

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study, which provides an overview of the research topic and the main issues discussed in this research. It consists of the research background, previous studies, research questions, research purposes, research significances, and the definition of key terms.

1.1 Research Background

Language plays a very important role in human communication. People use language not only to share information, but also to express ideas, opinions, emotions, and intentions. According to Yule (1996) people do not merely utter words or sentences, but also perform actions or wants something in return through their statements. In addition, Leech (1981) explains that language has five functions, namely informational, expressive, directive, phatic, and aesthetic. The informational function is used to convey information or facts, the expressive function is used to express feelings, the directive function is used to influence other people's behavior or actions, the phatic function is used to maintain social relationships, and the aesthetic function is used to create beauty in language. Furthermore, language serves several functions, including conveying information, expressing feelings, persuading others, entertaining people, and sharing opinions (Trudgill, 1974). Because of these functions, in many situations, language is also used to influence others and shape their attitudes or decisions. One field where language has a strong persuasive function is politics.

Language is a powerful tool in politics. It is used to influence public opinion, present issues in specific ways, and build political identities (Rahmani & Saeed, 2024). The language of politics as an occupation is important to understand how language is used by those who wish to gain power, those who want to exercise power, and those who want to maintain power (Beard, 2000). Persuasion can be found in everyday life, such as in advertisements, social media, and daily

conversations, it plays a more significant and strategic role in political campaigns. Political campaign is an activity carried out by political parties, candidates, and campaign teams to persuade people to vote for them. It usually involves presenting their programs and policies (The Electoral Commission, n.d.). In political campaigns, candidates must convince voters that they are capable leaders by presenting their visions, missions, policies, and political ideologies. At the same time, candidates try to highlight their strengths and expose the weaknesses of their opponents. Campaigns can take various forms, such as posters, flyers, and direct activities in the community, to convey political messages widely and effectively.

One of the most important platforms for persuasive process in political campaigns is a political debate. The concept of political debates refers to verbal interactions carried out by certain actors in specific forums, in which issues of general interest are discussed (Berganza & Carratalá, 2016). A political debate allows candidates to communicate directly with the public. In a debate, candidates explain policy proposals, respond to public issues, criticize opposing candidates, and defend their own arguments. According to Chilton (2004), political activities such as debates, speeches, and governmental discussions are fundamentally based on language. The success of persuasion in debates largely depends on how effectively candidates use spoken language.

This study chooses the final 2025 New York mayoral debate as its object because New York City is one of the largest and most influential cities in the United States. According to the Global Cities Index 2025 by Oxford Economics, New York ranks first among the top cities. This assessment is based on five aspects: Economics, Human Capital, Quality of Life, Environment, and Governance. Consequently, whoever leads the city will attract attention. This study analyzes Zohran Mamdani, the candidate who won the New York mayoral election. In addition, political debates mainly depend on spoken interaction. Therefore, they provide rich data for pragmatic analysis. Pragmatics focuses on how people use language in context and how they rely on context to interpret the meaning intended by others (Levinson, 1983). One important theory in pragmatics is speech act

theory, which explains that speaking is not only producing sentences, but also performing actions. According to Austin (1962), speech acts are divided into 3 types, namely locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. In the context of a mayoral debate, candidates can use illocutionary act to persuade voters, such as stating facts, making promises, giving commands, or expressing emotions. Through these illocutionary acts, candidates attempt to influence voters' perceptions and gain public support. Therefore, analyzing illocutionary acts in the 2025 New York mayoral debate is important to understand how political persuasion is constructed through language. This study aims to examine the types of illocutionary acts used by Zohran Mamdani and how these functions of illocutionary acts are employed to persuade voters in the final 2025 New York mayoral debate.

1.2 Previous Studies

Several previous studies have examined illocutionary acts using Searle's (1979) speech act theory in different discourse contexts, such as movies, speeches, and social media. These studies provide important theoretical foundations for the present research. A study on illocutionary acts was conducted by Sihombing et al. (2021). This study analyzed the types of illocutionary acts found in the movie *Incredible 2*. The researchers applied Searle's theory of speech acts and used a qualitative content analysis method. The data were taken from the dialogues spoken by the characters in the movie. The findings showed that all five types of illocutionary acts were present, namely assertive, directive, expressive, commissive, and declaration. Directive acts were the most dominant type.

Another related study was carried out by Baok et al. (2021). This study focused on illocutionary acts in Hillary Clinton's speech entitled "American for Marriage Equality". The researchers used a qualitative method, with data taken from the speech video and its transcript. Searle's theory (1969) was used to identify the types of illocutionary acts, while Leech's theory (1983) was applied to analyze their functions. The results showed that four types of illocutionary acts were found:

assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive, with assertive acts as the most dominant.

Another related study was conducted by Wulandari (2024) entitled “The Illocutionary Acts Used by Amani Al-Khatahtbeh to Influence Muslim Women in TED Talk YouTube Channel.” The study aimed to identify the types and functions of illocutionary acts used in Amani Al-Khatahtbeh’s TED Talk speech. Using a qualitative method and the theories of Searle (1976) and Yule (1996), the study found that assertive acts were the most dominant type among the 62 data analyzed. In terms of function, stating was identified as the most frequent function, stating that the speaker mainly expressed opinions, experiences, and beliefs. The study contributes to the understanding of how illocutionary acts are used in public speaking to convey messages and influence audiences.

Another relevant study was conducted by Sabtiana & Siregar (2024) entitled “An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in Vladimir Putin’s Election Victory Speech”. This study analyzed the types of illocutionary acts used in Vladimir Putin’s 2024 election victory speech using a qualitative analytical method. The research applied Searle’s speech act theory to classify the illocutionary acts in the speech. The findings revealed that all five types of illocutionary acts were present, with assertive acts as the most dominant with 20 data, followed by expressive acts with 10 data, commissive acts with 5 data, and one datum each of directive and declaration acts. This study shows how a political leader uses language to convey ideas, express attitudes, and influence the audience.

In addition, Fazri. (2025) conducted a study entitled “Illocutionary Acts on Samsung Indonesia’s Instagram Caption in Releasing its New Products”. The research analyzed the types of illocutionary acts and how these acts were used in Instagram captions related to Samsung’s product releases. The study used a descriptive qualitative method and applied Searle’s theory of illocutionary acts. The findings showed that assertive acts were the most dominant with 49 data, followed by directive acts with 42 data, commissive acts with 25 data, and expressive acts with 3 data, while declaration acts were not found. The study also identified

fourteen ways in which illocutionary acts were used, with informing, ordering, and offering as the most common. These results indicate that the captions mainly function to provide information about the products and encourage customers to purchase them.

In this regard, speech acts, particularly illocutionary acts, play a crucial role in understanding the speaker's intentions behind their utterances. An illocutionary act refers to an action performed through an utterance that carries a particular conventional force (Austin, 1962). This means that when a speaker produces an utterance, it is not only a statement of words but also an action with a specific intention. In addition, it can be understood that when a speech is produced, the speaker has a certain purpose in mind, and the utterance may have one or more functions in communication (Yule, 1996). Therefore, illocutionary acts show how speakers use language to perform actions and convey intentions in different contexts. Although previous studies have analyzed illocutionary acts in movies, social media, and speeches, there is still limited study focusing on mayoral debates in the United States, particularly the 2025 New York mayoral debate. Moreover, many studies emphasize the types of illocutionary acts, while fewer studies explore how function of illocutionary acts contribute to persuasion.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What types of illocutionary acts are used by Zohran Mamdani in the New York mayoral debate?
2. How does Zohran Mamdani use the functions of illocutionary acts to persuade in the New York mayoral debate?

1.4 Research Purposes

Based on the research questions, this research is conducted to achieve the following purposes:

1. To identify the types of illocutionary acts used by Zohran Mamdani in the New York mayoral debate.
2. To analyze how Zohran Mamdani uses the functions of illocutionary acts to persuade the audience in the New York mayoral debate.

1.5 Research Significance

The significance of this research is divided into two parts, namely theoretical significance and practical significance. These significances explain the contributions and benefits expected from this study for both academic purposes and practical understanding. Furthermore, this section highlights how the findings of the study may serve as a reference for future research and provide insights.

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics, particularly to the study of speech act theory. By applying Searle (1979) classification of illocutionary acts to political debates, this study provides empirical evidence of how illocutionary acts function in oral discourse. The analysis of assertive, commissive, directive, expressive, and declaration acts in the 2025 New York mayoral election debate helps to show how these categories are used in politics. This study also helps clarify the relationship between function of illocutionary acts that proposed by Leech (1983) and persuasion, showing that illocutionary acts are also strategic tools used to influence audiences. Therefore, this study can deepen theoretical understanding of how meaning, intention, and persuasion are constructed through language in a political context.

1.5.2 Practical Significance

Practically, this study is expected to be useful for students, researchers, and the general public who are interested in language and politics. For students of linguistics and English literature, this study can serve as a reference for understanding how illocutionary act theory can be applied to real-life data, especially political debates. For researchers, the findings of this study may provide useful insights and as a reference for future research on political discourse, persuasion, and pragmatic analysis. In addition, this study can help the general public become more aware of how political language works and how candidates use language to persuade voters. By understanding the persuasive behind political speech, audiences can become more evaluative and informed listeners when engaging with political debates and campaigns.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and avoid misunderstanding throughout this study, several key terms used in this study. The definitions are presented to give a clearer understanding of the terms used in this study. The definitions of these terms are presented below.

1) Act

According to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics (1997), an act as an utterance that is understood as an action through which a speaker does or accomplishes something in communication.

2) Illocutionary Act

Illocutionary act is actions performed through language to achieve a particular purpose or intention, such as requesting, commanding, promising, or expressing thanks. The Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics (2013) defines an illocutionary act as the communicative action intended by a speaker or writer when producing an utterance. These actions may include stating information, asking questions, making

requests, or issuing commands. According to Searle (1979), there are five types of illocutionary acts, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declaration.

3) Zohran Mamdani

Zohran Mamdani was one of the candidates in the 2025 New York mayoral election. He won the election and began serving as the 112th mayor of New York on January 1, 2026. Before becoming mayor, Zohran Mamdani served as the representative of New York State Assembly District 36 and the surrounding neighborhoods, including Astoria, Ditmars-Steinway, and Astoria Heights. (City of New York, n.d).

4) New York

New York is a city located in the United States. According to National Geographic Society (U.S.) (2008), New York City is the largest city in the United States and has long been recognized as a major center of economic activity and a gateway for immigrants entering the country.

5) Mayoral Debate

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2015), debate is a formal discussion of an issue at a public meeting or in a parliament. In a debate two or more speakers express opposite views and then there is often a vote on the issue.

Mayor is a person who is elected or chosen to lead the group who governs a town or city (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Thus, mayoral debate is a formal public discussion involving two or more candidates for mayor, in which they present and oppose views on issues related to city governance in order to inform the public during the electoral process.