

An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts Used by Jessica Wongso in the “Chilling Interview” on 7News Spotlight’s YouTube Video

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Abstract

This study analyzes the speech acts used by Jessica Wongso in 7 News Spotlight interview, with the framework of pragmatics that focuses how language used in context to deliver meaning and actions. With using Searle's classification of assertive, expressive, declarative, directive, and commissive acts, this research aims to classify the type of speech acts used by Jessica and to discover which kind of acts occur most frequently. This paper uses a descriptive qualitative method with quantitative support to find the frequency of speech acts used by Jessica Wongso in the 7 News Spotlight. The data show that Jessica used four types of speech act. Assertive acts dominantly, mainly to explain, clarify, and deny that shape her reputation in front of the public. Expressive reveal her emotional reaction, while directives and commissive appear rarely, showing that she rarely making demand or commitment. Overall, the analysis uncovers that Jessica's speech acts function as a tool to defend herself and influence public perception.

INTRODUCTION

The cyanide coffee case associated with Jessica Kumala Wongso in 2016 became one of the most controversial law cases in Indonesia. The incident started with the death of Wayan Mirna Salihin after she drank the Vietnamese coffee that was found having cyanide inside of it, at a café in Jakarta called Olivier Café. According to Amalia & Lestari (2016), the media news and television gave reports massively related to the case, building public opinion all over Indonesia. What drew attention was the legal process and also how the media built the narrative often frame Jessica Kumala Wongso as the suspect behind the cyanide coffee that killed her friend, Wayan Mirna Salihin (Handoyo et al., 2023). The media news resulted a public debate questioning the truth, justice in this criminal case, and shape the public opinion framing Jessica as the suspect.

Jessica was then found guilty as the suspect behind the cyanide coffee, as was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Other than that, public still questioning the behavior of her character that seem to be normal, knowing her best friend was dead. Many viewed Jessica as a mysterious figure, while there are other believed that Jessica was the victim of media narrative (Tarigan et al., 2024). According to Kurnaiwan et al, (2024), the legal process placed her not only as a defendant but also as a figure whose image was shaped by the media and public conversation. This situation opened to examine how Jessica's language became the subjects of deeper analysis that may reveal the truth of her version.

Nearly a decade later, Jessica appeared in the public spotlight, specifically an exclusive interview with 7 News Spotlight 2025 in YouTube. The interview uncovered a more personal side of Jessica after she spent almost years throughout the case. The public paid a very close attention because it was the first time she finally opened up about her side of story. In the conversation, her choice of words and manner resulted a question that were then analyze. These utterances of Jessica Wongso turned the interview became a data for the analysis of how speech functions as a tool for her reputation and influence the public opinion.

Several analysis have observed Jessica Wongso's case through different perspectives. Hastuningdyah & Permana (2025) revealed the gender ideology in the documentary *Ice Cold*, while Mughiroh et al. (2024) focused on the conversational discourse analysis in the same film. Havizah & Muhajir (2024) examined the illocutionary speech acts in Jessica's interview on Deddy Corbuzier's podcast, and Handoyo et al. (2023) revealed the speech acts in her courtroom trial. Moreover, Tarigan et al. (2024) uncovered

the illocutionary speech act in trial of Jessica Wongso. However, none of these papers has specifically analyzed Jessica's linguistic strategies in the *7 News Spotlight 2025* interview using a speech act framework. Therefore, this research seeks to address that gap. However, none of these papers has specifically analysed Jessica's utterances through the perspective of linguistic strategies in the *7 News Spotlight 2025*. By doing so, this analysis focuses on the speech act framework and tend to fill that gap.

This analysis is to reveal the type of speech acts used by Jessica and to classify the most frequently type appeared in her utterances. Moreover, the research aims to identify the reason why Jessica used specific speech act more often than the other and how the speech act used to reveal her intention in shaping personal reputation also to influence the public perception. The significance of the study contributes to the field of pragmatics specifically in analysing how speech acts operate in the interview, practically it also gives knowledge to the reader how language can also be a tool for a specific strategy by the figure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examine language based on its use in context. According to Yule's theory written by Kurnaiwan et al. (2024), pragmatics emphasizes how utterances are understood according to the situation. In discourse studies, pragmatics is important because it helps explain the speaker's intentions, which are often not explicitly stated in the linguistic structure. For example, a simple sentence like "it's so cold in here" can be understood either as a mere statement about the weather or as an implicit request for someone to close the window. Eragamreddy (2024) mentioned pragmatics also covers phenomena such as implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and politeness. The study of pragmatics in the context of the Jessica Wongso case becomes relevant because, through public interviews, every choice of words, tone, and speech act can reveal communicative strategies aimed at self-defense, denial of accusations, constructing a particular image and to influence the public. Therefore, pragmatics provides a conceptual framework for revealing hidden meanings and communicative purposes behind Jessica's utterances in the *7 News Spotlight 2025* interview.

The concept of speech acts was first introduced by Austin in Simamora et al. (2020), Austin divided speech acts into three types, locutionary the act of uttering something with a specific meaning, illocutionary the act performed through the utterance, such as ordering, requesting, or promising, and perlocutionary the effect produced on the hearer, such as

persuading or frightening. This theory was further developed by Searle in Handoyo et al. (2023) who placed greater emphasis on the illocutionary force. Searle categorized illocutionary acts into five groups, assertive is statements that describe or claim something to be true, directives is utterances that attempt to get the hearer to do something, commissive is commitments or promises made by the speaker, expressive is utterances that convey feelings, and declaratives is utterances that change the status or condition of a situation, such as pronouncing someone married or firing an employee. Each of these categories can be further specified into sub-types. For example, assertive may include explaining, denying, confirming, or speculating. Directives can involve requesting, questioning, or giving suggestions. Commissive often appear as promising or offering. Expressive may be realized through apologizing, showing regret, or expressing surprise. Declaratives, on the other hand, may take forms such as declaring. With this theoretical framework, speech act analysis becomes a powerful tool to reveal how speakers use language to achieve particular communicative goals. In the context of Jessica Wongso's interview, this framework is especially relevant to observe how she expresses denial, defense, or emotional statements that are not only informative, but also strategic in shaping public perception.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method with simple quantitative support to reveal Jessica Wongso's speech acts frequency in the exclusive *7 News Spotlight* interview. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), quantitative research focuses on analysing numerical data, while qualitative research explores meanings and experiences. Furthermore, the quantitative method in this analysis is to measure the frequency of the findings, while the qualitative method is to describe the meaning behind the data. The data source of the study is the interview transcript broadcast through the official *7 News Spotlight* YouTube channel in 2025 with using English language, with a duration of less than one hour. Data were collected using documentation techniques, namely by transcribing Jessica Wongso's entire utterances from the video into text form. Moreover, the data were analyzed using Searle's speech act theory, which classifies illocutionary acts into five main categories, assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The analysis followed several steps. first, the researcher watched the interview video of Jessica Wongso to gain an overall understanding of the context. Second, the transcript of the interview was carefully read. Third, the utterances were classified into Searle's five categories of speech

act. Fourth, each utterance was further classified into more specific sub-type. Fifth, the frequency of each speech act and sub-type was calculated in order to identify which were the most dominant. Finally, the results were interpreted to explain how Jessica Wongso used speech acts in her responses. This approach was chosen because it provides a deep understanding of Jessica Wongso's communication strategies and how she constructs self-representation before the international public.

FINDINGS

The objective of this paper is to reveal the kind of speech acts used by Jessica Wongso in her interview. The five types of speech acts were applied in Jessica utterances and the classified to each sub-type. The findings are presented in the table below, followed by further descriptive explanations that interpret the distribution of each type.

Table 1. Table Captions Should be Placed above the Table

No	Type of Speech Acts	Function of Speech Acts	Frequency
1.	Assertive	Stating	7
		Explaining	10
		Denying	10
		Claiming	6
2.	Expressive	Emotional reaction	7
		Regret	2
		Despair	4
3.	Directive	Ordering	2
4.	Commissive	Promising	1
5.	Declarative	-	-
Total			49

The data show Jessica uses speech acts with the total 49 utterances. The finding show that she only used four types of speech acts. Assertive acts dominant with 33 utterances, followed by expressive acts with 13 utterances. Meanwhile, directive acts appeared only twice and commissive appeared only once This data reveal a clear strategy in Jessica linguistics behavior throughout the interview.

Assertive Acts

Stating

Interviewer: Can you describe to me what your friendship with Mirna was?

Jessica: **We weren't close at all**; we weren't best friend or anything.

This sentence can be identified as assertive subtype of stating. Jessica response provides information about her friendship with Mirna, presenting it as a simple truth and

information from her side. By saying that they “weren’t close at all”, she frames the friendship as distant and ordinary.

Jessica uses this choice of word to shape how public see her bonding with Mirna. With stating that they weren’t close, she pushed the idea that she had no personal motive or deep connection that might lead to conflict. This way she tried to influence public perception, framing herself as someone with no deep connection to the victim, in turn to be less suspicious.

Denying

Interviewer: Clearly you’re looking around, what are you looking for?

Jessica: **I don’t think i was looking around finding CCTV to be honest. I never really actually did that** like in a public place, but if I was looking around, if my eye goes somewhere. I could probably looking at something like someone like people around me.

This utterance of Jessica can be identified as assertive subtype of denying. When Jessica arrived at the café in 2016, she was walking around to find table but there were still many empty tables. The interviewer asks her what she was looking for. She unexpectedly denied that she was not looking for CCTV. The interviewer never mentioned about CCTV, but Jessica introduces it first and rejects the idea. This makes her statement form a denial.

Jessica’s denial function as a defensive tool to manage how her action might be interpreted. By saying and denying the possibility accusations of looking for CCTV, she tries to reject any negative assumptions. She then softened her denial by saying that her eyes might have been just looking to the people around her. This way helps her control the public perception, making her action to be normal rather than suspicious.

Explaining

Interviewer: Why? Why did you get this so early?

Jessica: **Because of the traffic rule. It has to be at least 3 people** or something in the car at a certain time. So it wasn’t like i deliberately want to come early or anything. It’s just because i had to.

This sentence can be classified as assertive subtype of explaining. When the interviewer asked why she arrived early before the appointment with her friend, she responded by giving reason a reason why she arrived early. Jessica explained that there had to be at least three people in a car at a certain time, since she was driving alone, she had no choice. Her words function to clarify her action of early arrival.

Jessica used this explanation to show that arriving early was not her personal decision. By saying that she didn’t deliberately want to arrive early, she removed the

suspicion from the public, and influence their perception that Jessica's action is a normal and unsuspecting.

Claiming

Interviewer: You're saying there's a lot of lies that have been told

Jessica: Yeah, **many**.

This statement can be categorized as assertive subtype of claiming. The interviewer said there have been a lot of lies and she quickly responded with "Yeah, many". Jessica's statement function as a claim that numbers of lies surrounding her

Jessica used this confirmation to stress her position and claimed that she is a victim of a false story. By agreeing firmly without hesitation, she convince the public that there had been misinformation spread about her. This way, her claim works to influence that Jessica is the victim.

Expressive Acts

Emotional Reaction

Interviewer: Who is in their right mind is going to employ you? What chance of you ever getting a normal job again?

Jessica: Oh this thing when I think about it, **I get really freaked out**. I don't know if I could get like a normal job anymore

In this conversation, Jessica expresses her feelings in her response about the questions asking her future job. This utterance can be classified as expressive acts subtype emotional reaction, because she revealed her fear about whether she could ever get a normal job again.

Jessica's reason for sharing this emotion publicly is to reveal her vulnerability and the impact of her life. By expressing her fear, she tries to gain the empathize from the public to the events that she has gone through

Regret

Interviewer: Why did they ask you to leave?

Jessica: I kind of like um, I had a really difficult time at that time kind of thing. So it was like **in the past I um, they are things I'm not very proud of. Like I did a lot of things in the past**.

In this context, the interviewer asked Jessica why she was told to leave her previous job in Australia. Her answer can be classified as expressive acts under the subtype regret, because she expressed feeling of discomfort and remorse related to her actions in the past

Jessica's reason for sharing this emotion publicly because she seeks empathy and understanding from the public. By admitting that she has done things she is not proud of,

she asks the public to view her as a human who normally made mistakes, rather than judge her harshly

Despair

Interviewer: Do you think it's possible it will find you innocent?

Jessica: Well this is 50/50 percentage you know like I, I don't know what's going to happen in the future obviously, **I can only hope**. But like let's just see what happen, let's just go with the flow. I can only hope, you know.

In this excerpt, the interviewer asks Jessica whether it is possible for her to be found innocent. This utterance can be classified as an expressive speech act, specifically under the sub-type despair because she expresses uncertainty and a sense of powerlessness regarding the outcome, admitting that she can only hope for a positive result.

Jessica's purpose in sharing this emotional reaction with the public seems to seek empathy and support. By expressing her helplessness and reliance on hope, she encourages the audience to understand her vulnerability and sympathize with her situation, highlighting the emotional weight of the legal process she is facing.

Directive Acts

Requesting

Interviewer: I'm trying to find a way of reconciling the description that some people have for you. So Christy Carter for example, your boss at New South Wales Ambulance Service. She told the court that you had two very different personalities.

Jessica: But **did you check?** Did she actually say that?

In this context, the interviewer brings a statement from Jessica's former boss about her saying that Jessica has two different personalities. Jessica response to that can be categorized as directive speech acts under the subtype requesting, because Jessica is questioning the truth, and request further clarification.

Jessica's reason for making this request is to challenge the truth of the statement and ensure that the public collects true information. By requesting for a verification, she tries to defend her image and avoid any misunderstandings, motivating the audience to consider the truth of the sources before making any judgement.

Commissive Acts

Promising

Interviewer: But that's why I'm wondering about his actions there. Taking out a restraining order is, you know, is a quite thing to go through

Jessica: Well I'm not here to talk about him, like honestly we can do it off camera obviously, but yeah he was in the past. **I'll tell you the reason later.**

The interviewer asked Jessica about her ex-boyfriend's actions in Australia, mainly regarding the restraining order against Jessica. By saying "I'll tell you the reason later" can be categorized as a commissive act, under the subtype promising, because she prefers to provide the explanation later time, off camera.

Jessica's reason in saying this commitment is to maintain her credibility and to convince the public that she is not avoiding the questions. By making promise to share the information later, she wants public to recognize not as someone who avoid the questions, instead she made the promise and answer it later.

DISCUSSION

The data show that assertive speech acts are used by Jessica Wongso dominantly during the interview, which is important because it uncovers how she intends to build the public's perception of her. Assertive, involving explaining and denying dominate her utterances to show her effort to control the narrative presented to the public. By explaining, Jessica includes reasons, context and detail about her actions or decisions that were questioned by the public, which helps the public to understand her story and reduce any wrong information. Moreover, she also used denials to reject any claims or accusations made by public that might harm her reputation. Her strategy is to influence the public's perspective and build Jessica's image to be less suspicious. By doing that. She seeks to control the image of herself, prevent misinformation and collect empathy from the audience. This shows that assertive acts are not only a tool to share information but also a strong means to control public perception and protect her image as a figure related to the cyanide coffee.

CONCLUSION(S)

This study set out to identify the types of speech acts used by Jessica Wongso in her interview on *7 News Spotlight* and to understand how these acts reflect her way of presenting herself to the public. The findings show four categories of speech acts, namely assertive, expressive, directive, and commissive, with a clear dominance of assertive acts. Specifically, the data reveal that Jessica used 33 assertive acts, 13 expressive acts, 2 directive acts, and 1 commissive act throughout the 45 minutes video. The large number of assertive

acts indicates that Jessica relied heavily on explanations, and denials to clarify the misunderstanding and reject any accusation for her reputation. Expressive acts, though fewer, gave glimpses of her frustration and emotional burden. Directive and commissive acts appeared only occasionally, showing that Jessica rarely pushed the interviewer to act or committed herself to promises. Altogether, the pattern suggests that Jessica strategically used speech acts especially assertive as a defensive tool to influence public perception and to position herself as someone who is wrongly accused but still rational in her responses.

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