


Speech Acts in Hailey Bieber’s “Motherhood Journey” Interview: A Searlean Perspective

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i1.1822>

*Dinda Annisa’ Aulia, Yaqutatul Yumna Nur Rosyidah, Irma Khoirot Daulay^{abc}

¹²³Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: ammisad037@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the speech acts in Hailey Bieber’s motherhood journey interview with WSJ.Style using Searle’s framework (1979), containing an illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. A qualitative content analysis of 34-unit utterances identified findings that consist of assertive dominating the result, followed by expressive in the second position. This determines that Hailey Bieber interviewed to share her experiences and express emotions as a new mom. In a case of direction of fit, most utterances are identified as word-to-world, portraying her tendency to describe events that correspond to reality. Hence, null fit emerges in expressive utterances to cover her personal emotions. Otherwise, psychological state represents belief and emotions, which are proven based on her statements on personal conviction and affective responses. Overall, the study shows how Hailey Bieber builds an identity as a new mother. It further highlights the role of speech acts in celebrity personal branding and the linguistic expression of emotion.

Keywords: *Speech Acts, Searle’s Theory, Celebrity Interview, Hailey Bieber, Motherhood*

Article History:

Received 09th December 2025

Accepted 31st December 2025

Published 03rd January 2026



INTRODUCTION

Language is not only about learning grammar, vocabulary, writing, and speaking, but it is also the way we express our intentions, attitudes, and identities within every utterance made by a speaker. In other words, language is identified as a powerful tool for performing actions and shaping perception. On the other hand, the digital era transforms communication into a performative and multimodal act, such as YouTube, podcasts, and interviews, which facilitates public figures and influencers in communicating with their fans. It provides a strategic approach to building an image in entertainment programs, for they are supposed to maintain their image as their branding. Based on Tomasello (Tomasello, 2023), humans’ brains can process speech acts instantly, almost within 150 milliseconds. Furthermore, our brains are already able to discriminate different types of speech acts like naming, requesting, or questioning. This incredible thing means people understand every single utterance others speak. Particularly, (Rahmayanti et al., 2025) explored Indonesian YouTube podcasts, revealing how influencers use a variety of speech actions to attract viewers, such as verdictive (judging), exercitives (ordering, warning, and advising), commissive (promising), and expositives (reply/argue).

In this matter, speech acts are employed to study any of the acts that speakers perform in making an utterance, such as stating, asking, requesting, advising, etc. (Flowerdew, 2012). In addition to identifying what kind of speech act a speaker performs, Searle (Searle, 1979a) classified speech acts into 3 ways of approach, since he proposed building upon Austin’s work a more systematic classification of speech acts. The first is the illocutionary point, where we focus on finding the purpose of the speech act, whether it is for requesting, promising, or even declaring. The second is the direction of fit, which aims to make the words match the world (statements, descriptions, assertions, and explanations), world to world (requests, commands, vows, and promises), null/no-fit to express emotions, and double to indicate declaration. The

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last is the psychological state, which refers to a speaker's expression of a belief about something, such as a promise that expresses an intention to do something or an apology that expresses regret for something. From those classifications, Searle came up with five categories of speech acts (representatives, directives, commissives, expressive, and declarations) to define and differentiate the speech act taxonomy (Flowerdew, 2012). Therefore, these dimensions explain not only what a speaker intends to do, but also how language relates to reality and reflects the speaker's mental state. Within this context, it attracts researchers to study speech acts intensively to discover the meanings underneath utterances performed by speakers.

Several studies have used Searle's classification approach to categorize speech acts. for instance, Marsevani et al. (2024) discovered teaching in online environments, presenting directives and expressions in the form of suggestions, greetings, and expressions of gratitude. It has been proven that assertive and directive acts dominate four categories of illocutionary acts (assertive, directive, expressive, and commissive) for instruction and control in maintaining interpersonal rapport, as evidenced by an examination of 90 utterances from the Learning Management System (LMS) and Microsoft Teams recordings. Furthermore, according to Yulian and Mandarani (2023), ESL teachers use directive, representative, commissive, and expressive to represent themselves as powerful individual in the classroom, so they can manage the class. Hence, in political speeches, which are studied by Agagon, M. (2024), President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. integrates assertiveness and directives more often to inform citizens and urge collective action, while commissive language appears to form promises and commitments to gain the public's trust, and expressive language shows in emotionally charged moments such as condolence or celebration. Hågemark and Gårdenfors (2025) explained in their study that types of speech act distinct mental capacities, such as expressive, relate to emotion and empathy, which are connected to human cognitive and social functions. In fact, in some studies (Faishal & Saifudin, 2024; Putri, A. R., Eriyani, R. N., & Purwahida, 2025; Rahmayanti et al., 2025), the domination of assertive acts reflects the universal human need to convey belief and knowledge; on the other hand, directives and commissives are the key instruments for influence and collaboration. Additionally, hateful messages are included as a form of assertive, directive, and expressive, since they adopt the same linguistic mechanisms with harmful intent (Harahap & Ayomi, 2025). These studies demonstrate that speech acts are social and cognitive processes that influence understanding and interpersonal relationships in a variety of settings, such as online conversations and dialogue. The illocutionary act expresses the speaker's intention, as Searle categorized; this relates to language, belief, emotion, intention, and actual results, which are still relevant today.

In Hamza and Nordin's study (2024), pragmatic deviations were found in speech acts with an emphasis on Searle's three core criteria, such as illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. The indication showed that even though the felicity conditions were not aligned, listeners were still able to grasp the intended illocutionary force through contextual clues. Similar to Khaya (2024), he analysed denial speech acts using Searle's twelve illocutionary dimensions and concluded that denial functions dualistically as a representative and directive speech act, involving certain psychological conditions such as rejection and correction; these findings demonstrate the multidimensional nature of Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. A comprehensive review by Zou and Wu (2023) also confirms that speech act theory has evolved from traditional linguistic applications to modern domains such as digital communication and social media, while identifying a research gap in lifestyle-based celebrity discourse, particularly in informal media interactions. Based on Ghosh et al. (2023), emphasized that speech acts were relevant in dialogue within AI. It highlighted the findings that user intent in multi-turn dialogue can be effectively used by assertive, directive, and commissive acts. Meanwhile, Nur'aini and Ariatmi (2025) analysed expressive speech acts in YouTube comments on Lex Fridman's podcast with Elon Musk, discovered that greeting, thanking, and attitude expressions demonstrated that online audiences employ expressive acts. Therefore, (Pratika 2025) found the debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump conveyed illocutionary acts to influence public perception.

In addition to exploring Searle's 3 criteria to classify speech acts, the previous studies inspired the researcher to conduct this study. Although Searle's framework has been widely referenced in previous studies, this study's focus is on Hailey Bieber's interview with WSJ. Style, the YouTube channel for fashion, entertainment, and culture from the Wall Street Journal. The channel appears to be a casual conversation about celebrities' lifestyles, hence it provides a rich meaning to be learned, where the utterances' function is studied in a speech act. It aims to fill the gap that most of the previous studies explore on influential people, like politicians, influencers, and teachers, who use directive, assertive, and commissive to persuade people. Hence, there is research on Hailey Bieber, which has highlighted hateful comments consisting of a type of hate speech, while this study provides a contrast of issues on Hailey Bieber's journey as a new mom. Moreover, the 3 core analytical elements have rarely been applied holistically, and analysing them together will reveal how Hailey Bieber uses language to convey belief, intention, and emotion. Therefore, this study aims to identify Hailey Bieber's interview with WSJ. Style of the research questions below.

What is the illocutionary point in Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey interview? Validation strategies (e.g., intercoder reliability, peer debriefing)
What is the direction of fit in Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey interview?
What kind of psychological state does Hailey Bieber show?

By applying Searle's three-element framework to current celebrity discourse, this study will advance knowledge of how language shapes identity, emotion, and persuasion in public communication.

METHOD

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design within the framework of pragmatic analysis, especially illocutionary speech acts. The researcher chose this approach to capture the spoken data along with its interpretive and contextual nature of speech acts, while including descriptive support. Likewise, the purpose of the study is to examine Hailey Bieber's "Motherhood Journey" interview through Searle's speech act theory, focusing on the 3 analytic dimensions of illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. Additionally, the data source was from YouTube WSJ. Style channel consists of Hailey Bieber's interview for 9.49 minutes (2025).

Data Collection

The data were collected using observation and note-taking techniques by watching an interview featuring Hailey Bieber entitled "Motherhood Journey" on YouTube. Data inclusion and exclusion were conducted to focus on segment support research relevance, and the transcripts from YouTube were copied on Ms. Word. After that, the transcription from the 5.36-7.53 minute segment was reviewed along with the video to ensure accuracy. The researcher used Searle's 3 criteria for selecting utterances.

Data Analysis

To analyse the data, the researcher employed (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014), consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions. During data condensation, the researcher conducted purposive sampling based on inclusion criteria, such as Hailey Bieber's complete utterances from the 5.36-7.53 minute segment that consist of a relevant topic on her motherhood journey, a clear illocutionary act, and its potential as educational material. Otherwise, the overlaps and incomplete speech were excluded. The next stage was coding the data by selecting the utterances, transcribing, and segmenting into speech act units manually according to Searle's (Searle, 1979) three criteria to classify speech acts: illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. Then, the data was displayed in tables. The final stage, interpreting the findings and confirming validity through peer review and triangulation, was conducted to draw conclusions and verify results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presented the findings and discussion of the research on Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey interview with WSJ. Style. The researcher analysed 34 utterances that were discovered in the interview, and these 34 utterances were classified into 3 criteria based on Searle's classification criteria of speech acts (Searle, 1979). Consequently, the findings were shown in the distribution tables below.

Findings*Illocutionary Point*Table 1. *Distribution of Illocutionary Point*

Illocutionary Type	Frequency	Percentage
Assertive	20	58,82%
Expressive	13	38,24%
Commissive	1	2,94%
Grand Total	34	100,00%

The analysis based on the table revealed that the most dominant type of illocutionary point in Hailey Bieber's utterances was assertive. The percentage was 58,82% which indicated 20 utterances in total. Hailey Bieber used assertives to respond to questions that referred to her experience being a new mom. This type of illocutionary point expressed Hailey Bieber's opinion and facts as a mother of Jack Blues Bieber, a baby she gave birth to in 2024. Moreover, she also shared her factual experience as a mom, like in the utterance, "We just had a party at our house with our friends and our family," and "You're a mom, you change a lot". In the interview, she told the audience that she endured struggles with the constant change due to her son was still a baby.

Therefore, expressives was pointed out to be a strong illocutionary point with a percentage of 38,24%. Since Hailey Bieber exposed her emotions as well as her feelings clearly, she was proud, as an instance, she said, "I like who I am as a mom." Hence, at the same time, she felt sad and happy because her son turned one this year. On top of that, she enjoyed her motherhood journey, for she stated in the interview that it was fun. In this part, Hailey Bieber represented herself emotionally as a mom. It strengthened her personality within emotions in the public, so it increased her audience's persuasiveness and empathy.

Commissive appeared to be less, and its evidence on the table showed only one utterance (2.94%). As a result of her statement in the interview of saying, "Like I have to go back and like delete things to make a space." Commissive was identified with her intention to delete some photos on her phone due to her phone had no storage left. Likewise, Hailey Bieber did not make any commitment in the future, yet she explained her situation and described her emotional process. In the final analysis, neither directive nor declarative was found in Hailey Bieber's utterances because she did not direct someone to do any actions, and it was obvious she did not make any decisions. Ultimately, the context of the interview was personal.

*Direction of Fit*Table 2. *Distribution of Direction of Fit*

Direction of Fit	Frequency	Percentage
Word to world	20	58,82%
Null	13	38,24%
World to word	1	2,94%
Grand Total	34	100,00%

The majority of the utterances coming out of Hailey Bieber's interview were word-to-word (58,82%). It was used to describe situations, explain the reality naturally, and highlight the change she was experiencing as a new mom. Particularly, it was aligned with the domination of assertive that was rewarding for stating facts or opinions, along with her trying to build her new identity. Whereas, null direction (38,24%) was identified when she expressed emotions while taking a mother's role. The emotions she had shown during the interview were pride, sadness, happiness, and embarrassment. For the evidence, she mentioned in the interview, "It's actually really crazy and embarrassing. Like, I have like 200.000 photos." On

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the other side, world-to-world emerged when she intended to delete photos, so it was included as displaying the lack of promise/commitment. However, the result did not discover a double fit due to a zero formal declaration.

Psychological State

Table 3. Distribution of Psychological State

Psychological State	Frequency	Percentage
Belief	20	58,82%
Emotion	13	38,24%
Intention	1	2,94%
Grand Total	34	100,00%

Based on the data, belief dominated the others in the psychological state, as Hailey Bieber's utterances reflected her beliefs, her perspective, and her discussion of facts she was experiencing as a parent. Thus, Hailey Bieber made gestures that showed her pride in being a mom, such as smiling and waving her hands. The evidence was during the interview, the interviewer asked, "Under accomplishments, I have here that you're a mom to a one-year-old Jack Blues Bieber." Hailey Bieber reacted in a high-pitched voice and smile to claim, "I am. Yeah!". It led to the result that emotion (38,24%) was in the top position, whereas she was being transparent to express herself as a new mom.

As a result, intention (2,94%) came to be a low psychological state. It was proof that the focus of the whole interview of Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey discussed her point of view and experience as a parent, yet it did not determine her plan in the future, unless she only mentioned deleting some photos to free her overloaded storage filled with 200.000 photos of her son. Desire and authority were not discovered in the data, for the context of the interview did not contain any want, hope, declare, or even appoint.

Overall, all the utterances in the 5.36 - 7.53 minute segment emphasized the domination of assertive and belief, as Hailey Bieber built narration on spouting facts and sharing her personal experience. The domination of using emotion revealed the process of self-disclosure because it was intimate, like two women sharing their stories as mothers. However, the low result of commissive determined Hailey did not ask, command, or declare something, yet she only stated facts by telling her stories to her audience. Nonetheless, word-to-world and null were dominated as her utterances aimed to describe facts and express her emotions.

Discussion

The findings in the previous chapter convey the 3-dimensional analysis of Searle (1979): illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. In accordance with the findings, the discussion is conducted to link the results with the theory of speech acts in Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey interview, which brings a rich personal and emotional context. Therefore, the discovery was that assertive (58,82%) dominated types of illocutionary point, followed by expressive (38,24%). According to Searle (1979), assertive has the function to express the speaker's opinion or facts within the utterances that cover their belief. In this case, Hailey Bieber expressed herself by telling the audience how she felt being a mother. The process of being a mother was evidenced when she claimed, "They're changing so much so often" and "He won't remember it obviously," demonstrating the assertive that she described the situation she was in. In addition to proving the dominator of expressive (38,24%), Hailey exposed her emotion after she gave birth, watched over the development of her son, and her role as a mom, such as in these utterances "I was proud of me for that" or "I was sad he was turning one, Searle (1979) defined proud, embarrassed, sad, and happy as expressive. This added to the findings that Hailey Bieber's identity being a new mom was shaped through her delivering factual experiences (assertive) and expressing her feelings (expressive). In fact, commissive (2,49%) was detected, that she neither influenced nor decided to do something.

The analysis of the direction of fit highlights two powerful types Hailey Bieber used in utterances: word-to-world (58,82%) and null (38,24%). First, the world dominates because she frequently used assertiveness in the interview, which was theoretically fitted to reality (Searle, 1979). By the time she portrayed her experience in motherhood, she felt the change physically

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and emotionally, such in the interview she utterance, "When you're a mom, you change a lot" and "Becoming a mom gives me a different kind of confidence." Nonetheless, null appeared to be expressive when she showed her emotion throughout the interview. Null does not need a matching word in the world because it reflects the speaker's feelings. Proud, sad, happy, and embarrassed, as portrayed by Hailey Bieber, are not verified objectively, so they are classified as a null fit. Otherwise, world-to-word (2.94%) came out to be less prevalent, as Hailey Bieber rarely intended or committed actions, unless they were discovered. It also aligns with findings that there is no double fit, emphasizing that the interview does not act to declare what can change social status. This concludes that she more represented reality (word-to-world) than creating a new reality or giving commitments. Additionally, it shows the strength of her emotional journey as a mother.

Psychological state strengthens the previous findings. Belief (58.82%) and emotion (38.24%) are indicated as the emotions revealed through Hailey Bieber's utterances. In this state, belief proves that the assertives contain the speaker's belief when they talk about facts or opinions. Whereas emotion (38,24%) dominated expressive, and these emotions were part of Hailey's personal feelings she encountered in her motherhood journey. However, intention (2,94%) rose to be Hailey's plan, yet it did not determine that she was committing. Searle (1979) employs to express in the performance of the illocutionary acts to which it is related a speaker's inner condition or mental attitude. By her utterance, "Becoming a mom gives me a different kind of confidence," she has already authenticated her personal opinion as well as her belief. On the other hand, her utterances describe a big picture of a young mom who is proud, thrilled, and touched, with every single day a new moment is created. In summary, the psychological state in Hailey Bieber's motherhood journey demonstrates her beliefs and emotions, and it gives proof that the interview is narrative and personal.

These three dimensions analyze Searle's criteria to classify speech acts, consistently demonstrating that Hailey Bieber constructs her identities as a new mom, which she learns a lot from raising her firstborn son. Furthermore, it illustrates that she is reflective, emotional, and resilient, for she is open about her impression of having a son. Thus, every utterance that Hailey Bieber has employed in the motherhood journey interview with WSJ. Style delivers interpersonal emotions of a celebrity for personal branding with more humanistic and relatable expressions. Therefore, these findings show similarities and differences with the previous studies. Rahmayati et al. (2025) stated that assertive acts examine the human need to speak up for their belief and knowledge, which is consistent with Hågemark and Gårdenfors's research (2025) that speech acts cover mental capacities, whether in the form of empathy or emotion, which is known as expressive. Equivalently, Nur'aini and Ariatmi (2025) confirm that greeting, thanking, and attitude are classified in expressive acts. However, the absence of directive and declarative acts in this study is distinct from Agagon, M. (2024), who observed the political speech of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., which integrated both assertive and directive. Despite that, Yulian and Mandarani (2023) report that ESL teachers use directives to control the classroom, reminding students that teachers are a powerful individual. These distinctions arise from contextual variation due to Hailey Bieber participates in a personal narrative interview, not in an institutional or instructional setting.

This study acknowledges the limitations that researchers need to consider when interpreting the findings. First, regarding the limited scope of data, the data was obtained from a three-minute segment (minutes 5-8) of an interview conducted by Hailey Bieber with WSJ. Style. Although the segment was deliberately chosen because it was relevant to the title, its limited duration means that it may not fully represent Hailey's speech behaviour throughout the interview. If more data had been available, it would likely have produced a more diverse range of speech acts and psychological states through a single interview. The nature of personal interviews tends to elicit more expressive and assertive speech acts, which may differ from other genres such as talk shows, debates, or public statements. Likewise, this study relies solely on qualitative coding and manual interpretation, which produces results that are subject to the researcher's subjectivity. Despite these limitations, there are several recommendations that can be given to future researchers. First, in future research, researchers are expected to be

able to expand the dataset by analysing all interviews or comparing several interview segments. A broader corpus allows researchers to observe patterns that may not appear in shorter excerpts. Second, researchers are expected to conduct comparative studies by analysing the language actions of different speakers, such as comparing Hailey Bieber with other celebrity mothers, public figures, or other influencers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the speech acts performed by Hailey Bieber in her interview with WSJ. Style by analysing 34 speech units through Searle's framework (1976), which includes illocutionary force, direction of appropriateness, and psychological state. From this study, three main conclusions can be drawn. First, regarding the analysis of the illocutionary point, which shows that assertive acts are the dominant category, followed by expressive acts. This indicates that Hailey prioritizes the use of language that functions to provide information, express personal thoughts, and can be used in conveying her experiences as a mother. Followed by expressive actions that can evoke emotional qualities in the topic, allowing her to share the types of feelings she experiences, such as pride, shame, happiness, and sadness. On the other hand, commission actions appear minimally, and no directive or declarative actions are found because the context of the interview is personal and non-authoritative. Second, regarding the directionality analysis, which shows that the word-to-world pattern is a frequently occurring pattern, consistent with the high occurrence of assertive actions. This indicates that Hailey's statements are mostly intended to describe or represent real experiences. The incongruity of patterns related to expressive actions appears prominently, indicating that emotional expression plays an important role in constructing interview narratives. Third, regarding the analysis of psychological states, this shows that beliefs and emotions are the dominant mental states underlying all of Hailey's statements. Beliefs reflect her assessments, opinions, and interpretations of motherhood, while emotions describe an effective response to personal experiences. Overall, the three analytical dimensions consistently show that Hailey Bieber constructs her identity as a reflective, emotionally expressive, and relatable mother. The interview emphasizes narrative and emotional expression, rather than persuasion, instruction, or institutional authority. This study highlights how language in a personal interview not only serves to convey information but also to shape personal identity and emotional connections with the audience.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study on speech acts in Hailey Bieber's WSJ. Style interview, using Searle's framework, benefited from key tools. Microsoft Excel enabled efficient coding and analysis of 34 utterances across illocutionary point, direction of fit, and psychological state. Additionally, Google Scholar is used to find previous studies, while ChatGPT assisted with outlining structure, references, and sections like methodology and findings

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