

## UNEARTHING STUDENTS' REALIZATION OF SPEECH ACT IN ASKING INFORMATION IN TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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**Abstract:** This research aims at investigating speech acts realization in asking for information in Bahasa Indonesia done by students at Widyatama University. Secondly, it seeks for the utterance patterns highly used by students in asking for information using Bahasa Indonesia. The study utilized a descriptive method. This method comprises distributing questionnaires, collecting data, classifying data, and analyzing data. The subjects in this study were fourth semester students of Information Technology, Faculty of Engineering. The results showed that speech realization patterns highly used when they ask for information via telephone to a friend is they make an opening and directly to the purpose of calling, and closing. When calling to parents, casual utterances are significantly employed.

**Keywords:** *speech acts, utterance patterns*

### INTRODUCTION

Communicating is one of the basic human needs as a social creature. Communication can be conducted by two or more people in expressing feelings or thoughts. In communicating to one another, people make use of sentences, or specifically, utterances. According to Wardhaugh (2010), utterances can be classified by length, by grammatical structure, by semantic or logical structure, and by functional approach. Utterance which is long is not a guarantee that it is easily understood by the hearer. More often short but concise utterance is more effective than the longer one. In terms of grammatical structure, utterances may vary in number of dimensions, for instance, the use of active and passive, clausal type and complexity, statement, question, request, and exclamatory. In terms of functional approach, simple functions of utterance may be as stating, questioning, requesting, and exclaiming. In short, a conversation engages not only language to state propositions or to

utter facts but also the unmarked used of the language.

Through conversation, people establish relationships with others, achieve or fail a measure of collaboration or cooperation, maintain channels open for further relationship. People communicate orally face to face, or at least they can see and not too far, in nature with their partner of speaking. However, advanced technology allows them to speak with their partner of speaking without direct presence of the two speakers at the same place of which the conversation occurs. Let's take some examples of advanced technology that are highly used nowadays; telephone, web camera (digital imaging system), teleconference, etc. Among those instruments mentioned earlier, the easiest-to-find and easiest-to-use is telephone. It can be found in almost all houses, especially in cities even in countryside of some parts of Indonesia. Furthermore, the availability of cellular phone enables people to talk with

other users without any limits toward distance.

Speech acts possible to be conducted when conversing are manifold. When people need to know something that they do not know, they would ask other people to let them know the information. In order to get information they need, they have to realize it through speech acts. One of the speech acts employ as to get information is requesting. Yule (2000) classifies general functions performed by speech acts into declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Firstly, declarations are kinds of speech acts which change the realm through the utterance. Utterances like below:

- Priest : "I now pronounce you husband and wife."
- Referee : "You're out!"
- Jury foreman: "We find the defendant guilty"

The above utterance should be uttered by one who has a special institutional role, in a specific context, in order to perform a declaration appropriately. Secondly, representatives are speech act which state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statement, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are categorized into representative speech acts. Thirdly, expressives are kinds of speech acts

which state what the speaker feels. The expressions of psychological states, statement of pleasure, pain likes, dislikes, joy, and sorrow can be delivered by using expressives speech acts. Following are the examples; 'I'm sorry!', "congratulations!" and "oh, yes, great, mmmmm, ssahh!". The speaker makes the utterance fit the world of feelings. Fourth, directives are kinds of speech acts which speakers use to get other people to do something. The utterances express what the speaker wants which can be positive or negative, they can be commands, order, requests, or suggestions. Following are the samples of utterances of directives:

- a. "Give me a cup of coffee. Make it black"
- b. "Could you lend me a pen, please?"
- c. "Don't touch that!"

Finally, commissives are speech acts which speaker use to commit themselves to some future actions. It expresses what the speaker intends, for instance, promises, threats, refusals, pledges, that can be performed by the speaker alone or by the speaker as a member of a group. When performing a commissive speech acts, the speaker undertakes to make the world fit the words through the speaker. Yule (2000) also simplifies the elaborations on classifications of speech acts as in the table below:

Table. 1. *The five general functions of speech acts (Searle, 1969)*

Speech acts type	Direction of fit	S = speaker X = situation
Declarations	Words change the world	S causes X
Representatives	Make the words fit the world	S believes X
Expressives	Make the words fit the world	S feels X
Directives	Make the words fit the world	S wants X
Commissives	Make the words fit the world	S intend X

Yule (2002) also distinguishes types of speech acts. He proposes three basic sentence types; declarative, interrogative, and imperative. On the other hand, Allan (1994) says that speech acts is classified as interpersonal acts. It is usually addressed to an individual so that it only involves the

speaker and interlocutor(s). A speech act is considered to be effective when there is reaction from the interlocutor.

Further, Austin (1962) classifies speech acts into three; locutionary acts, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary acts. The basic unit of human linguistics

communication is illocutionary act (Searle, 1969, p. 1). Whereas, asking for information lies under the umbrella of requesting of perlocutionary acts; the speaker should utter his intention through a speech act properly so that the interlocutor would do what the speaker wants. In other words, the speaker ought to be polite in conveying the utterance.

In terms of politeness, Brown & Levinson (1987) claimed that there are certain social principles that guide human communication. They argued that as people communicate with others, they are constantly aware of their own and others' face and that they cooperate to maintain one another's face. Thus, people attempt to soften the effects of their face threatening acts (FTA) by using a variety of politeness strategies.

It is commonly stated that there are three influential factors in interpersonal communication; firstly, social distance. Boxer (1993) states that social distance is one of the foremost factors that determine the way in which interlocutor conserve precisely because it is an important determinant of the degree of comfort in a verbal exchange. Secondly, relative power. It refers to a speaker's power level that enables him to make an interlocutor do or not do the action. Lastly is absolute ranking of imposition. This links to what kind of action expected.

The strategies employed by speakers to maintain politeness can be in terms of address e.g. Miss, Ma'am, or Sir. Gordon and Tripp (1985) state there are conventional request types as following; 1) Imperatives: any form with imperative syntax, 2) imperative ellipsis: naming what is wanted without a verb is heard as a request, 3) embedded requests: make explicit the desired action, agent, and object, e.g. using modals can/could, will, etc., 4) permission requests, e.g. using can/may I, and explicit need or wants statements, e.g. I want, I need..., etc.

The above forms can be varied or nuanced in many ways (Gordon & Tripp, 1985). Expressions can be intensified or mitigated through prosodic variation such as falling pitch or wheedling tone. Request can be mitigated through displacements and minimizers, which include; utterances with displaced tense or aspect (e.g. could you? would you?) and utterances with displaced agents and minimization (e.g. give me a little of ...). Further, there are etiquette performance that people do when making a phone call, which are opening, mentioning numbers, mentioning self-identity, mentioning reason for calling, and closing.

## METHOD

The objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To find out language realization by students at Widyatama University in conveying asking for information in Bahasa Indonesia.
2. To investigate the strategy they employ to lead to the main topic of conversation.
3. To see utterance patterns which are highly used by students in asking for information by using Bahasa Indonesia.

The scopes to be analyzed are as follows:

1. To unearth students' style in a telephone conversation which includes the way they open and close the conversation.
2. To find out how students lead to the main topic of the conversation in terms of directness and politeness.
3. How they use the language in asking for information.

The subjects involved in this research were students of fourth semester of Information Technology, Faculty of Engineering, Widyatama University Bandung. There were fifteen students in the classroom consisting of five female and ten male students. It is assumed that they are familiar with or accustomed to conversing through telephone.

The instruments used to investigate the three research questions above are; 1) a

questionnaire containing questions related to their procedure in using phone, e.g. when the line is connected to the interlocutor what would he says first, etc., and 2) DCT or discourse completion test. The questionnaire comprises a situation where the subjects should respond to by creating a dialog on how they would ask for information through a telephone. The two questionnaires are intertwined since one of the two can be used to crosscheck subjects' consistency in responding the questions given related to procedure of telephoning. Since the writer wants to know students' speech realization in Bahasa Indonesia, the instruction and the questions are in Bahasa Indonesia.

Besides giving the written instruction, the writer also gave verbal instruction as well in order to avoid misunderstanding in questionnaire completion. Following is the example:

*Anda menelpon teman untuk menanyakan apakah besok ada kuliah tambahan atau tidak.*

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The procedures employed in obtaining the data were as follows. The writer made five situations (DCT, discourse completion test) where the subjects can respond to. The discourse completion tests were then distributed to the subjects to be filled out. Next, they are assigned to respond to the given situations by completing them. After that, the data collected are categorized based on their group. Then, the writer analyzes the data by referring to the theoretical foundations used in this research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Asking for information, a type of speech act which is under the classification of directive speech acts is very day to day utterance to perform. In asking for

information, a person might address the utterance to someone he already knows, like family, friends, and relative or even to someone that he does not know, e.g. a policemen at the street, a passer-by, a receptionist at an office or hospital, etc. People ask for information for many reasons. They ask questions because they need a piece of information or just to make sure or confirm that the information that he or she understand is valid or correct.

In this modern era, there are various types of media to use in asking for information. With the advancement of the technology, people can text, phone or video call to get information. Different applications of social media facilitate the flow of information. Unfortunately, there is still constraint in using those media in getting information. For examples, using applications such as whatsapp, messenger, line for texting are lack of intonation in delivering the utterance. Although emoticons are created to represent the feelings of the speaker when expressing his/her idea, misunderstanding may still occur. Therefore, video call is a better facility to offer for long distance communication. It offers a face to face communication as long as the connections in the speaker and hearer's area are good.

Initially, asking for information can be simply conducted through a telephone line. People commonly used a telephone line to get information they need since it offers a fast response. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out whether there will be differences when a person makes an utterance via telephone or directly face to face. However, Scollon and Scollon (2001) claim that there is no faceless communication. This means that face is an important aspect to maintain in a communication.

Besides, there might be a distinction when a person asks for information from someone he knows and from someone he does not. The differences might lie in terms

of utterance, like the greeting, addressing, leading to main topic, closing, as well as in directness and politeness in making the utterances. When there is distance between speaker and hearer, the utterance will be then delivered in an indirect manner. On the contrary, if there is no distance between the speaker and the hearer, then the utterance will be conveyed in a direct manner.

The data gathered from the questionnaires show that the subjects, students of Faculty of engineering, are active users of telephone as their means of communication. Although the availability of internet-based media communication is various for the students to use, they still use telephoning in getting information. Especially, when they are in situations where they need quick responses from their interlocutors. Some of the students will text their lecturers first before they make a phone call. They think that they do not want to disturb if their lecturers are giving lectures when they call them. Some others will make a phone call directly without making appointment or permission to make phone calls to their lecturers. In short, almost all of the subjects use the telephone when they find it necessary to do it.

Some students prefer to use social media applications available on their smart phone rather than making phone calls. They stated that using social media applications on the basis on internet connection is a lot more economical. On the other hand, few of them use it only for chatting. It means that they are quite economical, since it is not cheap using this modern technology, they use only if they really have particular urgency. The conclusion is supported by their response in the questionnaire that they use the telephone when they really need it.

### Opening

The utterances produced by the subjects reveal that students employ different types of opening. They generally utter opening before they proceeded to the

conversation. *Halo* and *assalamu 'alaikum* are the most used utterance by the subjects. The use of *halo* is universal since it does not refer to particular religious believers' utterance, whereas the latter is. However, few subjects seem to be persistent in using *assalamu 'alaikaum* to whomever they were calling; a person they know or a person they talk to for the first time. In my opinion this happened because saying *assalamualaikum* has been their habit as soon as they make a contact with other people. The other few subjects opened the conversation by saying both and became '*Halo, Assalamualaikum*'. But they utter it to people that they already know.

Some of the subjects did not use the two types of openings above. They use *Eh*, instead. The subjects used *Eh* to intimates; especially, when they made the call to cellular phone. They have already known the hearers they are contacting. Utterance *Eh* which is used as an opening serves as an attention getter or a way to directly start the conversation. It happened because they were very certain that the person replying is the one they expected to speak to, e.g.

- *Eh, besok ada kuliah tambahan gak? Saya gak tau, euy!*
- *Eh, Lif, besok ada kuliah tambahan gak?*

However, when they made the call to home telephone most of the subjects will ask for information on whether the person they wanted to speak to is there or not, can be contacted or not. Type of utterance highly used by subject is *Bisa bicara dengan* (Could I speak to) ... (name). Permission is used in interrogatives since the speakers understand that the addressee is potential source of the permission. It happened because they assumed that anybody in the house might pick up the receiver. They do not know yet who was answering the phone it can be the maid, parents, sibling, etc. That is why they made the utterance in a polite way by using

modality can or could in Bahasa Indonesia 'Bisa'.

None of the subjects mentioned the number they were calling when they made the calls in asking for information. It is evidence that mentioning the destination numbers is not a popular procedure in telephoning in Indonesia. They did not think it is necessary to do until they find out that they had dialed the wrong numbers. Especially in a digital era, the dialed phone number can be seen from the telephone screen. Some telephone machines come with wide screen enabling the caller see the number that he/she is being dialed.

### Closing

Utterance used to close a telephone conversation is quite various, including *Makasih ya, ya udah, makasih, assalamu'alaikum, dah, sampe besok, thanks, terima kasih, terima kasih banyak, terima kasih, maaf telah mengganggu*. The first seven closings are used when they close the conversation with people they feel close, whereas the last three and *assalamu'alaikum* are addressed to people they respect or they talk to for the first time.

### Situation #1

When they made a call to a friend that they know well, almost all of the subjects tend to be very casual and they directly get to the topic or the purpose of calling. However, few of them greet first and made a question as an ice breaker by asking questions like, *Halo Vie, lagi ngapain?* (Hallo Vie, What are you doing?), before they get down to the reason for calling. They ask the interlocutor's activity when they made a call. This is showing that the relationship of the two speakers is close. They are trying to be attentive.

The utterance used is casual or informal because they are aware that they are familiar with each other and of the same level of power in terms of social distance. The pattern used is; they mention name or

nick name of their friends and directly mention the purpose of calling. The utterances produced are also direct.

Examples:

- *Eh, Lif, kalo besok ada kuliah tambahan gak?*  
(Eh, Lif, Is there any additional lecture tomorrow?)
- *Ada kelas tambahan gak?*  
(Is there any additional lecture tomorrow?)
- *Ji, kata anak-anak Bu Ida ngadain kelas tambahan, beneran nih?*  
(Ji, someone told me that Mrs. Ida will give additional lecture, is it right?)

Out of fifteen subjects, only one uses explicit want statement in uttering asking for information, e.g. *Halo, Rin Saya mau tanya apakah besok ada kuliah tambahan?* The language used tends to be formal. It might be because the speaker thinks that her relationship with the interlocutor is not very close so that she feels reluctant to produce informal utterance. Another possible reason is that the speaker do not think that she feels comfortable to be casual to the hearer due to personal matter.

### Situation #2

In situation #2, the subjects are assigned to ask for information from someone they talk to for the first time. The speech realizations are similar to when they ask for information from friends. The procedures of telephoning conducted by the subjects are different. Something that is obviously different is that they are introducing themselves before they come to the purpose of telephoning. The procedure becomes: opening, mentioning their self-identity, and tell the reason for calling (asking for information). They realize that the interlocutor will not directly understand the conversation because they do not have the same common ground; topic of conversation. Mentioning self-identity becomes crucial so as to make the

conversation runs smoothly. Following are speech realizations made by the subjects.

- *ini Faisal dari Fakultas Teknik.*  
(I am Faisal from Engineering Faculty)
- *Saya Taufik anak IF '14*  
(I am Taufik from IF '14)
- *Hai Dan, ini Kiky, mau tanya nih*  
(Hai Dan, I am Kiki, I want to ask you something)

When they realize the speech act of asking question, some of them tried to be casual by uttering directly the point of conversation, following are the examples.

- *Bu Ida nitip buku buat difotokopi gak untuk perkuliahan minggu depan?*  
(Did Mrs. Ida entrust a book to be copied for the next lecture?)
- *Tadi Ibu Ida menitipkan buku untuk dikopi ngga buat minggu depan?*  
(Did Mrs. Ida entrust a book to be copied for the next week?)

The data above show that most of the subjects tend to use explicit want statements, e.g. *mau tanya, mo nanya, mo nanya nih*, before they realize the asking for information. It occurs because they understand the social distance between them and their interlocutors. They are aware that they have a non-casual relationship. Since they talk to them for the first time, somehow they would feel awkward in the beginning. After that, they tend to be informal in making the utterance.

### Situation #3

In asking for information from parents, they tend to be direct. After they utter the opening, they directly proceed to the main topic of conversation; asking for information. However, few of them make question asking their parents' conditions and continued to the topic. In my opinion, it may be the result of the family culture or upbringing style. The family has custom not to be direct to other members of family when they conversing. The parents expose the children on asking condition in the conversation as a way of respecting elderly.

The tones of the utterances are informal. It shows that their relationship is very close. They feel comfortable to be direct in expressing their intention. Casual utterances indicate that the speakers feel close to the interlocutor so that they feel comfortable making informal utterances.

The data show that none of the respondents tell his or her identity when telephoning to their parents. Therefore, mentioning self-identity is not important, as they feel certain that the partner of speaking know already the speaker from the voice and topic of conversation. Following are the utterances made by the subjects:

- *Assalamualaikum, apa kabar bu?*  
(Assalamualaikum, how are you, mom?)
- *Assalamualaikum, ibu sehat?*  
(Assalamualaikum, are you okay, mom?)

### Situation #4

Making a phone call to ask for information from a lecturer is quite different from the one making for parents. The procedure is after the opening, they mention self-identity; name and major of study. All subjects try to be informative on their identity. They think that the lecturer may not be able to directly identify who the speaker is unless the students tell their identity or the students have good personal relationship with the lecturer. This is a strategy that is employed by the students to be concise in giving self-identity and be polite with one that they respect. After mentioning their identity, the subjects then lead the interlocutor to the topic or purpose of telephoning. Before mentioning their purpose of calling, they express an apology by saying, *maaf Bu/Pak, Bu, maaf saya mengganggu*. The apology is meant to show that it is an effort for them to be polite. They realize their social distance with the interlocutors. Most of the utterances use explicit want statements: "*Saya Elif, mau Tanya nilai UAS kemarin sudah keluar belum*", "*Apa nilai UAS saya sudah keluar, Pak?*" Paying attention to their utterance,

the writer notices that they tend to use casual or informal language in uttering their purpose. Instead of using a formal one, they use a less standardized or formal language. The reasons may be they are trying to be informal although at the beginning of their conversation they use opening, greeting and self-mentioning; procedure of being formal. Another reason is they have lack language competence so they cannot employ appropriate expressions when they want to extend purpose conversation. Saying an apology before they state their intention of calling indicates their effort to be polite in their utterances. They try not to direct to the purpose of calling; asking for information. Following are examples.

- *Maaf Bu, saya Elif mau tanya nilai UAS kemarin sudah keluar belum?*  
(I am sorry Miss, I am Alif, I am calling to ask you about the result of the final test, has it been published?)
- *Maaf Pak saya Taufik, apa nilai Uas sudah keluar Pak?*  
(I am sorry Sir, I am Taufik, has the final test result been published?)

However there are also subjects who directly get to the topic by using explicit want statements without expressing an apology. Their politeness in the utterance is indicated by explicit want statement. Here are some examples.

1. *Hallo Bu Ini ma Eril. Eril mo nanyain nilai UAS BU? Apa udah keluar gitu?*  
(Hallo Miss, this is Eril calling. I want to ask you about the result of the final test, has it been published?)
2. *Apakah nilai Uas sudah dikeluarkan BUK? Terimakasih.*  
(Has the final test result been published? Thank you.)

### **Situation #5**

They make a call to ask for information from someone they talk to for the first time; a customer service. The pattern that the subjects employ is similar to situation #4. They start with greeting, make

an apology, and then state their purpose of conversation. Few of them express an apology before mentioning the main topic. Out of fifteen subjects only one mentions self-identity by stating that he is a spokesperson from a particular region, e.g. *kami perwakilan kompleks X. I.*

Mentioning self-identity is not compulsory for the subjects unless they represent a specific community or a group of people, not as an individual. As a manifestation of social distance, they use explicit want statements in uttering asking for information.

### **CONCLUSION**

The speech realization patterns highly used when the subjects ask for information via telephone to a friend is they make an opening and directly state the purpose of calling, and then closing. Meanwhile, when calling to someone of relatively the same age and social status but talk for the first time, they will mention their self-identity then continue with the topic of calling. Mentioning self-identity is an evidence that they somewhat feel awkward and to lead and give interlocutors clue to their purpose of calling.

When calling to parents, casual utterances are significantly employed. Comfortable feeling in uttering their purpose in informal way indicates their closeness with the interlocutors.

The patterns employed when asking information to a lecturer or someone they talk to for the first time is quite similar. To a lecturer, they will make an opening and followed by mentioning self-identity. They tend to be indirect in proceeding to the purpose of calling by expressing an apology for disturbing the lecturer's time. Anyway, this is a way used to show their politeness. The other way employed to show politeness is by using explicit want statement. To someone they talk to for the first time, e.g. PLN customer service, is they utter the opening, (they tend not to) mention self-



identity. Realizing the social distance, they will state their apology and continue with the purpose of calling. To sum, the speech realization in asking for information through a telephone line tend to be brief and purposive to whomever the call is addressed to.

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## **Drummer**

A drummer, sick of all the drummer jokes, decides to change his instrument. After some thought, he decides on the accordion. So he goes to the music store and says to the owner, "I'd like to look at the accordions, please." The owner gestures to a shelf in the corner and says, "All our accordions are over there." After browsing, the drummer says, "I think I'd like the big red one in the corner." The store owner looks at him and says, "You're a drummer, aren't you?" The drummer, crestfallen, says, "How did you know?" The store owner says, "That 'big red accordion' is the radiator."

(Source: <http://www.study-express.ru/humour/funny-stories.shtml>, picture: [www.google.co.id](http://www.google.co.id))