

# An Analysis of Speech Acts Performed by a Fitness Influencer, Kayla Itsines, in Her Instagram Captions

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## ABSTRACT

This study seeks out the speech acts in Kayla Itsines' Instagram captions. The captions written in the last week of January 2020 were selected as the data. There were 20 captions which consisted of 209 sentences. The results present that *representative* is the most frequent classification in this study. It only has one type which is *claiming*. It proves that in her captions, Kayla uses phatic expressions to communicate to her followers since she considers her platform as a community that shares the same interests. Hence, she can express her thoughts or feelings without having to provide the scientific evidence. Further, *directive* consists of 3 areas in this study; *ordering*, *suggesting*, and *thanking*. *Ordering* and *suggesting* have the same occurrence which is 39.75%. It presents that being a fitness influencer means being a role model. Hence, she urges her followers to make suggestions to achieve their goals. Lastly, *expressive* is used to express *liking*, *congratulating*, and *thanking*. *Liking* is the highest with 50% total occurrence. It aims to display her excitement towards her followers' achievement since the goal of an influencer is to influence people to reach their goals.

**Keywords:** captions, illocutionary act, speech act

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, most people are registered to some social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter. Statista (2015) as cited in Hosain & Liu (2020) mentions that 1 out of 4 people has a Facebook account. People just need an internet connection on their devices to surf the internet. Through social media platforms, there are so many benefits people get. Especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 and early 2020, almost all the dynamics of life shifted from offline to online. Moreover, with the implementation of lockdown and social distancing, everyone almost spent their time at home. This caused an increase in internet usage and media social activities. In Southeast Asia, as reported by Google, Temasek, and Bain Company (2020, as cited in Bayu, 2020), the average duration of public internet use increased by an hour during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 1).



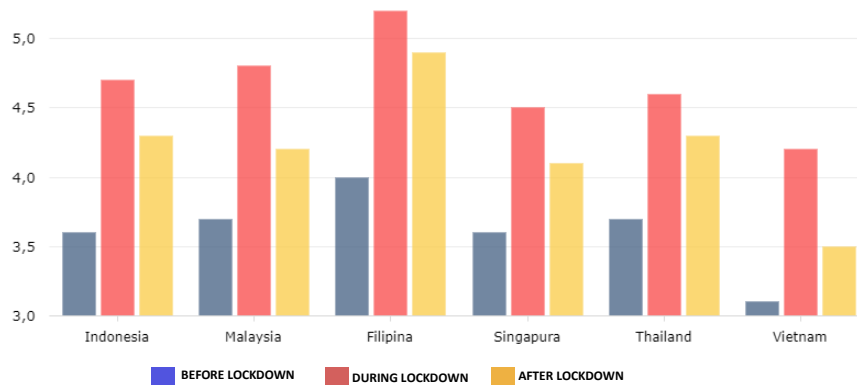


Figure 1. The average duration of public internet use before, during, and after lockdown in Southeast Asia

On the other hand, social media has become very important for people, especially during a pandemic. Taken from the Kata Data databox (2020), the use of social media is the highest increase in Southeast Asian society related to activities in cyberspace during the pandemic (see Figure 2). One of them is because of the demand to spend more time at home, to suppress the transmission of Covid-19. Based on YouGov data quoted by Facebook for Business (Pusparisa, 2020), there are at least five applications whose use is increasing. Social media is the favorite alternative for the people of Southeast Asia. This is because the use of social media has increased by 38%. Meanwhile, video streaming services also increased by 35%.

Social media has become the most popular application since the beginning of the pandemic. This is because firstly, the system offers such easy access for people to stay connected with other people around the world. People just need to follow their friends or relatives, or even someone else they even don't know. Akram and Kumar (2018) mention that social media aims to share social relations with other people. Hence, they do not need to send a letter to relatives or friends who live in different places since they can communicate with them just through their hands.

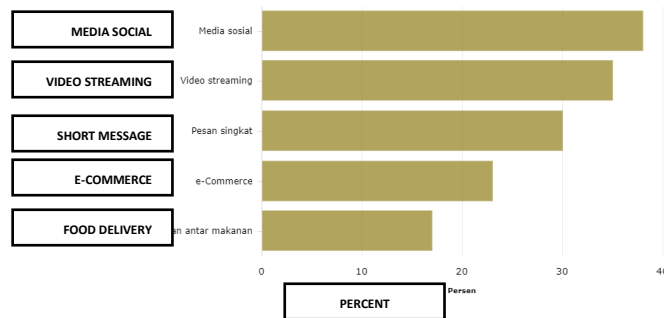


Figure 2. The increase of five applications during the pandemic in 2020

Especially during the early days of the pandemic situation when social distancing and lockdown were enforced, people couldn't meet each other directly, not even their neighbors. Social media is one of the platforms for socializing today, especially during a pandemic. Secondly, through social media, they can gain more information on a particular topic since they just need to type some words as keywords. Everyone can get information easily and quickly, and everyone can share or even deliver certain information freely through social media. Searching for information is now just as easy as the touch of a finger. Thirdly, people use social media to get some entertainment. Through social media, people can get entertainment, whether passively (in the form of videos, readings, pictures) or even interactive media (games, comments-reply, duet-platform, etc.). Hence, Venkateswaran, Ugalde, and Gutierrez (2019) reveal that most companies put extra effort into taking advantage of the media social platforms. Further, some people also use certain platforms to explore their hobbies, talents, and interests.

Besides, even social media now can be part of teaching and learning activities, especially due to the shifting of the educational system from offline to online.

As mentioned before, anyone can get certain information, or share and even deliver their content through social media freely and easily. People can look for their interests through some keywords easily through social media, and now social media has become a very crowded means to find and disseminate information. People can even follow an account to continue to get the content generated by that account. With this kind of system, the term *influencers* emerged. Geysler (2021) states that influencers in social media are people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic. They make regular posts about that topic on their preferred social media channels and generate large followers of enthusiastic, engaged people who pay close attention to their views (Geysler, 2021).

Some people follow social media influencers since they are interested in the content presented by the influencers. If they follow a particular account or channel, then they will be notified if that account uploads some new videos or posts. Then, they, as followers, can either like the posts or comment on them. Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) state that influencers use technology to have more control over their personality by posting status updates, photos, or even answering their followers' comments. Further, through the development of the features in the platforms, the interaction among people is easier such as through Instagram captions. Instagram is one of the most famous social media nowadays with 500 million total users since its launching in 2010 (Pessala, 2016).

Based on the explanation above, the influencers in the social media platforms create a community with the followers since they share the same interests and engage with one another almost every day. However, the interactions that occur in that phatic communion are not always done directly but can be done indirectly due to the time difference in interacting on social media, i.e. someone can respond to very old posts.

On average, social media provides an available platform for texts, images, videos, interactive activities such as games, and so on. Each social media has its mainstay feature specifications, with different systems. Like YouTube for example, YouTube's main platform is video, with other features like 'Like', 'Comment', 'Share', 'Save', 'Community Group', 'Playlist', 'Description', etc. As for Instagram, the main platforms are 'Feed', 'Story', 'Reels', and 'Tags' which can only load images and short videos (unlike YouTube which can load long videos). However, Instagram has a long description feature which is usually called a 'Caption'. Further, every influencer must have a way to engage with their followers. Most social media influencers often write captions to give information related to their posts. "text data is the caption or short information of the images uploaded by the user" (Purbey et al, 2017, p. 3401). They can write up to 2200 words and a maximum of 30 hashtags for each of their captions (Kuncoro & Iswanto, 2015). In this case, they often greet their followers to engage them in that post. The followers also have the right to respond related to the posts or captions through the comment section. Hence, the use of language in captions or certain descriptive features in certain platforms becomes interesting to discuss, related to the speech act contained in the contents brought by each influencer. Yule, (1996) argues when people communicate with others, they utter languages that are not only for saying something such as making a statement, describing things, or stating of affair, but also for doing something such as requesting, suggesting, warning, making question, ordering, etc.

Thus, this research aims to analyze the five classifications of speech acts proposed by Yule (1996): assertive or representative, directive, commission, expressive, and declarative. The object chosen for this study is captions written by a fitness influencer named Kayla Itsines. The researcher chose Instagram as the object platform since, although each social media attracts influencers somewhat (Intelligence, 2021), Instagram is the most favorite among the models. Almost four out of five (79%) brands overwhelmingly tap Instagram for influencer crusades,

compared with Facebook (46%), YouTube (36%), Twitter (24%), and LinkedIn (12%), per Influencer Marketing Hub (Miller, 2021). In 2020 when the pandemic began, Instagram was ranked first as the social media favored by young people and Generation Z (GlobalWebIndex as mentioned in (Pusparisa, 2021). Then the ranking still hasn't shifted in 2021 (HooteSuite, 2021 as cited in (Dihni, 2021).

Meanwhile, Kayla Itsiness was chosen since she is a fitness influencer who has more than 12 million total followers on Instagram. In 2016, TIME Magazine named her as one of the '30 Most Influential People on the Internet' (as mentioned in Forbes, 2021). In 2017, she was Number One of the World's Most Powerful Influencers by Forbes and was included in '30 Under 30' Asia (Forbes, 2021). In 2020, at the beginning Covid-19 outbreak, she was included into TOP 4 World Fitness Influencers by Coach Nine (Scott, 2020); and in 2021, she is still in the TOP 6 World Fitness Influencers according to (Miller, 2021), TOP 5 according to MediaKix (2021) and TOP 3 according to Influencer Marketing Hub. Kayla Itsines herself is best known for her ebook series, Bikini Body Guides, and her meal-planning and workout app, Sweat with Kayla. She's been named one of Time's 30 most influential people on the internet and is one of Australia's most wealthy under 40 (MediaKix, 2021). She actively uses her Instagram to post some pictures with the addition of captions. Most of her posts are related to fitness and lifestyle. Tracking how famous and engaging Kayla Itsiness is in maintaining her career development as an influencer, this study aims to analyze the speech acts used by Kayla Itsiness in maintaining and engaging her relationship and communication with her followers.

This study is not a pioneer study since many scholars have conducted research applying this theory (Basra & Thoyyibah, 2017; Budiasih, Andayani, & Rohmadi (2017); Siritman & Meilantina, 2020; Syah, Djatmika, & Sumarlam, 2017; Tutuarima, Nuraeningsih, & Rusiana, 2018). The studies use different objects of the study such as TV programs and school students. Those bring new insight to the readers in understanding the theory in different contexts. Therefore, this study does not contribute to the development of the theory. However, it helps the readers to enrich their understanding.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Further, in the captions, the expressions written in the captions express many ideas such as motivating, sharing, thanking, or apologizing. Pragmatically, it is considered an illocutionary act. (Austin, 1962) classifies speech act into 3 parts, namely locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Locutionary act is the production of meaningful utterances and expressions or the act **of** saying something (Leech, 1989) e. g. "take that please!", "I promise", "who is he?", etc., which leads to an illocutionary act, an act **in** saying something (Leech, 1989), the intention of producing meaningful expression (e. g. promise, offering, etc), which causes the performance of a perlocutionary act, which is the effect of the locutionary and illocutionary act (which produces actions, behaviors, feelings, beliefs, etc). According to Searle (1968), the illocutionary act is not just a simple act of saying something, but an act of doing something, e.g. informing, ordering, warning, asking, stating, wishing, promising, etc.

Furthermore, Searle (1979, in Yule, 1996) classifies illocutionary acts into five different categories. Firstly, it is *assertive* or *representative* which deals with conveying information. The illocutionary acts of this class aim to commit the speaker to the **truth** of the expressed proposition (Pogoni, 2013). The simplest test that can be done to an assertive act is if it can be defined as *true* or *untrue*. Secondly, it is *directive* means a request given by the speaker to make the hearer undertake an action/particular actions, e.g., begging, inviting, permitting, requesting, ordering, commanding, supplicating, imploring, pleading, permitting, advising, and even daring, contradicting, challenging, doubting, etc. (Searle, 1868, as cited in Pogoni, 2013). Thirdly, it is *commissive* means when the speaker assumes to do something such as promising, offering, refusing, accepting, vowing, threatening, engaging, undertaking, reassuring, or assuring. Fourthly, it is *expressive* means revealing the speaker's mind, e. g. thanksgiving, condoling, deploring, welcoming, apologizing, wishing, congratulating, cursing, blessing, etc. Fifthly, it is *declarative* in which a change is the purpose, e. g. resigning, job position-

appointing, firing, employing, making someone into something/onto certain positions, etc. Declarations bring about some alternation or change in the status or condition of the referred object or objects solely in virtue of the fact that the declaration has been successfully performed (Putra, 2018). This feature distinguishes declarative from the other categories.

Searle (1968) concludes that generally, speech acts have the structure F (P), where F represents the *illocutionary force* and P represents the *propositional content*. To indicate that an utterance of a sentence containing this element has a certain illocutionary force, the *Illocutionary Force Indicating Device* (IFID) can be represented by any element of a natural language, namely *the mood of the verbs, punctuation, word order in a sentence, intonation contour and stress, and performative verbs or form*, etc. In other words, to make the intended illocutionary force recognized by the hearer, the speaker will use IFID. It is the device used by the speaker to deliver their intention so the hearer or reader can understand this intention (Yule, 1996). The most obvious device in IFID is a performative verb: a verb that explicitly names the illocutionary act being performed (Putra, 2018).

## METHOD

The researcher analyzed the types of illocutionary acts proposed by Yule (1996) found in Kayla Itsines' Instagram captions. There were several reasons for choosing Kayla Itsines instead of other fitness influencers. Firstly, she has more followers on Instagram instead of other influencers. Her total number of followers is 12.800.000. Secondly, compared to other fitness influencers, she regularly posts on Instagram with long captions. The captions usually discuss her personal life, motivation, or information related to her fitness journey and lifestyle. Hence, her followers who have the same interests will get the benefits through it. Third, tracking how famous and engaging Kayla Itsines is in maintaining her career development as an influencer, it is interesting to analyze the speech acts used by Kayla Itsines in maintaining and engaging her relationship and communication with her followers. Further, by applying the 5 classifications of illocutionary acts proposed by Yule (1996), then it can be discovered the intended meaning of the utterances.

The captions analyzed in this study were written in the last week of January 2020, as it was the beginning time of the COVID-19 outbreak. There were 20 captions found on that week. Based on the analysis, 209 sentences were classified into each of the categories. There were several steps done by the researcher in collecting the data. Firstly, the researcher selected the captions. Secondly, the researcher screenshots the captions. Thirdly, the researcher wrote the captions in the form of a table for each of the sentences to make the analysis easier.

To analyze the data, after the data is put into tables sentence by sentence, the researcher categorized them into each of the types of illocutionary acts by using a tick symbol and noted the IFID identified from the sentences. Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFID) include at least: the word order, the stress, the intonation contour, the punctuation, the mood of the verb, and the so-called performative verbs. Then, the researcher counted the total occurrence for each of the types. Lastly, the researcher chose some samples to discuss to make discussion easier.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the data, the writer displays the data in the form of tables which is followed by the explanation. The table consists of the process, frequency, and percentage of the data.

Table 1. Speech act classification distribution

| No | Classification | Frequency | %    |
|----|----------------|-----------|------|
| 1. | Representative | 118       | 56.5 |
| 2. | Directives     | 83        | 39.7 |
| 3. | Expressive     | 8         | 3.8  |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>   | 209       | 100  |

The table above presents that representative is the highest percentage. It occurs 118 times or 56.5 %. Then, directives with 83 total occurrences, or 39.7 % follow it. Each of the classifications will be displayed in the discussion below.

### Representative

Representative deals with the ability of the speaker to decide whether something is true or false. In other words, it is related to the belief of the speaker. Searle and Vanderveken (1985) clarify that a representative can be in the form of criticizing, claiming, informing, or complaining. In this study, representative occurs frequently. The detail is shown in the table below.

Table 2. Representative distribution

| No | Classification | Frequency | %   |
|----|----------------|-----------|-----|
| 1. | Claiming       | 118       | 100 |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>   | 118       | 100 |

There is 1 only one representative that occurs in the captions which is claiming. Claiming is the most frequent with 68 times occurrence or 57.6 % respectively. The writer provides some of the data below.

### Claiming

It deals with the transfer of information from the speaker to the hearer. By that, the hearer gets the idea of a particular thing. However, claiming is a statement in which there is no proof or evidence. In other words, it is a personal judgment.

- a) I **feel** like it's such a good way to stay connected and bring our amazing community together.
- b) I **know** that some people find it easier to prepare their food and eat at home when they are focusing on their health and fitness.
- c) I **know** some women can't do some of these exercises because of sore knees or other injuries, or because they live in an apartment or shared house and can't make too much noise.
- d) However, I **know** that pre-workouts have become popular, and many of you have questions about whether you should take them before you train.
- e) For some people, that **might** mean they keep having more and more pre-workouts to keep feeling its effects.

Based on the samples above, it shows that the claims are not based on some facts or evidence. Rather, it is more on the personal opinion. It is indicated by the use of some verbs such as 'feel' and 'know.' They are considered as the mental process in which their state is related to what the speaker feels or thinks.

For example, in the first data, it is Kayla's feeling that she feels close to the followers. In the second data, Kayla assumes that some people get access to prepare their food when they are on a diet. However, this is not always the truth. Therefore, to prove her claim, she needs to do a survey or research.

### Directives

Directives refer to the idea that the speaker intends to make the hearers do something. In other words, it depends on the situation they are in. Muhartoyo and Kristani (2013) mention that the examples of this classification are asking, inviting, requesting, recommending, demanding, or permitting. Based on the analysis, there are 83 occurrences for this classification. In this case, ordering and suggesting have the same frequency. To make the explanation clearer, the writer provides the table which is followed by the analysis.

Table 3. Directives distribution

| No | Classification | Frequency | %     |
|----|----------------|-----------|-------|
| 1. | Ordering       | 33        | 39.75 |
| 2. | Suggesting     | 33        | 39.75 |
| 3. | Asking         | 17        | 20.50 |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>   | 83        | 100   |

Based on the table above, it shows that ordering and suggesting occur with the same frequency which is 39.75 %. Then, the other classification of directives found in the analysis is asking. It occurs 17 times. Some of the samples are shown below.

### *Ordering*

Ordering deals with the instruction given by the speaker to make the hearer do something.

- a) **Comment** below and **tell** me how are you going to spend your weekend!
- b) **Make sure** you video your challenge, then **tag** me in them so I can see!
- c) **Be disciplined. Clean up** your diet. **Work** your butt off.
- d) **Tell** me below what you're proud of achieving at this point of the Challenge.
- e) Then **mix** 1/4 cup basil pesto, 2 Tbsps lemon juice, sea salt, and fresh ground black pepper to taste, add to your salad and you're done!

Through the samples of the data above, it shows that most of the time the orders are expressed in the form of imperative text. For example, in the first data, the followers are asked not only to give comments but also to tell Kayla how their weekend is going. In this case, by giving those instructions, Kayla wants the followers to engage actively in the comment section. Hence, they will get connected.

### *Suggesting*

It deals with the suggestion given by the speaker to the hearer so that the hearer will get insights about a particular thing.

- a) **Whether** that means spending time with the family like I am doing, or catching up with friends.
- b) Ladies, **if** you're looking for a CHALLENGE today, this one's for you!
- c) **If** you are currently doing my BBG Challenge program, make sure you focus on building healthy and maintainable habits so your fitness journey works with your lifestyle!
- d) **If** you're trying to include more protein in your diet you could also have some grilled chicken or salmon on the side.
- e) **If** you are looking for tips, here are some of mine.

Specifically, adverbs of frequency are mostly used to suggest this study. In this case, the adverbs of frequency are used to indicate if the followers are in a particular condition, then Kayla suggests doing something. For example, in the first data, the adverb of frequency found is 'whether.' In this case, Kayla gives some options the followers could do when they are on the weekend; spending time with the family or meeting friends. Another example is found in the second data. The adverb of frequency used is 'if.' Based on the context, it refers to the situation when people look for a challenge, and then Kayla comes up bringing that challenge for them.

### *Asking*

It deals with a condition when a speaker's expressions need an answer from the hearer.

- a) **Why** am I being consistent?
- b) So, **how** much water should you be drinking??
- c) **Who** else loves quick and easy meals?!

- d) **What** am I going to do today to help me achieve these goals?
- e) **Which** combination will you try first?

Based on the samples above, WH questions are commonly found. In this case, Kayla tries to include the followers in the discussion. Therefore, by asking questions, the followers will respond to them in the comment section. Then, the comment section will be kind of a discussion place. Besides, the question offers not only in the form of WH-questions. However, it also uses ‘which.’ The purpose is to let the followers decide which one is their favorite.

### **Expressive**

It deals with the ability of the speaker to express her/himself. Tamam, Setiawan, & Anam (2020) express that it expressive deals with the speaker’s attitudes or feelings. Hence, the expressions might be varied such as happiness or sadness depending on the current state of the speaker. The result of the analysis of this classification is previewed in the table below.

Table 4. Expressive distribution

| No | Classification | Frequency | %          |
|----|----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1. | Liking         | 4         | 50         |
| 2. | Congratulating | 3         | 37.5       |
| 3. | Thanking       | 1         | 12.5       |
|    | <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>8</b>  | <b>100</b> |

It shows that liking has the highest frequency in the study. Then, it is followed by congratulation which occurs 3 times.

### **Liking**

It deals with the situation when the speaker matches a particular thing.

- a) I **love** seeing results.
- b) I **love** eating/ drinking healthy most of the time.
- c) And I so **badly** wanna see what is gonna bring.
- d) I was so **happy** I wanted to cry.

Based on the examples above, shows that Kayla expresses her feelings toward a particular thing. To express their feelings, she uses some adjectives such as ‘love’ and ‘happy.’ Besides, she also chooses to use the adverb ‘badly,’ which refers to the idea that she wants something, that deep.

### **Congratulating**

It is an expression stated by the speaker to the hearer which means that s/he is happy for what the hearer gets or achieves.

- a) Jamie, I am **so proud** of you for realizing this and I want all of the #BBGcommunity to know that my programs are about LONG-TERM changes and not quick solutions.
- b) Nothing makes me **happier** than hearing how positive you feel taking these progress photos, Rachel!
- c) Our bodies are AMAZING, and it makes me **so proud** to hear that you see that too, Tiff!

In this case, Kayla expresses her attitude towards Jamie, Rachel, and Tiff for their achievements. As a fitness influencer, Kayla is so happy looking for the results made by her followers. Hence, she expresses her gratitude to them.

## **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, out of 5 classifications of speech act, there are only 3 classifications found in this study; representative, directives, and expressive. For the representative, the only classification that occurs is claiming. It happens because the captions are functioned as a



medium for Kayla to stay connected with her followers. Hence, the language used for the captions is just colloquial. In other words, it is just in the form of daily conversation which does not need some science basic evidence.

Further, for directives classification, ordering is the most frequent which is followed by suggesting and asking. In this case, Kayla as a fitness influencer is a role model for many of her followers. Hence, by giving some orders or suggestions, Kayla hopes her followers will follow the instructions and get the goals they want. Besides, in terms of asking for classification, it is a way for her to engage the followers. Hence, the followers will respond to her questions in the comment section which later turns into a discussion.

Besides, expressive classification in this case consists of 3 types, liking, congratulating, and thanking. These are the ways for Kayla to express how happy she is about the achievements of her followers. As a fitness influencer, she will be really happy when she can influence people.

For future research, this theory can be used to explore any other objects found in social media such as YouTube live streaming or TikTok videos. The theory can also be limited by 1 or 2 classifications only.

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