

Narrate, Direct, Commit, Express and Declare Acts in the Official Communication at the Workplace: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT – The best medium for professional communication in workplaces is email writing. However, it requires intercultural awareness and pragmatic knowledge. Previous empirical studies in Pakistan have focused on public discourse of leaders, online communication on social media and lack of training and grammatical errors in email writing. The present study fills the gap by examining the illocutionary acts and perlocution outcomes of the official emails in the workplace. For this purpose, A qualitative case study has been undertaken using purposive and convenience sampling. The data has been analyzed using Searle's (1969) give categories for descriptive analysis. The findings of the study showed that the employees wrote different assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarative emails. Furthermore, the informative emails performed direct and indirect actions. Similarly, the emails had multiple actions to be performed within a single email. The Congratulating emails showed that mutual congratulations were expressively ordered and achieved by the perlocution outcome. In the same manner, directive email had different orders which were explicitly achieved by the perlocution acts by the addressee.

Key words – illocutionary acts, perlocution, communication, workplace

I. Introduction

The official communication in the workplace takes place mostly in English due to its global impact. Emails are an essential communication tool in workplaces, where interpersonal dynamics are greatly impacted by their illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. An email's intended meaning is known as its illocutionary force, whereas its actual impact on the recipient is known as its perlocution. It is crucial to comprehend these elements to communicate effectively at work (Rehan, 2025).

Different cultures have different ways of expressing speech acts, such as requests and criticisms, which affect how messages are put together and understood (Ly, 2016). The examination of professional emails reveals their complicated illocutionary dynamics and perlocutionary impacts, which can lead to pragmatic failures when receivers read them differently. The relationship between illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect can be challenging in professional settings, particularly in hierarchical and multicultural settings like Pakistan. If the intended meaning is not clearly communicated or culturally inappropriate, there may be a risk of misunderstanding, offense, or noncompliance. Pakistan officially recognized English as the formal language as per the constitution (Yasir et al, 2021), therefore, English is the most frequent and the only language in the workplace for official correspondence.

Positive, negative, and persuasive emails have different implications for communication at work, such as creating a positive atmosphere. Emails can boost staff morale and productivity (Ewuzie & Obong, 2024). Studies have demonstrated that helpful emails increase energy levels and engagement, which in turn improves task performance (Giumetti et al., 2013). On the other hand, cyber incivility brought on by negative emails might boost burnout and turnover intentions. Emails that lack social indications may worsen miscommunications, resulting in negative emotional reactions and poorer performance (Lim et al., 2008). Lastly, persuasive emails that use rhetorical devices have a great impact on company culture and employee behavior. This type of email conveys responsibilities and can improve task completion, alongside dealing with the problems of information overload.

Emails are a great communication aid, but cultural misconceptions and information overload can reduce their usefulness. Optimizing email communication in a variety of professional settings requires addressing these issues. Even though emails are now an integral part of official communication in Pakistan, many professionals and administrative staff are still not properly trained in digital communication. This disparity frequently leads to communications whose illocutionary impact is either too direct to be interpreted favorably or too implicit to accomplish the desired effect.

The majority of research on email communication in Pakistan has focused on aspects such as language, politeness cues, and formal conventions (Mousavi, 2013). The deeper pragmatic aspect, or how illocutionary forces are incorporated into emails and how recipients interpret them to produce particular perlocutionary outcomes, has received little attention. In the absence of such insights, organizations may compromise harmony and efficiency in correspondence. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the construction of illocutionary forces and the perlocutionary outcomes they produce in professional emails. Therefore, the objective and research question of the present study is given below:

II. Objective and Research Question

To examine the illocutionary acts and perlocution outcomes in the official communication at the workplace.

What are the different illocutionary acts and perlocution outcomes in the official communication at the workplace

III. Literature Review

Email has become the primary means of professional correspondence in a number of organizational contexts in the era of digital communication. From public organizations to multinational corporations, emails have essentially replaced formal letters and memos as the principal means of communicating, requesting information, giving instructions, and keeping track of official correspondence. Economidou-Koetsidis (2011) examined e-politeness in non-native student-faculty email interactions. This study analyzed 200 real email requests from Greek Cypriot university students to faculty using qualitative and quantitative techniques. The results showed that students' emails frequently employ incorrect forms of address, remove welcomes and closings, and are strikingly direct, giving the impression that they are rude and disrespectful.

Other than following the grammar and conventions, pragmatic competence is also important to comprehend and respond to official emails, especially in a professional context. Austin's (1962) idea of speech acts: locutionary (the act of saying something), illocutionary (the communicative intention of the utterance), and perlocutionary (the effect on the listener) acts, is the foundation for comprehending intended meaning and effects in language. Austin (1962) explained that an utterance might influence its audience in addition to performing an act (such as ordering or promising). Adding to this, Searle (1969) also described how context and intentions of speakers' messages determine speech actions and offer a taxonomy of illocutionary acts. In many situations, including textual forms like email, pragmatic analysis is based on this set of theories. Austin and Searle's speech act theory is still very important for

understanding how professionals utilize language to accomplish organizational and social objectives.

Scholars have studied distinct impressions of emails perceived by the receivers in different professional communication settings. Contrastive outputs have been noticed from email correspondence due to the lack of pragmatic competence. For instance, Madanchian and Taherdoost (2021) explored aspects of email discourse in business communication. A corpus of email communications (N=112) sent and received by members of a certain Iranian organization over a predetermined period was the data for this study. The Speech Act Theory framework served as the foundation for the analysis and interpretation of this qualitative study. Additionally, NVivo was used to analyze the data. The findings of the study explained that in order to meet the particular communication needs at work, the staff members of this Iranian company used a range of rhetorical and discourse techniques. The writer's interpersonal interaction with their email intercalants is reflected in the tactics they have chosen. Lastly, the results revealed that they all had a tendency to be extremely courteous and view email as more of a written document than a spoken communication medium. According to the findings, they appeared courteous and formal by using polite openers and closings. In contrast to everyday language use, Lim et al. (2022) conducted research that filled a knowledge gap regarding the impact of machine translation (MT) on social intention communication. In an online experiment, native English speakers evaluated emails in three different languages: native English, non-native English, and Chinese with MT translation. Results showed that MT-translated emails resulted in less positive evaluations and a less accurate interpretation of social intents, whereas the background of the sender's language enhanced comprehension.

In another study, Stefanowicz-Kocot (2025) highlighted a significant issue of pragmatic failures in professional communication in this study which resulted in inefficiencies, disputes, and decreased productivity. The study drew attention to a gap in the psycholinguistic processes that underlie these errors, specifically their linguistic and cognitive origins. This is an interesting study because it uses an interdisciplinary approach, incorporating ideas from organizational studies, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. The scholars examined the underlying cognitive and linguistic causes of common pragmatic failures, including Theory of Mind deficiencies, cognitive load, working memory constraints, language proficiency gaps, and native thought patterns. These causes included politeness failures, misinterpretations of indirect speech acts, and contextual misalignment. The study found that psycholinguistic systems are at the core of pragmatic failures. Major findings included how cognitive load affects

communication flexibility, how working memory constraints affect the ability to digest complex messages, and how cultural differences in pragmatic standards could result in miscommunications. The study suggested practical ways to lessen these shortcomings, including developing metapragmatic awareness, cultivating cultural intelligence, and putting stress management and real-time communication analysis tools into practice.

Zummo (2018), however, emphasized how business emails, especially in Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) situations, have changed into a dynamic, semi-spoken format driven by cultural quirks and technology, which frequently results in miscommunications when language skills are poor. A self-compiled corpus of 155 business emails sent and received between Italian and Pakistani participants over five months (October 2015–February 2016) was used in this study. Using a Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) framework, it evaluated the grammatical, structural, and social purposes of those emails. According to the findings, despite being an older CMC technology, corporate emails are still a "not yet conventionalized" means of communication. Push email systems have influenced email interactions, which frequently resemble "written dialogue" with elements of spoken discourse and gradually become more casual. Lexical problems and non-native speakers' poor use of BELF are the main causes of misunderstandings, highlighting the significance of proper terminology and business protocols. The study also found that despite cultural differences affecting these standards, email style is fluid and casual, with opening and closing expressions expressing digital politeness.

Recently, Rehan (2025) conducted a study in a similar domain in a local context, but her major focus was to generally analyze online correspondence, and emails were only considered one of those components. Furthermore, its major focus was to understand the lack of proper education and training of pragmatic failure among professionals in online correspondence. With a focus on academic, professional, and online communication, this study investigates pragmatic difficulties in cross-cultural communication among English speakers from Pakistan. This study also shows how mishandling requests, rejections, praises, and apologies were often influenced by sociocultural transfer that led to misunderstandings or rudeness in digital correspondence by using interlanguage pragmatics and speech act theory. This study directly identified a lack of digital communication proficiency in Pakistani professionals, emphasizing the necessity of discourse-based education, pragmatic awareness training, and cross-cultural communication. Another study conducted by Raza et al. (2025) took an interesting turn by analyzing teachers' application discourse. The use of internal

and external modification methods by Pakistani teachers while requesting casual leave from principals was investigated in this qualitative study. Two government colleges were chosen through purposive sampling. The results indicated that in addition to external modifiers like grounders and statements of gratitude, internal modifications, particularly lexical and phrasal downgraders like "humbly," "kindly," and "with due respect," were more common. Disparities in formality, politeness, and hierarchy awareness were reflected in the different mitigating levels. In order to encourage polite and productive conversation in educational settings, the study suggested incorporating pragmatic competence training into teacher preparation programs.

Despite the fact that research on email communication is expanding worldwide, there is still a significant gap in the local context. In Pakistan, scholars usually apply speech acts theory by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) in political or media discourse. For instance, Rehman et al. (2023) analyzed Imran Khan's speech; Khan and Chaudhary (2023) analyzed the Vice Chancellor's speech; and Afzaal (2022) conducted the study on the use of speech acts in advertisements. Thus, this study fills the gap by applying the speech acts theory to professional correspondence through emails.

IV. Methodology

The present study focused on the illocutionary acts of email writing at the workplace. Therefore, qualitative case study had been undertaken (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative approach provides a detailed account and builds knowledge system based on informants (directing the act) and participants (performing the act) about the different illocutionary forces and the perlocution effect on the employees in the email (Dewi, 2021). As the study focused on email correspondence within a workplace, therefore, case study design was selected (Creswell, 2014). The data for the present study was collected using purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to analyze selected emails as per the objective and scope of the study. The sample size of the study included five emails (ten from each category). The researchers collected emails from the employees (head and juniors) within the selected institute. The data was analyzed using Austin (1962) and Searle's (1969) five categories of emails. Firstly, the emails were collected and then categorized into five categories as shown in Table 1. Then the emails were analyzed for illocutionary acts and perlocution using descriptive analysis. The researchers followed the ethical protocols and assured the institute that the emails were to be used for research purposes and would not be used to defame the institute.

Table 1
Email's Illocutionary Acts

S. No	Searle's Categories	Illocutionary Act	Percentage
1	Representative	Advising, suggesting, informing	30%
2	Directives	Ordering, indirect orders	25%
3	Commissive	Commit, promise, ensure	20%
4	Expressive	Thanking, apologizing, condoling, congratulating, welcoming	15%
5	Declaratives	State of affairs changed	10%

Note: The percentage indicates the number of emails per category in the workplace

V. Findings

The illocutionary act in the emails had been analyzed using Searle's (1969) five categories of acts. The informative, declarative and congratulating emails have been analyzed in detail for different illocutionary acts and perlocution below.

VI. Informative Emails

National festivities are celebrated with great pride and unity in Pakistan. This year, the Govt announced to celebrate 78th Independence Day in Pakistan from 1st August to 14th August based on the theme Mark-e-Haq (Unity and Resilience) to celebrate the courage and bravery of Armed forces of Pakistan. As a result, the institutes were asked to celebrate each day starting from 1st of August. Therefore, the administration wrote different emails to the employees for active participation and joining the national celebrations. Hence, the illocutionary acts of these emails have been analyzed the perlocution affect on the readers based on the response to the emails.

Informative emails about the celebration were mostly based on information about the activities and active participation from the audience. The illocutionary acts of these emails were suggesting, advising and preparation for the employees. Most of the emails were advisory based on which perlocution act was achieved by directly performing the act as suggested by physical presence in the activity.

However, few emails had direct and indirect illocutionary acts and the perlocution act varied. One of the emails was about the visit to a place and its illocutionary act was assertive along with sharing information to gain knowledge by presenting a historical claim, however the implicit illocutionary act was forcing employees to join in different events.

A. Extract A

"Purpose is basically written on the flyer caption. This visit may help us understand that how the Legal brightness and intelligence of Quaid e Azam paved the way for Pakistan. He is the only politician so far who never been arrested during the struggle of Pakistan."

In a similar manner, another informative email had multiple illocutionary forces and acts to be performed by the employees in the workplace. The informative email was about visit to the Assembly building on the invitation and the selection of faculty was made using a criterion. The locutionary acts of the emails have been analyzed in table 2 below. In the table 2, the analysis of the acts showed that the informant send the email to convey the factual information, give indirect instructions to attend the event, fulfilling a commitment made with the organizers with representation and nomination of ten people, showing the positive invitation and the names of ten people officially declared them as representative which denied them an opportunity of refusals.

Table 2
Informative Email about Visit

Searle's Category	Phrase from Email	Acts and Purpose
Assertive	"The Honorable Speaker... has graciously invited..."	Provide factual information
Directive	Implicit instructions to attend session	Prompt action by recipients by confirming their presence.
Commissive	"shall represent the institute"	Commit instantly to attend and represent the institute

Expressive	"graciously invited"	Show respect/acknowledgment
Declaration	Announcement of selected delegation	Officially appoint representation

The perlocution effect of the illocutionary acts was achieved when one of the respondents and representative responded by expressing 'honor' and declaring 'participation as representative of institute' and confirming the information and directives in the emails.

Hence, the analysis of the informative emails showed that the illocutionary acts were suggesting, informing and advising for different activities. Moreover, direct and indirect instructions and acts were pointed out in the communication. Similarly, multiple acts were asked to perform in single email correspondence as well.

VII. Directive Emails

The directive email entitles the readers to perform different actions like orders from the boss to perform a certain act and task. The analysis of directive emails showed orders about different actions like "submission of bills before the deadline", "order to collaborate in finding opportunities", "registration at the portal", "use of portal" and "call for female participation". The directive emails had explicit orders whose perlocution effect was achieved by performance of the acts by the readers immediately.

VIII. Congratulations Emails

Institutes more often write congratulatory emails to the employees, colleagues and senior staff to express their feelings and emotions about success, good news, launch of new initiatives and monetary benefit. Hence, the administration and employees wrote different correspondence whose illocutionary acts were congratulations and thanksgiving. One of the emails to congratulate the employees as shown in Extract B who received award in the workplace.

A. Extract B

"My heartfelt congratulations to them for winning the Best Department Award along with a cash prize of one million rupees. This recognition is truly well deserved. Special applause for the respective heads for their outstanding leadership."

The analysis of the act showed the act of assertion, expression and explicit call for congratulations. Similarly, the perlocution

outcome emails showed the achievement of mutual call of happiness and congratulation from colleagues. The analysis of the email showed that the act of informing was performing by announcing the news "for winning the Best Department Award along with a cash prize of one million rupee" and emotions were expressed as "my heartfelt congratulations..." which shows joy and pride over the achievement and a call to the colleagues for congratulating and appreciating the winners was performed. The perlocution outcome was achieved when almost twelve employees expressed congratulations like "Heartiest congratulations, special congratulations, historic moment, many congratulations, congratulations and sincere congratulations."

Overall, most of the emails congratulate and thank the administration and employees, which called for mutual direction in congratulating and expressing joy, happiness and pride over the success at the workplace.

IX. Discussion and Conclusion

Pakistan is a multilingual country where English is a non-native variety yet used as an official and only medium in the workplace. Previous empirical studies showed illocutionary acts have not been analyzed in official emails at the workplace. (Dewi, 2021; Khan and Chaudhary (2023) & Rehman et al 2023). The present study fills the gap by examining the illocutionary acts and perlocution outcomes of the emails at the workplace using Searle's (1969) five categories. The analysis showed that the institute sends different emails which performed different acts and have been categorized in table 1. Most of the emails just narrated the information, suggestion and advice. However, detailed analysis of the information and congratulating emails showed that direct and indirect acts were performed by the informant of the email correspondence. Moreover, multiple actions were desired in a single email as shown in Table 2 within a single email as well. The perlocution outcome of the emails and actions was acted as desired. Overall, the analysis shows that informants in the emails performed multiple acts which the recipients/employees are asked to perform in their daily life. Communication gets complex when multiple acts are desired within a single email which often leads to pragmatic failure and miscommunication. A future study can be conducted about the perceptions of employees towards different directive/acts in the email. Furthermore, it can focus on intercultural communication across the diverse and indigenous communities. The study was limited in its findings as it focused on official communication within a single case study and selected emails for analyzing the different acts. However, longitudinal and across the different disciplines like banking,

medicine, health and agriculture can be conducted in future as well.

X. References

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