

Interpreting Speech Acts in Political Context: A Political Discourse Analysis of Prabowo Subianto's Speech on Public Unrest

Shila Zalsabila^{1✉}, Fani Indrawan²
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya^{1,2}
✉ Szalsabila03@gmail.com

Abstract:

This research explores how speech acts are used in Prabowo Subianto's press conference on August 31, 2025, to respond to national protests and public unrest. The research aims to identify the types of speech acts expressed in the speech and to interpret how they contribute to the framework of political discourse. The study engaged a qualitative descriptive method using the transcript from the *SekretariatPresiden* YouTube channel as the main data source. The analysis applied Searle's (1979) Speech Act Theory to categorize the utterances and Fairclough's (2010) Political Discourse Theory to interpret their political and social implications. The findings expose that Prabowo's speech indicates a strategic use of language to influence the public, build authority, and project political responsibility. The speech reflects a balance among assertive expressions of policy, directive attract for public cooperation, and declarative statements showing government action. Through this linguistic pattern, the study highlights how language works not only as communication but also as a performative act that strengthen legitimacy and leadership during a period of social pressure. In conclusion, the research emphasizes that political speeches are not simple statements but acts of power that shape public perception and trust. Future research may compare similar speeches from other object to further explore how language builds authority and manages crisis narratives in political contexts.

Keywords: Speech Act; Political Discourse; Prabowo Subianto; Leadership; Communication Strategy

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana tindakan bahasa digunakan dalam konferensi pers Prabowo Subianto pada tanggal 31 Agustus 2025 untuk menanggapi protes nasional dan ketidakstabilan publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis tindakan bahasa yang diungkapkan dalam pidato tersebut dan menginterpretasikan bagaimana tindakan-tindakan tersebut berkontribusi pada kerangka diskursus politik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan transkrip dari saluran YouTube SekretariatPresiden sebagai sumber data utama. Analisis menerapkan Teori Tindakan Ucapan Searle (1979) untuk mengkategorikan ucapan dan Teori Diskursus Politik Fairclough (2010) untuk menafsirkan implikasi politik dan sosialnya. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pidato Prabowo menunjukkan penggunaan bahasa yang strategis untuk mempengaruhi publik, membangun otoritas, dan menampilkan tanggung jawab politik. Pidato tersebut mencerminkan keseimbangan antara ekspresi kebijakan yang tegas, ajakan kooperatif kepada publik, dan pernyataan deklaratif yang menunjukkan tindakan pemerintah. Melalui pola linguistik ini, penelitian menyoroti bagaimana bahasa tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai komunikasi tetapi juga sebagai tindakan performatif yang memperkuat legitimasi dan kepemimpinan selama periode tekanan sosial. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menekankan bahwa pidato politik bukanlah pernyataan sederhana, melainkan tindakan kekuasaan yang membentuk persepsi dan kepercayaan publik. Penelitian masa depan dapat membandingkan pidato serupa dari objek lain untuk lebih mengeksplorasi bagaimana bahasa membangun otoritas dan mengelola narasi krisis dalam konteks politik.

Kata kunci: Tindak Tutur; Wacana Politik; Prabowo Subianto; Kepemimpinan; Strategi Komunikasi



INTRODUCTION

The House of Representatives also known as DPR policy on allowances and facilities often causes public debate and protests in many cities across Indonesia (Tahir et al., 2025). Budget policies and the behavior of political elites seen as not supporting the people in August 2025 make demonstrations became more intense. This situation built the tension between civil society, the House of Representatives, and the government underlining the necessity for effective political communication to preserve social stability (Solito, 2018). In this case, a way for political communication is not only to share information but also a tool to build legitimacy, shape public opinion, and avoid further conflict (Fairclough, 2010).

President Prabowo Subianto with leaders of state institutions and leaders of political parties besides him were held a press conference on August 31, 2025 for response to that situation. In his statement, Prabowo highlighted the government's commitment to maintaining order, listening to public aspirations, and taking firm action concerning the House of Representatives (DPR) policies, such as canceling DPR member allowances and carrying out a moratorium on foreign working visits. This statement was a communicative act with powerful political meaning, not just an administrative announcement. Based on political discourse theory Fairclough (2010), Prabowo's political speeches usually can be seen as directive, representative, and commissive acts that aim to shape public perception, he knew that through political speech, he can manage power relations, and strengthen government legitimacy. According to Searle (1979) speech acts are separated into five types such as representative, expressive, directive, commissive, and declarative which help explain how political speech serves as a strategy to build legitimacy, influence public behavior, and control the political narrative.

In political study throughout Indonesia, Previous studies have frequently shown that speech act analysis is a functional tool for expose how leaders strengthen government commitments, legitimize policy decisions, and project diplomatic credibility. These works explained that political speeches often engage a mix of directive, representative, and commissive acts to manage public perception and maintain authority (Alam, 2023; Daar & Jemadi, 2023; Nida Amalia Asikin, 2010; Permana & Mauriyat, 2021; Rahmawati Vebriary Eka & Sulistyaningsih, 2021). Other previous studies also explored the use of speech acts in different political contexts in Indonesia such as Rangkuti et al. (2023) focused on Bima Yudho Saputro's public criticism of the Lampung government, indicate

that representative and expressive acts were used to express complaint and reassure the public. In the other hand, Abbas et al. (2021) highlighted how expressive speech acts in the 2019 presidential debates functioned to enchant emotionally to voters and set up a positive political image. Both studies demonstrated that psychological and persuasive language plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and political effects.

However, these studies only describe utilize of speech acts and do not explain what's the deeper impact. This research in the context of Indonesia political speech, how language can influence political situations and people's opinions is suggested that speech acts are closely attached to political discourse. Understanding this connection helps leaders describe how to act with words and create meaning in society not just to speak. Based on this view, it can be concluded that this study aims to analyze the types of speech acts used by Prabowo Subianto in his statements and how these speech acts function in building political discourse. Specifically, this research answers two main questions: (1) What are the types of speech acts used in Prabowo's statement regarding DPR allowances? And (2) How do these speech acts function in shaping political discourse and leadership image? The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions in the form of expanding the study of speech acts in political discourse, as well as practical contributions as a reference for future communication and public policy studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Acts

According to Searle (1979), Speech acts are actions performed through speech, where language is used as a tool to carry out actions in society. Searle's approach provides a structured way to understand how each utterance has a specific communicative meaning that can be analyzed based on context, thus helping to identify ways of communicating in political or social discourse. As explained by Searle (1979), speech acts can be categorized into five main types. Representative acts are used to state facts, beliefs, or descriptions that reflect reality. Directive acts aim to influence the listener to take specific action, such as through commands, advice, or requests. Commissive acts involve the speaker committing to a future action, often expressed in the form of promises or obligations. Expressive acts deliver the speaker's psychological response to a situation, such as through gratitude, apology, or praise. Finally, declarative acts are unique because they create or alter a social



reality, and they can only be performed by individuals with a recognized authority, such as judges or officials.

Political Discourse

According to (Fairclough, 2010) discourse is known as a social practice that both shapes and reflects power relations and social structures, this framework is crucial for elaborate political discourse because it describes how political leaders use language not only to communicate information but also to construct legitimacy, shape public perception, and reinforce their authority. As (Fairclough, 2010) narrate that he developed a three-dimensional model that includes text, discursive practice, and social practice. First, text dimension focuses on the linguistic features of communication, such as grammar, vocabulary, and cohesion. Second, discursive practice dimension implicates the processes of production, distribution, and interpretation of the text, presenting how messages are created and understood within specific contexts. The last one is social practice dimension connects discourse with cultural structures and broader social, showing how language is used to maintain or challenge ideology and power. By applying Fairclough's technique, researchers can discover how discourse contributes to conflict or social stability, especially in moments of public unrest or political tension.

RESEARCH METHODS

This researcher chose to using a qualitative method with a discourse analysis design based on speech act theory Searle (1979) and continue to interpreting the utterances using political discourse theory by Fairclough (2010). The qualitative method was chosen because it allows various interpretations of social context and language meaning. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is suitable for examined complex social phenomena and interpreting meanings that appeared from human communication. The main data source was a transcript of YouTube live Prabowo Subianto's press conference on August 31, 2025, uploaded on *SekretariatPresiden* YouTube channel. The original video lasted around 14 minutes and was selected because it addressed national issues related to public unrest and government policy.

The research step consisted of three main stages. The first stage was data preparation, which involved transcribing video of Prabowo's speech word for word, and pay attention to the accuracy of the transcription by repeated listening. The second stage was identification and categorizing of speech acts that the researcher heard from Prabowo's

statement. However, some of utterance such as a series of greetings in the transcript were excluded as they do not contribute to the analytical focus of this research because the main objective of this research is to find out the point meaning of Prabowo's speech. This stage aimed to determine how each utterance functioned in delivering political meaning and purpose. The third stage was political discourse analysis, which focused on interpreting the social and political implications of Prabowo's language use. Following Fairclough (2010), the findings were interpreted to elaborate how Prabowo's speech reflects the interaction between language, leadership, and political context, and to guarantee the credibility of the analysis.

FINDINGS

This section shows the results of the analysis based on Searle (1979) speech act classification. The findings present the types and frequency of speech acts used in Prabowo Subianto's press conference. The allocation of speech acts is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Kind of speech act in Prabowo's speech

Speech Acts	Utterances
Representative	8
Expressive	0
Directive	18
Commissive	3
Declarative	1
Total	30

Based on the results of the analysis, the researcher identified in total 30 speech acts by Prabowo Subianto's press conference. The findings present that directive speech acts appeared most frequently, with 18 occurrences, followed by representative speech acts with 8 occurrences. And continue 3 commissive speech acts, while the researcher found only 1 declarative speech act, and the last one is expressive speech acts were not found. The following discussion describes each category of speech act in detail, showing how these linguistic strategies contribute to set up political discourse and strengthens leadership authority.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of Prabowo Subianto's press conference on August 31, 2025, portray that several types of speech acts were used to address the political strengthen and public unrest. Each type of speech act serves a diverse communicative function that reflects Prabowo's strategy in handle public perception, reinforcing authority, and maintaining

social stability. The discussion below explains the representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts identified in the transcript, supported by two examples for each type.

Representative Speech Act

Data 1 (2:44 – 3:12)

“Dalam beberapa hari ini saya Presiden Republik Indonesia terus memantau perkembangan situasi yang terjadi di Jakarta dan beberapa kota lain di Indonesia. Negara menghormati dan terbuka terhadap kebebasan penyampaian pendapat dan aspirasi yang murni dari masyarakat. Terhadap petugas yang kemarin melakukan kesalahan ataupun pelanggaran.”

(Over the past few days, I, the President of the Republic of Indonesia, have continued to monitor developments in Jakarta and several other cities across Indonesia. The state respects and is open to the freedom of expression of genuine opinions and aspirations from the public. We will take an action against officers who committed errors or violations yesterday.)

This utterance is a representative speech act because it shows the factual state on transparent and freedom of expression, linguistically, it conveys an affirming tone that reinforces the government’s image as democratic and transparent (Searle, 1979). In political discourse framework by Fairclough (2010), the statement serves an ideological function, positioning the government as morally legitimate among social unrest. To show how representative acts can sustain public trust and political authority, Prabowo uses language to create a sense of openness and reassurance through this. the use of representative speech is also reflected in other political context by Anita & Puspita (2024), this research evidenced in Biden’s state speech, where assertive illocutionary acts function to inform and affirm governmental positions.

Data 2 (3:48 – 4:27)

“Dalam rangka menyikapi apa yang menjadi aspirasi murni dari masyarakat, saya menerima laporan dari para ketua umum partai politik bahwa mereka telah mengambil langkah tegas terhadap anggota DPR masing-masing terhitung sejak hari Senin, 1 September 2025. yaitu terhadap anggota DPR masing-masing yang telah mungkin menyampaikan pernyataan-pernyataan yang keliru.”

(In order to address what is a genuine aspiration of the people, I received a report from the general chairmen of political parties that they have taken firm steps against their respective members of the DPR, effective from Monday, September 1, 2025. Namely against their respective DPR members who may have conveyed erroneous statements.)

This utterance represents a representative speech act because it conveys information about disciplinary actions taken by political parties against their members. Linguistically, it

functions to inform and assert the speaker's active involvement in monitoring political developments (Searle, 1979). Within Fairclough (2010) *political discourse* framework, this statement serves as a means of political legitimization showing coordination and unity between the executive and legislative powers in addressing public discontent. Through this utterance, Prabowo knew how to position himself as a decisive yet composed leader, reinforcing an image of government responsibility and control amid national tension.

Expressive Speech Act

In this speech, the researcher did not find data that matched Searle's approach in the expressive speech act section. If expressive speech acts were not identified in Prabowo's speech, it indicates that emotional was not the primary focus of his communication. The absence of expressive utterances, except for formal greetings and closings, shows that the statement he brought was intended to maintain authority and objectivity rather than convey personal emotion. This aligns with Fairclough, (2010) view that political discourse often prioritizes institutional legitimacy over individual expression, reflecting a leader's attempt to project control and professionalism in times of public tension. This interpretation is supported by Hadiati et al. (2024) Found that expressive acts in presidential speeches mainly appear in formal section such as openings or closings to show politeness and maintain harmony rather than to express deep personal feelings. According to Hadiati et al. (2024), this limited use of expressive forms highlights the speaker's focus on reinforcing political image and maintaining diplomatic decorum, which is common in official or crisis-related communication contexts.

Directive Speech Act

Data 3 (7:02 – 7:21)

“Para aparat yang bertugas harus melindungi masyarakat, menjaga fasilitas-fasilitas umum yang dibangun dari uang rakyat. Aparat yang bertugas juga harus menegakkan hukum apabila ada pelanggaran-pelanggaran yang mengancam kehidupan masyarakat luas,”

(Officers on duty must protect the public and safeguard public facilities built with public funds. Officers on duty must also enforce the law if violations threaten the lives of the wider community.)

According to Searle (1979), this utterance represents a directive speech act, as it contains a command directed to uphold the law in cases of public threats. Prabowo uses his institutional authority to instruct subordinates, he clarifies his role as a head of state. From Fairclough (2010) political discourse perspective, this statement goes beyond a directive, it serves as a discourse strategy to project power, assert state control, and reassure the

public. Through this utterance, Prabowo constructs the image of a strong yet protective leader, emphasizing the government's responsibility to ensure justice, order, and public safety. This directive use is supported by the findings in diplomatic discourse by Zou & Zhu (2023), where directive speech acts are employed strategically to project authority and shape national image.

Data 4 (9:07 – 9:25)

“Saya juga akan meminta pimpinan DPR untuk langsung mengundang tokoh-tokoh masyarakat, tokoh-tokoh mahasiswa, tokoh-tokoh dari kelompok-kelompok yang ingin menyampaikan aspirasinya supaya bisa diterima dengan baik dan langsung berdialog.”

(I will also ask the DPR leadership to directly invite community leaders, student leaders, and leaders from groups who wish to convey their aspirations so that they can be well received and engaged in direct dialogue.)

This statement is also categorized as a directive speech act according to Searle (1979), it gives moral advice and an implicit command directed to members of the House of Representatives. The speaker encourages the audience to align their behavior with the expected values of loyalty to the people's interests. In the context of *political discourse*, Fairclough (2010) explains that such statements function as a discursive strategy to assert symbolic authority and moral legitimacy. Through his utterance, Prabowo constructs his image as a leader who prioritizes public welfare and promotes ethical conduct among politicians. This also shows an ideological stance that strengthens solidarity between the government and society through persuasive and value-driven language.

Commissive Speech Act

Data 5 (8:43 – 9:01)

“Kepada seluruh masyarakat silakan sampaikan aspirasi yang murni dan tuntutan dengan baik dan dengan damai. Kami pastikan akan didengar, akan dicatat, dan akan kita tindaklanjuti.”

(To all members of the public, please convey your genuine aspirations and demands in a peaceful and respectful manner. We assure you that they will be heard, recorded, and acted upon.)

This utterance is categorized as a commissive speech act. Based on Searle (1979) theory that Prabowo commits to future actions listening to, recording, and following up on the people's aspirations, and then to address public demands he expresses a political promise that describes the government's responsibility through his statements. According to Fairclough (2010) in the framework of *political discourse*, such a statement functions as a discursive strategy to build legitimacy and public trust. By explicitly expressing

commitment, Prabowo constructs an image of a responsive and people-oriented leader. This utterance also highlights how language operates as a tool of governance and authority, reinforcing the symbolic link between political speech and the exercise of power. The use of commissive speech in this statement consistent with empirical observations in political discourse by Hashim (2015) research, where promises and commitments frequently dominate campaign rhetoric as evidenced, commissive acts comprised 40 % of all speech acts in selected political speeches supporting the view that such utterances are central to establishing accountability and public trust.

Data 6 (10:39 – 11:01)

“Kami bertekad untuk selalu memperjuangkan kepentingan rakyat dan bangsa, termasuk rakyat yang paling kecil, rakyat yang paling tertinggal. Mari kita jaga persatuan nasional. Indonesia diambang kebangkitan.”

(We are determined to always fight for the interests of the people and the nation, including the most disadvantaged and disadvantaged. Let us safeguard national unity. Indonesia is on the verge of rebirth.)

This utterance is categorized as a commissive speech act. The sentence above expresses Prabowo’s commitment and determination to act in the future to fight for the interests of the people and the nation as indicate by (Searle, 1979). His statement not only conveys good intentions but also reinforces the government’s image as consistent and people oriented. Within Fairclough (2010) *political discourse* framework, this statement serves as a strategy of legitimization, where language functions to strengthen authority and build public trust. By asserting collective determination, Prabowo uses language as a political instrument to express moral responsibility and national loyalty, which helps maintain unity and stability during political tension.

Declarative Speech Act

Data 7 (4:31 – 5:10)

“Kemudian para pimpinan DPR menyampaikan akan dilakukan pencabutan beberapa kebijakan DPR RI termasuk besaran tunjangan anggota DPR dan juga moratorium kunjungan kerja ke luar negeri. Langkah tegas tadi yang dilakukan Ketua Umum Partai Politik adalah mereka masing-masing dicabut dari keanggotannya di DPR RI.”

(The House leaders then announced that they would revoke several DPR RI policies, including the amount of allowances for DPR members and the moratorium on overseas working visits. The decisive step taken by the Chairmen of the Political Parties was to revoke their respective DPR RI memberships.)

This utterance represents a declarative speech act because it involves an official statement that alters a policy status, it carries a performative function, where the act of saying constitutes a symbolic implementation of policy change (Searle, 1979). Pragmatically, the utterance reinforces the government's authority and decision-making power, signaling responsiveness to public demand. From Fairclough (2010) *political discourse* perspective, this declaration serves as a discursive tool to legitimize institutional authority and reaffirm control over political narratives. In line with Akinkurolere (2019) research findings, presidents often employ declarative speech acts to enact policy change through language, rather than merely reporting it, as seen when Prabowo states that party leaders are revoked from DPR membership.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that language is useful as a powerful political tool in Prabowo Subianto's press conference on August 31, 2025. The researcher identified in total 30 speech acts and it is reasonable if the analysis is dominated by directive because this research using public unrest for the object. then followed by representative types, portraying that Prabowo used language not only to inform but also control public perception. Through commissive acts, he built political commitment, while declarative acts indicate authority and decision-making power. Expressive acts, although rare, served to moral credibility and maintain social connection.

While interpreted through Fairclough political discourse framework, these research findings expose how speech acts set up legitimacy and stability in times of crisis. Prabowo's statements expresses that political language does more than convey policy it manages social tension, shapes ideology, and reinforces leadership identity. The integration of Searle and Fairclough theories proves effective in discovering how micro-level linguistic acts provides to macro-level political discourse. Future research may expand this analysis by examining audience reception to better understand how political discourse shapes public trust and democratic engagement or comparing different leaders' speech acts in similar contexts.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, A., Djatmika, D., Sumarlam, S., & Nurkamto, J. (2021). Functioning Expressive Speech Acts in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election Debates. *Langkawi: Journal of The Association for Arabic and English*, 7(1), 81. <https://doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v7i1.2573>

- Akinkurulere, S. (2019). Exploring the Significance of Context in Meaning: Speech Act Features of Performative Political-Speeches of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*, 7(1), 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.7-1-3>
- Alam, O. S. N. (2023). Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Presidential Speech Regarding the Relocation of the National Capital City. *Celtic: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics*, 10(2), 156–171. <https://doi.org/10.22219/celtic.v10i2.28172>
- Anita, S., & Puspita, C. (2024). An Analysis of Assertive Illocutionary Acts Found in President Joe Biden's State Speech. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 12(2), 1893–1909. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v12i2.5450>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Daar, G. F., & Jemadi, F. (2023). Speech Act Use in Jokowi Political Communication during The Press Conference of The State Visit in Moskow. *LET: Linguistics, Literature and English Teaching Journal*, 13(1), 128. <https://doi.org/10.18592/let.v13i1.9041>
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis "The Critical Study of Language."*
- Hadiati, C., Muttaqin, U., & Yulianita, N. G. (2024). Speech Acts in the Closing Speech of the G20 Summit by President Joko Widodo "We Must End The War." *Lingua Cultura*, 18(1), 97–105. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v18i1.11692>
- Hashim, M. (2015). Speech Acts in Political Speeches. *Journal of Modern Education Review*, 5(7), 699–706. [https://doi.org/10.15341/jmer\(2155-7993\)/07.05.2015/008](https://doi.org/10.15341/jmer(2155-7993)/07.05.2015/008)
- Nida Amalia Asikin, -. (2010). *The Analysis Of Assertive Speech Act Category On President Yudhoyono's Speech Perceiving Bank Century Case.*
- Permana, T. J., & Mauriyat, A. (2021). Analysis of Speech Acts in Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Political Speech. *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education)*, 4(1), 62. <https://doi.org/10.22460/project.v4i1.p62-68>
- Rahmawati Vebriary Eka & Sulistyaningsih. (2021). Speech Acts Analysis on President Joko Widodo's Cinematic Reference Speeches Texts. *New Language Dimensions*, 2(1), 2021.
- Rangkuti, R., Maulida, D. E., Andira, M. A., & Balqis, S. (2023). a Sociolinguistic Case Study: Illocutionary Speech Acts Analysis on Bima Yudho Saputro's Criticism of Lampung Government. *Journal of Mandalika Literature*, 4(1), 286–294. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jml.v4i1.1602>
- Searle, J. R. (1979). Studies in the theory of speech acts. In *Cambridge University Press*.
- Solito, L. (2018). *Political Communication and Social Change . Political Communication and Challenges in the Digital Age.* 16(January), 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v16i1.1161>
- Tahir, M., Kunci, K., Wacana Kritis, A., Politisi, S., & Tunjangan, P. (2025). The Language of Entitlement and Crisis of Legitimacy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indonesian Legislators' Statements on Housing Allowance Controversy: Penelitian.



Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Dan Riset Pendidikan, 4(1), 6982–6994.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/JERKIN.V4I1.2918>

Zou, L., & Zhu, Y. (2023). A Corpus-based Analysis of Diplomatic Directive Speech Acts. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 6(7), 36–44.
<https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt>