribution of these conditions across the six episodes is presented in Table 2.

As illustrated in Table 2, the sincerity condition is by far the most dominant, satisfied in 358 utterances (68.6%), followed by the propositional content condition with 123 occurrences (23.6%), the essential condition with 26 occurrences (5.0%), and the preparatory condition with only 15 occurrences (2.9%).

The overwhelming dominance of the sincerity condition indicates that the communicative success of Taylor Swift's utterances in this docuseries depends heavily on the alignment between her internal psychological state and her outward speech. This finding supports Hadiati's (2019) argument that fulfilling the sincerity condition is essential for preventing an utterance from being perceived as deceptive, and it echoes Allan's (1997) view of felicity conditions as a social contract between speaker and hearer. Because assertive and expressive acts, both of which require a sincere internal state (belief or emotion, respectively), together account for the majority of the illocutionary data, it follows logically that the sincerity condition would likewise dominate the felicity condition distribution.

The propositional content condition, satisfied in 123 utterances, functions as a stable structural foundation ensuring that Taylor Swift's statements are properly anchored within a coherent temporal frame, whether referring to completed past milestones or coordinated future schedules (Hanks, 2015). Meanwhile, the comparatively low frequency of

the essential condition (26 occurrences) and the preparatory condition (15 occurrences) suggests that Taylor Swift's established authority and global status allow her to perform many of her speech acts without needing to explicitly assert her institutional standing or ability; her authority is largely presupposed rather than verbally reinforced. Taken together, the consistent fulfillment of all four felicity conditions throughout the corpus indicates that Taylor Swift's illocutionary acts in this docuseries are pragmatically valid and free from communicative defect, allowing her personal narrative to be constructed as a credible and shared social reality with her global audience (Searle, 1979).

D. Conclusion

This study examined the illocutionary acts and felicity conditions realized by Taylor Swift in the docuseries Taylor Swift: The End of an Era across six episodes. The findings show that, based on Searle's (1979) five-part taxonomy, assertive acts are the most dominant illocutionary category, accounting for 330 of the 522 analyzed utterances, followed by expressive, directive, and

commissive acts, while declarative acts are entirely absent due to the non-institutional setting of the production. This pattern demonstrates that the primary pragmatic function of a biographical docuseries is to construct narrative truth through description, explanation, and reporting.

With respect to felicity conditions, the sincerity condition emerges as the most consistently fulfilled criterion, satisfied in 358 utterances, indicating that the pragmatic success of Taylor Swift's communication in this docuseries relies principally on the alignment between her internal psychological states and her outward utterances. The propositional content, essential, and preparatory conditions, while less frequent, remain fully satisfied whenever relevant, confirming that her speech acts are pragmatically valid throughout the series.

These findings contribute empirically to Speech Act Theory by extending its application to the underexplored genre of professional, non-fictional docuseries, demonstrating that classical pragmatic frameworks remain highly relevant for analyzing

contemporary mediated communication. For future research, it is recommended that scholars explore the perlocutionary effects of public figures' utterances on their audiences, or examine how conversational maxims operate within multi-episode documentary narratives, in order to deepen the understanding of strategic communication in global media discourse.

REFERENCES

- Allan, K. (1997). Concise encyclopedia of philosophy of language. Pergamon.
- Argott, D., & Joyce, S. M. (Directors). (2025). Taylor Swift: The End of an Era [Docuseries]. Taylor Swift Productions; Disney+.
- Austin, J. L. (1975). How to do things with words (2nd ed.). Harvard University Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Devi, M. F., & Degaf, A. (2021). An analysis of commissive speech act used by the main character of "Knives Out." *Paradigm: Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 4(1), 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.18860/prdg.v4i1.10932>

Giasi, S. M., Dako, R. T., & Danial, H. (2026). Illocutionary act in talk show of "The Tonight Show" by Jimmy Fallon. *Priviet Social Sciences Journal*, 6(3), 384–394.

Hadiati, C. (2019). Felicity conditions of the speech acts in Banyumasan daily conversation. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 9(6), 700–705.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0906.13>

Hanks, P. (2015). *Propositional content*. Oxford University Press.

Lim, W. M. (2025). What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 33(2), 199–229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Putri, D. N., Kharenindia, A., & Darmawan, K. S. S. (2025). Pragmatic analysis of speech acts in Disney's "Frozen Fever" a case study. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Hukum, Bisnis, Sains dan Teknologi*, 5(1), 1007–1010.

<https://ojs.udb.ac.id/HUBISINTEK/article/view/4622>

Ramadhani, I. S., & Matoyah, S. (2026). Types and functions of illocutionary acts used by the main characters in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*: A pragmatic study. *RIGGS: Journal of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Business*, 5(1), 2403–2412.

<https://doi.org/10.31004/riggs.v5i1.6464>

Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Sowers, J. W. (2024). *Unveiling nature's narrative: A qualitative content analysis of environmental communication and human nature in the Netflix docuseries, Our Planet* [Doctoral dissertation, Regent University].

Trihanto, A., Astuti, P. I., & Arumi, S. (2022). An analysis on directive speech act found in *Jumanji: The Next Level* movie. *International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education (IJELLE)*, 4(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.32585/ijelle.v4i1.2175>