Directive and Expressive Speech Acts in Support Heroes' Voice Lines: Enhancing Team Coordination in *Mobile Legends*

THESIS

Submitted to Fulfil a Partial of Requirements for S1 Degree
in The English Department Faculty of Humanities
Bung Hatta University

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ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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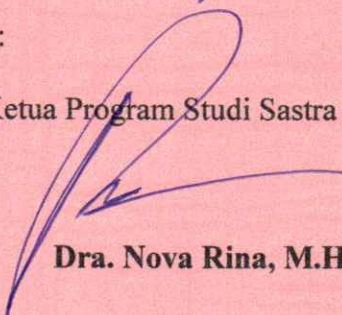
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify the originality of this thesis which I now submit to fulfill a requirement for an S1 in the English Department Faculty of Humanities Universitas Bung Hatta. The content of this thesis is entirely my work. All assistance received in writing this thesis and the sources cited have been acknowledged within the text of my work.

Padang, 17 September 2025

Angela Melinda Putri

Directive and Expressive Speech Acts in Support Heroes' Voice Lines:

Enhancing Team Coordination in *Mobile Legends*

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ABSTRACT

Voice lines are a distinctive feature of online multiplayer games that not only add character identity but also serve important communication functions in coordinating team play. This study focuses on the directive and expressive speech acts found in the voice lines of the Support heroes of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, in a bid to uncover their pragmalinguistic role in improving team synergy. Based on Searle's (1975) speech act theory, a qualitative descriptive approach drawing on these characteristics proposes that 75 voice lines of 14 Support heroes were used and categorized into directive and expressive, along with their subcategories. The findings show that directive acts—such as commanding, urging, requesting, advising, warning, and offering—primarily function as strategic cues that regulate team actions and synchronize tactical decisions. Meanwhile, expressive acts—including encouraging, reassuring, valuing, stating belief, motivating, criticizing, complaining, and emotional expressions—serve to sustain morale, reinforce solidarity, and establish the supportive identity of these heroes. The results highlight that voice lines, though pre-scripted and non-interactive, perform meaningful communicative roles in multiplayer digital environments by combining emotional resonance with tactical alignment. This study not only extends the application of speech act theory into the domain of online games but also provides practical insights for linguists, digital communication scholars, and game developers regarding the design of in-game language as a tool for both strategic coordination and maintaining team morale.

Keywords: speech acts, directive, expressive, pragmatics, support heroes, Mobile Legends

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes in the way humans communicate and interact, including in the world of online games. Games are no longer just a means of entertainment, but also a medium of communication that involves various forms of language expression and communication strategies. One of the key features of modern games is the presence of voice lines—spoken utterances from characters that convey particular meanings and play a role in shaping the game's atmosphere and supporting team strategy. This phenomenon makes online games an increasingly relevant object of linguistic study, especially in the study of pragmatics and speech.

One of the game developers that stands out in this context is *Moonton* Technology, a video game developer and publisher based in Shanghai, China. Founded in 2015, *Moonton* initially focused on creating mobile games aimed at a global audience. The company's rapid growth and innovative approach to mobile games attracted significant attention in the industry. In 2021, *Moonton* was officially acquired by *ByteDance*, TikTok's parent company, through its gaming division, Nuverse. This acquisition marked *ByteDance's* strategic expansion into the gaming sector, emphasizing the importance of *Moonton's* expertise and success. Currently, *Moonton* operates as an independent subsidiary under *ByteDance*, continuing to develop and expand its game portfolio while maintaining a strong presence in the global mobile gaming market.

One of *Moonton's* phenomenal works is Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB), a multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game released in 2016. With widespread popularity

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in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, MLBB has become an important part of the global digital culture, reaching more than 1 billion downloads on various platforms. The success of this game encourages the development of a broad esports ecosystem, including professional leagues such as Mobile Legends Professional League (MPL) and its participation in international sports events such as the SEA Games.

MLBB gameplay focuses on 5v5 team battles where players choose characters (heroes) with special abilities and roles such as Tank, Marksman, Assassin, Fighter, Mage, and Support. Players fight in 3 lanes to capture or destroy enemy towers while defending their own towers. This game emphasizes team Strategy, individual skills, and coordination between players.

Among these roles, support heroes have the main function of maintaining team balance through healing, protection, and area control. In 2025, there are 14 official support heroes in MLBB, each with unique characteristics, abilities, and narratives. Aside from their protective abilities, support heroes also build emotional connections with players through voice lines, which are short quotes spoken in certain game situations such as when choosing a hero, moving, or fighting.

There is something interesting emerging from these voice lines, especially the voice lines of support heroes, which not only serve to complete characterization, but also to convey motivation, instructions, and emotional expressions. From a linguistic perspective, these support heroes' voice lines contain many forms of speech acts, especially the directive and expressive categories as stated by John Searle (1979). Directive acts are used to direct actions, while expressive acts convey feelings or attitudes towards a situation.

According to Raymonda (2016), in the online game player community, the most dominant type of speech is directive, followed by assertive, expressive, commission, and declarative. This shows that interaction in the game is not only technical, but also involves complex

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pragmatic aspect. Thus, linguistic analysis of speech in Mobile Legends not only provides insight into the structure and function of language in a digital context, but also contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics of human communication in the era of digital interaction and online collaboration.

However, the problem that arises is the lack of linguistic research that specifically analyzes voice lines in the Mobile Legends game, especially in the role of support heroes. Most previous studies have focused more on the gameplay or general narrative aspects of the game, rather than on an in-depth linguistic approach to character utterances.

The reason for this lack of research can be seen from the lack of studies that specifically examine speech acts in support hero voice lines in Mobile Legends. Most of the existing studies are more focused on analyzing gameplay, game mechanics, or the social impact of the game itself, while studies on the linguistic aspects of character voice lines are still very limited. Voice lines, which function to describe the character and motivation of the hero, have the potential to be explored more deeply in terms of social interactions between characters in the game. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing how speech acts in support hero voice lines shape the characteristics and social dynamics between characters. By focusing on directive and expressive acts, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role of language in building narratives and interactions in games.

Therefore, this research is important not only because it addresses the literature gap but also because it enriches the understanding of how strategic communication is built in a digital context. In addition, through the speech acts approach, this research contributes to the study of modern pragmatic linguistics and its application in interactive media.

This study examines the role of directive and expressive speech acts in the voice lines of Mobile Legends' support heroes, aiming to understand how language shapes in-game

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interactions and player experiences. By focusing on how these speech acts function within the game's virtual environment, the research seeks to provide valuable insights into the ways language affects communication in digital spaces. The results of this study will contribute to a growing body of work in pragmatics and game studies, offering a deeper understanding of the intersection between language and virtual gaming communities.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions found in this study are:

1. What types of directive speech act are found in the voice lines of Support heroes in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang?

2. What types of expressive speech act are found in Support hero voice lines in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang?

3. What functions do these speech acts serve in the context of team-based gameplay?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research are:

1. To identify the types of expressive speech acts used in the voice lines of Support heroes in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

2. To identify the types of directive speech acts used in the voice lines of Support heroes in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

3. To find the functions of speech acts in support heroes' voice lines during team-based gameplay.

1.4 Limitation of the Problem

This research is limited to analyze the voice lines of Support heroes in the game *Mobile Legends: Bang Bang* using the theory of speech acts proposed by John Searle (1979). The analysis focuses only on two types of speech acts, namely directive and expressive speech acts. The selected data are limited to the English voice lines available from 14 Support heroes as of

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2025, and do not include other roles such as Tank, Marksman, Fighter or Mage. The study does not analyze other linguistic elements such as phonology or syntax, nor does it involve player interactions or gameplay mechanics beyond the linguistic function of voice lines.

1.5 Significance of the Research

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Academically, it enriches the field of pragmatics by applying Searle's speech act theory to a contemporary digital environment, namely the voice lines of support heroes in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang. It contributes to the understanding of how language operates as a strategic and expressive tool within game narratives and character communication. Practically, the study may serve as a reference for linguistics students, researchers, and scholars interested in digital discourse. It also provides insight for e-sports communities regarding the relevance of verbal strategies and communication styles in collaborative gameplay and team dynamics. In terms of game development, the findings can be useful for developers and content writers in creating more effective, expressive, and strategically impactful voice lines. This can enhance both character design and the overall player experience in multiplayer games.

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