

An Analysis of Speech Acts in Service Situations at Japanese Restaurants

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Abstrak

Penggunaan bahasa dalam komunikasi dalam segala situasi tutur tidak akan terlepas dari fungsi tindak tutur didalamnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tindak tutur ilokusi dalam bahasa pelayanan yang digunakan oleh pelayan restoran di Jepang. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber data berupa 10 video dari kanal YouTube “飲食店応援ラボ” (Restaurant Support Lab) dengan kategori 基本編 (Theoretic Version) dengan total durasi 5 menit 45 detik yang berfokus pada ungkapan yang digunakan oleh pelayan restoran ketika menghadapi pelanggan dalam berbagai situasi pelayanan. Data yang dianalisis berupa ungkapan pelayanan yang kemudian ditranskripsi dan diklasifikasikan berdasarkan teori tindak tutur ilokusi Searle (1976). Analisis data dilakukan dengan metode ekuivalen pragmatik dan metode informal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari 20 data yang ditemukan dan dianalisis, jenis tindak tutur yang paling banyak adalah directives (11 data), diikuti oleh commissives (3 data), expressives (2 data), declarations (2 data), dan representatives (2 data). Dominasi tindak tutur ilokusi directives menunjukkan bahwa peran utama pelayan dalam interaksi di situasi pelayanan restoran adalah memberikan arahan, panduan, meminta, mengajak, dan merekomendasikan suatu hal kepada pelanggan.

Kata Kunci: *ilokusi; pelayanan restoran; speech act*

Abstract

Language use in communication across various speech situations is inseparable from the function of speech acts within it. This study aims to analyze illocutionary speech acts in service-related language used by restaurant staff in Japan. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data sourced from 10 videos on the YouTube channel “飲食店応援ラボ” (Restaurant Support Lab), under the category 「基本編」 (Theoretic Version), with a total duration of 5 minutes and 45 seconds. The focus of the analysis is on the expressions used by restaurant staff when interacting with customers in various service situations. The data consisted of service-related utterances that were transcribed and classified based on Searle’s (1976) theory of illocutionary speech acts. Data analysis was carried out using the pragmatic equivalent method and presented informally. The results show that among the 19 utterances identified and analyzed, the most frequent type of illocutionary act was directives (11 data), followed by

commissives (2 data), expressives (2 data), declarations (2 data), and representatives (2 data). The predominance of directive speech acts indicates that the primary role of restaurant staff in service interactions is to guide, instruct, request, invite, or recommend actions to customers.
Keywords: *illocutionary act, restaurant services, speech act*

1. Introduction

Language is understood not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for performing social actions across various situational contexts. In this regard, the meaning conveyed through language use in specific contexts becomes the central focus of the field of pragmatics.

Speech acts are one of the key areas of pragmatics study. Yule (1996) defines a speech act as an action performed by a speaker through utterances. Speech act is a crucial concept in understanding that speaking is a form of social action, rather than merely conveying information. Analyzing speech acts allows us to comprehend the intention and function of language in real-life contexts. This is particularly important in various domains of interaction, such as service encounters, education, legal discourse, and cultural communication.

Austin (1962) classifies speech acts into three categories:

- a. Locutionary act, which refers to the act of producing utterances with specific meanings and references. This type of act involves saying something with meaningful and understandable sentences.
- b. Illocutionary act, which refers to the speaker's intention or purpose behind an utterance, such as giving a command, making a promise, or offering an apology.
- c. Perlocutionary act, which concerns the effect or response triggered by the speaker's utterance on the listener, i.e., how the utterance influences others. For instance, if a patient is diagnosed with a serious illness, the utterance may lead to a response such as panic or sadness from the patient.

Furthermore, Searle (1976) elaborates on illocutionary acts and proposes their classification into several categories:

- a. Representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of a particular proposition. This category includes acts such as complaining and boasting, and is evaluated based on the truth or falsity of the statement.
- b. Directives, which are intended to get the hearer to carry out a certain action. Acts in this category include requesting, ordering, instructing, begging, praying, inviting, guiding, and so on.
- c. Commissives, which commit the speaker to a certain course of action in the future. Examples include promising, swearing, pledging, contracting, and guaranteeing.
- d. Expressives, which express the speaker's psychological state in relation to a certain situation or condition. These include acts such as apologizing, thanking, congratulating, offering condolences, expressing regret, etc.
- e. Declarations, which are aimed at changing the status or condition of an object or situation through an utterance. Such speech acts are typically performed by individuals with the authority to do so, for instance, announcing a dismissal or a resignation.

In everyday situations, the utterances we commonly express often fall into one or more of the illocutionary categories described above. These utterances typically occur within what is referred to as a speech event. According to Chaer and Agustina (2010), a speech event is an

interaction involving a speaker and a hearer, centered on a specific topic of discussion, and taking place within a particular time, place, and context. Such contexts may include situations of apology, complaint, refusal, service, and others. In this study focuses specifically on the analysis of speech acts in service-related situations, with particular emphasis on customer service interactions in Japanese restaurants.

Although extensive research on speech acts has been conducted across a wide range of contexts—such as education, media, and interpersonal communication—investigations that specifically focus on speech acts within service-related interactions remain relatively not explored. For example, Chen, Chen, and Chang (2011) investigated the use of complaint strategies in restaurant services in China and the United States. One of the scenarios examined in their study involved a situation in which a server accidentally spilled a drink on a customer’s clothing.

A more focused examination of illocutionary acts was undertaken by Sofyan, Badrudin, Fitriani, and Muta’allim (2022), who analyzed the types of speech acts used in the Indonesian short film *Tilik*. Employing Sudaryanto’s pragmatic equivalent and informal methods, they systematically categorized various utterances in the film according to Searle’s (1976) taxonomy of speech acts. Their findings illustrate how film dialogue can reflect real-life patterns of communication, particularly in the way characters perform functions such as asserting, questioning, and commanding.

In addition, Isbandi and Handayani (2020) directly investigated illocutionary speech acts within a service interaction at a restaurant located in Changi Airport. Through direct observation of conversations between customers and baristas, the study identified the types of strategies used and classified the speech acts that emerged, which included representatives, directives, and expressives. Kadri (2022) conducted a study on written speech acts found in fast food advertisements. From the analysis of 11 advertisements, a total of 16 speech acts were identified, with directive speech acts being the most frequently occurring. In comparison to these findings, the present study examines speech acts in direct service interactions at restaurants, focusing on the communication between waiters and customers.

Based on the findings of these previous studies, the present research aims to examine illocutionary speech acts in service situations occurring in Japanese restaurants. The study will specifically focus on the service-related expressions used by servers in various customer service scenarios. The objective of this research is to identify the types of illocutionary acts that emerge when servers handle service interactions in Japanese restaurant settings.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method. The data sources were obtained from videos available on the YouTube channel “飲食店応援ラボ” (Restaurant Support Lab). Only videos categorized under 基本編 (theoretic version) were selected for analysis. This category was chosen because the content focuses specifically on theoretical explanations related to illocutionary speech acts performed by restaurant staff. The data analyzed consist solely of illocutionary speech acts uttered by restaurant staff.

In the data collection stage, the observation and note-taking technique (simak-catat) will be employed. Zaim (2014) explains that the observation technique (simak) is a method of data collection carried out by listening to and observing the intended use of language. This technique is selected to closely observe and comprehend the content of conversational texts found in the selected videos. Following the application of the observation technique, note-taking (catat) will be conducted as an additional step. According to Mahsun (2005), the note-taking technique involves recording various forms of written language usage that are relevant

to the research topic. This technique is used to document sentences that contain categories of speech acts related to restaurant service.

These speech acts were transcribed into textual form and subsequently categorized according to Searle’s (1976) classification of illocutionary acts. The collected data were processed and analyzed using the pragmatic equivalent method and the informal method (Sudaryanto, 1993). The pragmatic equivalent method is a type of referential method in which linguistic data are interpreted using external determinants, specifically the context of the speech situation. The results of the analysis are presented using the informal method, in which the processed data are described in detail in a narrative form.

3. Result

Based on the research findings, 10 videos were identified under the “theoretic version” category 「基本編」, with a total of 20 speech act data performed by restaurant staff toward customers. The details are summarized in the following table 1.

Tabel 1. Findings

Speech Act Categories	Frequency
Representatives	2
Directives	11
Commissives	3
Expressives	2
Declarations	2

Based on the findings, it can be observed that directives speech acts appeared with the highest frequency, accounting for 55% of the total. Overall, the data highlight that directive speech acts are the most prevalent in restaurant service interactions, emphasizing the server’s role in facilitating the customer's dining experience. This was followed by commissive speech acts at 15%. The remaining three types of speech acts each appeared with an equal frequency of 10%. This indicates that representative, expressive, and declarative speech acts are infrequently used in restaurant service interactions.

The following section provides a discussion of each type of speech act that emerged in the context of service interactions at Japanese restaurants. The discussion will be presented according to the order of speech act categories as proposed by Searle (1976).

Representative Speech Acts

「お客様を席へ案内するシーン」 (00:23 - 00:28)

Context:

「こちらが本日の当店の限定のメニューでございます。」

“*Kochira ga honjitsu no **touten** no gentei no menyuu de gozaimasu.*”

“This is today’s special menu at **our restaurant.**”

Analysis:

This is classified as a **representative** speech act. The server provides factual information by pointing out the day’s special menu, which accurately represents the restaurant’s offerings.

「追加オーダーを聞くシーン」 (00:17 - 00:22)

Context:

「若鶏のからあげ？ はい！ 自慢です。若鶏のからあげを一つで。はい、ありがとうございます。すぐにお持ちいたします、失礼します。」

“*Wakadori no karaage? Hai! Jiman desu. Wakadori no karaage o hitotsu de. Hai, arigatou gozaimasu. sugu ni omochi itashimasu, shitsureishimasu.*”

“*Wakadori Karaage? Yes! It’s our specialty. One karaage, then. Thank you very much. I’ll bring it right away—excuse me.*”

Analysis:

This utterance also falls under the **representative** category. The server proudly and confidently endorses a particular dish, indicating that it serves as a representative or signature item of the restaurant.

Directive Speech Acts

「お客様を席へ案内するシーン」(00:17 - 00:22)

Context:

「今日は当店へようこそお越しくございました。ありがとうございます。おしぼりでございます。」

“*Honjitsu wa touten e youkoso okoshi kudasaimashita. Arigatou gozaimasu. Oshibori de gozaimasu.*”

“**Welcome to our restaurant today.** Thank you very much. Here is your *oshibori* (wet hand towel).”

Analysis.

This data demonstrates a classification of directive speech acts. In this context, the restaurant server is seen welcoming the customers in a friendly manner while presenting the *oshibori* (wet hand towel). The server offers the greeting promptly after the customers have taken their seats, indicating an attempt to direct or encourage the customer to feel welcomed and begin the dining experience comfortably.

「オーダーを聞くシーン」(00:10 - 00:20)

Context:

「私のおすすめですね。こちらの二つはおすすめになっております。」

“*Watashi no osusume desune. Kochira no futatsu wa osusume ni natte orimasu.*”

“If I may make a recommendation, here are two dishes **I would suggest.**”

Analysis.

This data represents a classification of **directive** speech acts. In this context, the restaurant server offers a recommendation or suggestion regarding food or beverages that the customer might consider ordering. The server provides this recommendation after noticing that the customer appears uncertain or hesitant while deciding on their order. This speech act functions as an attempt to guide the customer toward making a decision.

「お客様を席へ案内するシーン」(00:47 - 00:49)

Context:

「お待ちくださいませ。失礼いたします。」

“*Omachi kudasai mase. Shitsurei itashimasu.*”

“**Please wait a moment.** Excuse me.”

Analysis.

This is a **directive** speech act, as the server is asking the customer to wait while they momentarily leave to retrieve the order.

「卓上整理と追加提供のシーン」 (00:15 - 00:20)

Context:

「からあげでございます、揚げたてでお持ちしております。ごゆっくりどうぞ。」

“*Karaage de gozaimasu, agetate de omochi shite orimasu. Goyukkuri douzo.*”

“Here is the karaage. I’ve brought it freshly fried. **Please enjoy** at your leisure.”

Analysis:

This utterance directs the customer to enjoy their meal, following the information that the dish is served hot. The use of polite encouragement (“Please enjoy”) classifies it as a **directive**.

Commissive Speech Acts

「お客様を席へ案内するシーン」 (00:46 - 00:47)

Context:

「ただいま、すぐにお持ちいたします。」

“*Tadaiima, sugu omochi itashimasu.*”

“I will bring it to you **immediately**.”

Analysis:

This data represents a **commissive** illocutionary speech acts. In this situation, after the customer has placed an order for a beverage, the restaurant server promptly responds with the statement 「すぐにお持ちいたします」 (“I will bring it to you immediately”). This utterance indicates that the server is making a commitment or promise to the customer, thereby conveying a sense of assurance regarding the fulfillment of the request.

「お見送りをするシーン」 (00:09 - 00:13)

Context:

「そうですか、ありがとうございます、励みになります。また頑張ります。」

“*Soudesuka, arigatou gozaimasu, hagemi ni narimasu. Mata ganbarimasu.*”

“Thank you very much. That’s very motivating. **I’ll keep working hard**.”

Analysis:

This represents a **commissive** act, where the server indirectly commits to continuing their efforts, inspired by the customer’s compliment.

「オーダーを聞くシーン」 (00:40 - 00:41)

Context:

「急いでお持ちいたします。失礼いたします。」

“*Isoide omochi itashimasu. Shitsurei itashimasu.*”

“**I’ll bring it right away**. Excuse me.”

Analysis:

This speech act also qualifies as a **commissive**, as the server makes an implicit promise to deliver the item promptly, indicated by the phrase “right away.”

Expressive Speech Acts

「お客様を迎え入れるシーン」 (00:05 - 00:07)

Context:

「こんばんは、いらっしゃいませ。お二人様でいらっしゃいますか？」

“*Konbanwa, irasshaimase. O futari-sama de irasshaimasu ka?*”

“Good evening, **welcome**. Is it a table for two?”

Analysis:

This is an **expressive** act, in which the server warmly welcomes customers at the entrance, expressing a positive attitude through their greeting. The server also seeks confirmation on the number of guests.

「お見送りをするシーン」 (00:09 - 00:13)

Context:

「そうですね、ありがとうございます、励みになります。また頑張ります。」

“*Soudesuka, arigatou gozaimasu, hagemi ni narimasu. Mata ganbarimasu.*”

“**Thank you very much. That’s very motivating.** I’ll keep working hard.”

Analysis:

Here, the server expresses gratitude in response to a customer’s praise. This utterance reflects a sincere emotional response and is categorized as an **expressive** speech act.

Declaration Speech Acts

「お客様を席へ案内するシーン」 (00:05 - 00:15)

Context:

「失礼いたします、お客様。お席はこちらでございます。失礼いたします。」

“*Shitsureitashimasu, okyakusama. O seki wa kochira de gozaimasu.*”

“Excuse me, sir/madam. **This is your seat.**”

Analysis:

This is a **declaration** act. By stating that this is the customer’s seat, the server changes the customer's situation—inviting them to be seated at the designated spot.

「会計をするシーン」 (00:06 - 00:11)

Context:

「失礼いたします、お待たせいたしました。こちら伝票でございます。」

“*Shitsurei itashimasu, omatase itashimashita. Kochira dempyou de gozaimasu.*”

“Excuse me, sorry for the wait. **Here is your bill.**”

Analysis:

This is classified as a **declaration** speech act. The server does not issue a direct command or request, but rather announces that the bill is now presented. This implicitly shifts the customer’s status to that of being ready to make payment.

4. Discussion

Based on Searle’s (1976) classification of illocutionary speech acts, the data exhibit certain tendencies, as outlined in the following discussion.

Representative Speech Acts

Representative speech acts tend to convey information through expressions such as stating, reporting, claiming, or suggesting. The utterances made by the waiter, as presented below, serve to provide (1) statements and (2) claims regarding the menu offered at the restaurant.

1. 「こちらが本日の当店の限定のメニューでございます。」

“*Kochira ga honjitsu no touten no gentei no menyuu de gozaimasu.*”

“This is today’s special menu at **our restaurant.**”

2. 「若鶏のからあげ？ はい！ 自慢です。若鶏のからあげを一つで。はい、ありがとうございます。すぐにお持ちいたします、失礼します。」
“*Wakadori no karaage? Hai! Jiman desu. Wakadori no karaage o hitotsu de. Hai, arigatou gozaimasu. sugu ni omochi itashimasu, shitsureishimasu.*”
“*Wakadori Karaage? Yes! It’s our specialty. One karaage, then. Thank you very much. I’ll bring it right away—excuse me.*”

Directive Speech Acts

Directive illocutionary speech acts tend to suggest actions to the interlocutor through expressions such as requesting, pleading, instructing, suggesting, or commanding. The waiter’s utterances, as presented below, convey suggestions to the customer in the form of (1) menu recommendations and (2) polite commands to wait.

1. 「私のおすすめですね。こちらの二つはおすすめになっております。」
“*Watashi no osusume desune. Kochira no futatsu wa osusume ni natte orimasu.*”
“If I may make a recommendation, here are two dishes **I would suggest.**”
2. 「お待ちくださいませ。失礼いたします。」
“*Omachi kudasai mase. Shitsurei itashimasu.*”
“**Please wait a moment.** Excuse me.”

Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive speech acts tend to express promises or commitments to future actions through utterances such as promising, swearing, threatening, or offering. The waiter’s statements, as presented below, reflect such promises or commitments in the form of (1) a pledge to improve service quality and (2) an assurance to promptly deliver the customer’s order.

1. 「そうですか、ありがとうございます、励みになります。また頑張ります。」
“*Soudesuka, arigatou gozaimasu, hagemi ni narimasu. Mata ganbarimasu.*”
“Thank you very much. That’s very motivating. **I’ll keep working hard.**”
2. 「急いでお持ちいたします。失礼いたします。」
“*Isoide omochi itashimasu. Shitsurei itashimasu.*”
“**I’ll bring it right away.** Excuse me.”

Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive illocutionary speech acts tend to reflect the speaker’s attitudes or emotions through utterances such as thanking, congratulating, apologizing, or expressing regret. The waiter’s statements, as presented below, include expressions of (1) a greeting to welcome the customer and (2) gratitude for the customer’s visit.

1. 「こんばんは、いらっしゃいませ。お二人様でいらっしゃいますか？」
“*Konbanwa, irasshaimase. O futari-sama de irasshaimasu ka?*”
“Good evening, **welcome.** Is it a table for two?”
2. 「そうですか、ありがとうございます、励みになります。また頑張ります。」
“*Soudesuka, arigatou gozaimasu, hagemi ni narimasu. Mata ganbarimasu.*”
“**Thank you very much. That’s very motivating.** I’ll keep working hard.”

Declaration Speech Acts

Declarative illocutionary speech acts tend to directly change the state of affairs or reality through utterances such as declaring, canceling, appointing, or sentencing. The waiter’s statements, as presented below, include expressions of decisions regarding (1) the customer’s

seating arrangement and (2) the billing or payment statement addressed to the customer.

1. 「失礼いたします、お客様。お席はこちらでございます。失礼いたします。」
“*Shitsureitashimasu, okyakusama. O seki wa kochira de gozaimasu.*”
“Excuse me, sir/madam. **This is your seat.**”
2. 「失礼いたします、お待たせいたしました。こちら伝票でございます。」
“*Shitsurei itashimasu, omatase itashimashita. Kochira dempyou de gozaimasu.*”
“Excuse me, sorry for the wait. **Here is your bill.**”

5. Conclusion

Based on an analysis of 20 utterances taken from a Japanese restaurant service video categorized under 「基本編」 (Theoretic Version), it was found that directive speech acts were the most frequently used by restaurant staff, appearing 11 times. This indicates that interactions in Japanese restaurant service settings are highly focused on delivering instructions, guidance, and directions to customers.

In addition, other types of speech acts such as commissives, representatives, expressives, and declarations were also identified, though they occurred less frequently. Representative acts were used to convey information or facts, such as introducing special menu items. Commissives appeared when the server implicitly promised to provide better service or to bring the customer's order shortly. Expressives involved emotional expressions such as greetings or words of gratitude, reflecting the server's positive attitude toward customers. Meanwhile, declarations were found in situations where the server announced a change in status or condition, such as assigning a seat or presenting the bill.

This study is limited to the classification of speech acts observed within Japanese restaurant service situations. As further recommendations, future research could explore the strategies used in performing these speech acts to gain a deeper understanding of restaurant service discourse. Additionally, a contrastive analysis with other languages could reveal cross-cultural differences in service interaction styles.

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