

A Pragmatic Analysis of Speech Acts in *Wilujengan* Ceremonies at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace*

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates the pragmatic functions of speech acts used in *wilujengan* ceremonies at *Mangkunegaran Palace*, Focusing on the dominance of directive speech acts. The *wilujengan* ceremony, a traditional Javanese ritual of gratitude and spiritual harmony, uses specific linguistic forms that reflect the cultural and religious beliefs of the Javanese people.

Methodology: This study uses a descriptive qualitative method through technique of interviews to two courtiers and three tour guides. This study analyzes the utterances produced by the courtiers and ritual leaders during the ceremony to identify how directive speech acts such as requests, prayers, and supplications function in the ritual context.

Results: The findings show that directive speech acts are the most frequently used and most meaningful type of speech act, reflecting the participants' intention to seek blessings, protection, and forgiveness from God.

Applications/Originality/Value: These speech acts not only convey requests but also symbolize humility, respect, and devotion to God. This study concludes that language in *wilujengan* ceremonies functions as a pragmatic and spiritual instrument that bridges the human and divine worlds, illustrating the deep connection between language, culture, and spirituality in Javanese tradition.

Introduction Section

Language in ritual settings is used not only to communicate but also to conduct culturally and spiritually meaningful actions. In pragmatic theory, notably in Austin (1962) and Searle's Speech Act Theory (1979), utterances have an illocutionary force indicative of speakers' intentions within particular social contexts. Of the five categories of speech acts, the most significant role in religious and ritualistic communication belongs to directive acts, that is, utterances meant to request, command, supplicate, or pray. The great influence of cultural values like *andhap asor*, *tata krama*, and spiritual consciousness on directive expressions follows Javanese tradition and thus renders ritual language a very appealing site of pragmatic analysis.[†]

One of the important Javanese rituals in which such utterances play a central role is the *wilujengan* ceremony, performed to seek blessings, protection, and spiritual harmony. At *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace*, *wilujengan* rituals carry additional symbolic weight because of the palace's hierarchical structure and royal cultural heritage. Utterances such as "*mugi tansah pinaringan rahayu lan wilujeng*" ("may we always be given peace and safety") or "*kula nyuwun pangapunten dhumateng Gusti*" ("I ask for God's forgiveness") illustrate how directive forms in this context function as prayers with both communicative and performative force.

Previous research into speech acts in rituals in Javanese (Suryani, 2018; Rahmawati, 2020; Handayani, 2022) has demonstrated the significance of directive, expressive, and declarative acts in communal ceremonies. However, studies have largely neglected directive speech acts within the royal ritual context, where linguistic choices reflect more complex layers of power, spirituality, and tradition. No previous study has specifically investigates directive acts within the *wilujengan* ceremonies in *Pura Mangkunegaran*, considering the uniqueness of the cultural and hierarchical context.

To address this gap, the present study examines the types and pragmatic functions of directive speech acts employed in *wilujengan* ceremonies at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace*, identifying the specific forms these utterances take and the roles they serve within the ritual context. This focus is significant because it extends the application of pragmatic theory to a royal ceremonial setting and offers deeper insight into how directive expressions encode Javanese cultural values, spiritual orientation, and hierarchical norms. Through this analysis, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which ritual language functions as a sacred medium that mediates human divine interaction and reinforces the cultural foundations of Javanese traditional practice.

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Method

To gain a deeper understanding of the pragmatic meanings of speech acts used in the *Wilujengan* ceremonies, this study employs a qualitative descriptive method. Qualitative research is used to observe and analyze natural phenomena in their real-life context (Sugiyono, 2019). Meanwhile, the descriptive approach aims to provide an accurate and detailed description of how speech acts are used, interpreted, within the social and spiritual context of the *Wilujengan* ceremony at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace*. This research was conducted at Mangkunegaran Temple, where this ceremony is held in three types of commemorations, including to commemorate the birthdays of the king and his siblings, to commemorate the death of the king, and for a blessing ceremony when the place will be used for event. The researcher acted as the main instrument, responsible for observing ritual interactions, collecting data, and interpreting speech, thereby enabling direct involvement with culturally nuanced speech practices.

In this study, participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge and involvement in the ceremony. They consisted of two courtiers, who performed ritual recitations and organized the ceremony procedures, and three tour guides, who often explained the ceremony to visitors. This composition provided an insider and interpretive perspective. Data were collected through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The researcher, as an intern at the *Mangkunegaran Palace*, conducted observations through YouTube videos of past *wilujengan* ceremonies, and made detailed field notes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the Pendhopo Ageng of the *Mangkunegaran Palace* by two courtiers and three tour guides. With their consent, all interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve relevant linguistic features.

Data were analyzed using Searle's (1979), which categorizes speech acts into five types, namely assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The analysis process involved transcription, classification of utterances into speech act categories, and interpretation of their pragmatic meaning in the cultural and spiritual context of the ceremony. Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research. Participants received clear information about the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their confidentiality. Written consent was obtained before the interviews, and participants were entitled to withdraw at any time.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal the pragmatic functions of speech acts used in the *Wilujengan* ceremonies at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace*. The analysis is grounded in Searle's (1979) Speech Act Theory and supported by previous literature on ritual language and Javanese pragmatic norms. Speech acts in traditional Javanese ceremonies often carry layered meanings that reflect spiritual, cultural, and social values (Duranti, 1997; Errington, 1988). These theories help explain how utterances in the *Wilujengan* ceremony operate not only as linguistic expressions but also as ritual actions that reinforce collective identity, respect for ancestors, and communication with divine powers. The ceremony illustrates a close interplay between expressive, directive, commissive, and declarative acts, shaped by *unggah-ungguh basa* (politeness levels) that guide interactions in highly formal spiritual settings.

Analysis of interview transcripts and observation notes shows that expressive and directive speech acts frequently appear together, especially in ritual prayers. For example, phrases such as "*Mugi kersa paring pangayoman dhumateng kadipaten*" express both reverence and a request for divine protection. Declarative speech acts also play a key role, particularly when the ceremony is formally opened with the utterance "*Wilujengan punika kawiwitan*", which changes the social reality of the event from an informal gathering to a sacred ritual. Expressives are also widely used to honor the deceased, such as in the phrase "*Mugi arwahipun pinanggih swarga*", which reflects sincerity, grief, and hope rooted in Javanese beliefs about the afterlife. Commissive acts emerge when speakers express hopes and commitments for future harmony, such as "*Mugi tansah pinaringan berkah*", which simultaneously conveys aspiration and communal unity. Assertive acts, while less prevalent in ritual performance, appear in interviews and explanations provided by tour guides, who clarify the meaning and purpose of the ceremony for visitors.

Across these varied examples, several broader patterns become clear. Ritual utterances often combine more than one speech act type, especially expressive and directive functions. Declarations are reserved for ceremonial leaders and serve to mark structural transitions in the ritual. The language throughout the ceremony reflects a layered spiritual orientation, addressing God, ancestors, and the community simultaneously. The use of polite, gentle, and symbolically rich Javanese reinforces the solemn and sacred atmosphere of the event. Overall, the data indicate that speech acts in the *Wilujengan* ceremony are multifunctional, culturally embedded, and symbolically rich, revealing how language maintains spiritual continuity and cultural identity within the *Mangkunegaran* tradition. The table below illustrates examples of speech acts in the *wilujengan* ceremony.

Table 1. Identifying the Function of Speech Act in *Wilujengan* Ceremonies.

Data Source	Representative Example	Function in Ritual Context
Mr. Danang (Courtier)	“ <i>Mugi kersa paring pangayoman dhumateng kadipaten</i> ”	Delivering prayers and request for divine protection
Mr. Joko (Courtier)	“ <i>Mugi kawula sami pinaringan wilujeng, tansah tentrem rahayu</i> ”	Requesting safety, peace, and well-being
Oriza (Tour guide)	“ <i>Mugi arwahipun pinanggih swarga</i> ”	Expressing grief, respect, and hope for the deceased
Gerald (Tour guide)	“ <i>Mugi kersa paring berkah dhumateng kadipaten</i> ”	Requesting divine blessing for harmony
Arum (Tour guide)	“ <i>Mugi tansah pinaringan berkah</i> ”	Expressing gratitude and spiritual hope

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the *wilujengan* ceremony at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace* employs all five types of speech acts identified by Searle (1979): representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. However, the directive speech acts are the most dominant, reflecting the participants’ strong intention to request divine blessing, protection, and forgiveness. This pattern is consistent with the ritual’s primary purpose, namely requesting divine protection, safety, and blessings. From a theoretical perspective, the analysis aligns with Searle’s Speech Act Theory and is supported by broader pragmatic and anthropological literature that views ritual language as inherently performative rather than merely descriptive (Austin, 1962; Duranti, 1997). The findings also echo previous studies on Javanese ritual discourse (Suryani, 2018; Rahmawati, 2020; Handayani, 2022), which highlight the centrality of directives in prayers and ceremonial utterances. However, this study extends the existing literature by examining speech acts in a royal context, where language carries additional symbolic functions tied to historical authority and spiritual legitimacy.

The data show that the ritual language of *Wilujengan* operates as a multilayered communicative practice in which each utterance simultaneously expresses emotion, conveys respect, and performs a spiritual function. Directive acts such as “*mugi pinaringan wilujeng*” (may we be granted safety) emphasize humility and dependence on divine will, while expressive acts communicate reverence, grief, and blessings in line with Javanese values of *tata krama* and *andhap asor*. Commissive acts reflect shared commitments to maintain communal harmony, and declarative acts perform essential ritual transitions, formally opening or closing the sacred proceedings. Assertive acts, although less prominent, play an important role in guiding visitors and affirming cultural meaning. The consistent use of *krama alus* reinforces the hierarchical and ethical dimensions of the ritual, demonstrating how linguistic politeness operates as a cultural mechanism for preserving order and respect.

These findings are important because they illustrate how ritual speech in the *Mangkunegaran Palace* is not simply a means of communication but a central instrument for maintaining cultural continuity, spiritual relationships, and social harmony (*rukun*). The analysis highlights that pragmatic meaning in ritual contexts cannot be separated from cultural norms, symbolic values, and the spiritual worldview of Javanese society. The study therefore contributes not only to pragmatic theory but also to the broader understanding of how tradition is maintained through linguistic practice.

Despite these contributions, the study has certain limitations. The participant sample is relatively small, involving two courtiers and three tour guides, which may not fully capture variations in speech practices across different ceremonial roles or generations. The analysis is based on observations from several ritual sessions, so more subtle linguistic variations may remain undocumented. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on illocutionary functions without examining perlocutionary effects, such as how participants or audiences interpret or respond to the utterances.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the number and diversity of participants, including younger generations, ritual specialists, and broader community members. Comparative studies across different Javanese palaces or village-based rituals would also help illuminate institutional influences on speech act patterns. Further investigation into prosodic, nonverbal, and perlocutionary dimensions of ritual language could deepen understanding of how meaning is constructed and experienced. By pursuing these directions, future research can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, cultural, and spiritual dynamics that shape Javanese ritual communication.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the language used in *wilujengan* ceremonies at *Pura Mangkunegaran Palace* functions as both a pragmatic and spiritual instrument. Among Searle's five types of speech acts, directive acts are the most dominant, representing prayers, requests, and supplications to God. These acts express humility, respect, and devotion key values in Javanese culture.

The findings also show that *wilujengan* language embodies Javanese philosophical principles emphasizing politeness, harmony, and spirituality. Thus, speech in this ritual is not only communicative but also transformative it sustains social cohesion, spiritual connection, and cultural identity. In theoretical terms, this research supports the universality of Searle's Speech Act Theory while highlighting its contextual adaptability to Javanese ritual discourse. Future research may extend this study by exploring comparative analyses of speech acts in other royal or regional ceremonies to enrich cross-cultural pragmatics and linguistic anthropology.

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