

## A Speech Act Analysis of Harvey Specter's Conversation with The Male Characters in *Suits*

**Kayne Hanson Laksmono**

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University,  
Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA

E-mail: [a11200048@john.petra.ac.id](mailto:a11200048@john.petra.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

Speech acts are the most basic element of linguistic study to communicate effectively since it conveys the true intention of a word or a message to the listener. Speech acts are also crucial parts in communication since it becomes the connector between the speaker and the listener. Speech acts help us to understand and interpret the true meaning of every utterance. This research mainly focuses on locutionary and illocutionary. Utterances spoken by Harvey Specter to Louis Litt and Mike Ross in a Netflix series called *Suits* were qualitatively analyzed using types of speech acts, namely assertive, commissive, declarative, expressive, directive. In Harvey's utterances to both male characters, the three types of speech acts are found.

**Keywords:** speech acts, linguistic, utterances, locutionary, illocutionary

### INTRODUCTION

According to speech act theory developed by Austin (1962), expanded by Searle (1969), language goes beyond description to action. It actively shapes social interactions. Every statement contains a locutionary component (the spoken words), an illocutionary aspect (the intended meaning), and a perlocutionary result (the audience's interpretation), each is influenced by societal context and personal identity. On everyday communication events speech acts like directive, assertion, and commissive is a way to show commands or give an instruction, influence others' thoughts and deliver information. In the workplace settings speech acts are used to communicate in a strategic way to maintain several factors like professionalism, authority, and in some matters to achieve certain goals. Those contextual matters trigger the writer to analyze the film using speech acts.

Based on this reason, the writer decides to choose the TV series, *Suits*. Over nine seasons, *Suits* are about trust, identity, professionalism and moral choices. The show is known for its interesting storylines, sharp dialogues, and strong character relationships (*Suits (TV Series 2011–2019) - Plot*, n.d.) *Suits* is a legal drama set in a top law firm in New York City. The story is about Mike Ross, a smart young man with a great memory who never went to law school. He gets hired as a lawyer by Harvey Specter, one of the best lawyers at the firm. Together, they handle difficult legal cases, while hiding Mike Ross' secret. The series includes important character, Louis Litt, a unique but outstanding lawyer.

### METHODS

The writer took several steps in conducting the study. First, the writer watched the *Suits* series episode one, season one; the duration of the series is eighty-one minutes and twenty seconds. Next, the writer picked out the scenes and transcribed all Harvey Specter's utterances to Mike Ross and Louis Litt. Then, the writer jumped back and forth between watching the series and writing the utterance to get an accurate data outcome. Then, the writer rechecked the writer's writing with the spoken utterance on Netflix. After that, the writer organized the utterances into two groups: utterances from Harvey Specter's conversation with Mike Ross and Louis Litt that contain speech acts according to Searle (1969).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter the writer discusses the data analysis and the findings of the study. The findings are divided into three types of speech acts; locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts produced by Harvey Specter towards both Louis Litt and Mike Ross. For the illocutionary types since it has five classifications which are assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, the writer decides to put the data into one group according to each classification.

### Speech Acts Used by Harvey Specter to Louis Litt

#### Locutionary Acts.

When Harvey said, "Come on... She doesn't even exist" to Louis, this is identified as locutionary type and the context here is that Harvey said something to Louis about spending the night with Louis's wife which does not exist because Louis is unmarried. The utterance "Come on" is just a common word or utterance and the "she doesn't even exist parts!" holds the same meaning as the utterances that show the wife does indeed not exist. Second, when Harvey questioned Louis with a disbelieving tone "What?" is also a locutionary act which holds the same meaning that Harvey is trying to get the answer from Louis that Gerry Lipski is working in the mailroom.

#### Illocutionary Acts

##### - Assertive

It is a speech act where the speaker is giving a definition to something or someone, stating information or even speaking about one's own ideas or beliefs. When Harvey said, "Because when you put two bullies in the same room together, things generally don't go so well", the context here is that Harvey is merely judging and speaking about his own evaluation of Louis Litt and Gerald Tate. Next, Harvey said "My bad Louis, I was out last night and when I woke up, this is the suit your wife picked out for me". The context here is that Harvey is replying to Louis for responding in a rude way towards Harvey and the part where Harvey said "My bad Louis" means that Harvey is apologizing for his behavior, but then followed by the mockery which is also once again an assertive response, since Harvey is being sarcastic about Louis unmarried status. Lastly, "You plan to fake an employee to manipulate the associate. That's it..." the context here is Harvey restating Louis' idea for firing Gary Lipsky in front of Mike Ross which is also assertive because Harvey is stating the truth.

##### - Directive

It is a speech act where the speaker is trying to make the audience do certain things. First example, "You're not married?". The context here is that Harvey asked Louis if he was not married yet. And Harvey is waiting for Louis' confirmation or answering the question. Second example, "Now, if you'll just let me text your pretend wife that I just made senior partner, [Louis begins to exit] I-, what? Too far?". The context here is that Harvey tried to show his domination and authority when he said "Now, if you'll just let me...". Third example, "But if you ever threaten to fire one of my guys again, I am going to kick your ass" the context here is that Harvey is warning Louis in the utterances "but if you ever threaten...". Fourth example, "Don't play dumb with me, all right" the context here is that Harvey is asking Louis to take him seriously from the utterances spoken by Harvey. Fifth example, "You fired Gary Lipsky in front of Mike Ross. What's so funny?" The context here is that Harvey is asking for an explanation from Louis from the "what's so funny?" part of utterances which can be considered as a question.

##### - Expressive

It is a speech act where the speaker is expressing their emotions through utterances, for instance it can be apologizing, saying gratitude, giving praise for someone else, saying their dissatisfaction towards something or someone. The first example, when Harvey said "Louis, I apologize. I was out of line." Harvey is simply apologizing for mocking Louis, the utterances are "Louis, i apologize...". Next, "Now if you'll

just let me text your pretend wife that I just made senior partner, [Louis begins to exit] I-, what? Too far?" The context here is that Harvey is asking whether his joke towards Louis is too far, based on the utterance "what? Too far?" which also spoke with a concerned tone. Next, "Louis, come on! Louis! Just messing around with you" once again in this context Harvey is showing that he is sorry for mocking Louis, based on the utterances "Louis, come on! Louis! Just messing around with you". Next, "Hey. I get that you were upset that I was promoted before you" the context here is Harvey i acknowledging Louis's dissatisfaction towards him in the utterances "Hey, i get that you were upset...".

#### - **Commissive**

It is a speech act where the speaker is committing something in the future whether it is a promise, a threat, an oath and many more. Based on the data that have been collected, there is only one utterance conducting a commissive speech acts from Harvey utterances towards Louis which goes like this "But if you ever threaten to fire one of my guys again, I am going to kick your ass" Harvey's utterances here play the role of a threat towards Louis which can be understood from the whole utterances spoken.

#### **Perlocutionary Acts**

It is a speech act where the utterances delivered are affecting the audience or the hearers. The examples collected from the data are as follows. First, "Because when you put two bullies in the same room together, things generally don't go so well". This utterance also holds the perlocutionary acts aspect, since it affected Louis Litt as the hearer in a way that annoyed Louis Litt and bothered him. Next, "My bad, Louis, I was out late last night and when I woke up, this is the suit your wife picked out for me.". The perlocutionary type of this utterance is when Harvey is stating his condition while also provoking Louis Litt which Harvey successfully gets under Louis's skin for joking about Louis' marital status. Next, "You're not married?". The perlocutionary type of this utterance is when Harvey asked this question aside from the fact that he already knew Louis Litt's marital status, the utterance embarrassed Louis Litt. Next, "Now, if you'll just let me text your pretend wife that I just made senior partner, [Louis begins to exit] I-, what? Too far?". The perlocutionary type of this utterance is when Harvey delivered this utterance which was supposed to mock Louis Litt, Louis Litt takes it personally and leaves the room in anger. Then, "Come on, she doesn't even exist!". The perlocutionary type of this utterance is Harvey delivered this utterance to prevent Louis from walking away furiously and to prevent escalated social damage based on the previous utterance that Harvey considered as a joke. Then, "Hey. I get that you were upset that I was promoted before you". The perlocutionary type of this utterance is when Harvey delivered this utterance, Louis somehow felt that his feelings were acknowledged and it made Louis feel relieved.

#### **Speech Acts Used by Harvey Specter in His Conversation with Mike Ross**

##### **Locutionary Acts**

First example, "How the hell did you know they were the police" The locutionary part from this utterance is that Harvey is curious about Mike's method on how he is able to identify the police in disguise. Next, "You read a novel in elementary school". The locutionary part from this utterance is that Harvey is being skeptical about an elementary school student reading a novel. Then, "Why would you ask them what time it was?". The locutionary part of this utterance is that Harvey is curious about the reason behind Mike's decision. Then, "We should hire you". The locutionary part of this utterance is that Harvey is delighted by Mike's clever brain and wants to hire Mike immediately. Next, "Jesus, i would give you the 25 grand as a signing bonus". The locutionary part of this utterance is that Harvey is surprised by Mike's way of thinking and just about giving that much money. "Unfortunately, we only hire from Harvard, and you not only did not go to Harvard law school, but you also haven't even gone to any law schools". The locutionary part of this utterance is that Harvey explains about the requirements of the firm which Mike does not meet.

##### **Illocutionary Acts**

Since the data cannot be displayed in full quantity, the writer decides to give four examples on each category of illocutionary acts.

- **Assertive**

First example, "You read a novel in elementary school". The reason why this utterance is considered an assertive type of speech act is because Harvey is restating Mike's response in a skeptical manner. Next, "Unfortunately we only hire from Harvard, and you not only did not go to Harvard law school, but you also haven't even gone to any law school". The reason why this utterance is considered an assertive type of speech act is because Harvey is simply stating the facts of the requirements to be an associate and stating the true conditions of Mike as well. Then, "I'd say, you are full of crap". The reason why this utterance is considered an assertive type of speech act is because Harvey is stating his opinion on Mike's question. Lastly, "Civil liability associated with the agency is based on several factors--". The reason why this utterance is considered an assertive type of speech acts is because Harvey is stating legal information from a book.

- **Directive**

First example, "How the hell did you know they were the police" The reason why this utterance is considered a directive type of speech acts is because Harvey is asking and demanding an explanation from Mike about his method to identify the cops. Next, "Why would you ask them what time it was?". The reason why this utterance is considered a directive type of speech act is because Harvey is curious about Mike's reason for committing that action. Then, "How did you know that?". The reason why this utterance is considered a directive type of speech acts is because Harvey is amazed and asks for an explanation on how Mike knows any of that information. Lastly, "Okay hotshot fire up this laptop,". The reason why this utterance is considered a directive type of speech act is because Harvey is commanding Mike to turn on his laptop.

- **Expressive**

"Okay, look, this is all pretty fascinating stuff, but I'm afraid I got to get back to work.". The reason why this utterance is considered an expressive type of speech acts is because Harvey is about to close the interactions in the part "I'm afraid I got to get back to work.". This is the only expressive speech act used in the conversation of Harvey Specter with Mike Ross.

- **Commissive**

First example, "I'm gonna show you what a Harvard attorney can do". The reason why this utterance is considered a commissive type of speech acts is because in the utterance it says "I'm gonna show you..." means Harvey intends to show future actions. Next, "I'll make sure that Serpico isn't around waiting for you.". The reason why this utterance is considered a commissive type of speech acts is because in the utterance Harvey intends to make sure that the cops are not around anymore."

- **Declarative**

First example, "We should hire you". The reason why this utterance is considered a declarative type of speech act is because Harvey here has the authority to hire a new associate and since the speech acts are used in the correct contextual place which is in an institutional setting. Next, "Jesus, i would give you the 25 grand as a signing bonus ". The reason why this utterance is considered a declarative type of speech act is because Harvey here has the authority to give Mike a signing bonus, since Harvey is the head of the interview. Then, "Move over. I'm emailing the firm I just found our next associate" The reason why this utterance is considered a declarative type of speech acts is because Harvey here has the authority to hire a new associate and he chooses Mike to be the new associate. Lastly, "All right. You're gonna start a week from Monday.". The reason why this utterance is considered a declarative type of speech act is because Harvey as Mike superior in the firm officially hired Mike and informed the formal schedule for Mike's first day.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, someone as highly intelligent as Harvey Specter used speech as a strategy to maintain his status, convincing others, keeping his authority clear and not just as a tool to deliver some information in terms of a professional working environment. However, since this study is limited, the writer hopes the future research could explore and compare other speech acts style used in different situations and

environment. This study hopes to give a better understanding of how someone with high intelligence uses speech acts in their daily life.

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