

Former Muslims' Socio-Religious Discourse on Social Media: A Speech Acts Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to provide insights into the speech acts in socio-religious discourse constructed by former Malaysian Muslims on social media. This study employs a blended analytical lens consisting of Searle's (1999) taxonomy of speech acts and van Dijk's (1992) perspective of micro and macro speech acts. The analysis reveals that all five conventional speech act categories are represented in the discourse. But these categories do not provide insights into the real performances in the construction of discourse unless they are combined with analysis of actual performances at utterance level and at discourse level. Using blended speech act analysis, this study provides deeper insights into how and what former Muslims accomplish through their use of language while constructing anti-religious discourse on social media. The analysis revealed that from van Dijk's (1992) perspective of speech acts, at the utterance level; argument is the most used micro-speech act followed by denial, persuasion, suggestion, rejection, warning, and assertion. At the discourse level; argument is also the most common macro-speech act followed by rejection, denial, warning, assertion, persuasion, information, and direction. This study concludes that the social media affordances enabled the former Muslims living in Islamic countries to perform speech acts and construct derogatory discourse on Islam. Further the strategic speech acts identified demonstrate former Muslims' tendency, capacity and intention of challenging religious, especially Islamic, authoritative discourse.

Keywords: social media; ex-Muslims; micro-speech acts; macro-speech acts; discourse

INTRODUCTION

Searle (1969) transformed Austin's (1962) intuitions on the general nature of illocutionary acts through his idea of constitutive norms. Searle (1999, p. 19) asserts that "speaking a language is pursuing in the form of behaviour governed by rules". He proposed constitutive and regulative rules for the speech acts. For the performance of illocutionary acts, Searle (1999) proposed commanding constitutive rules such as propositional rule that specifies what propositional content corresponds to what illocutionary force; preparatory rule that defines what is required in order to perform certain speech act; sincerity rule determines the mental state in which the speech act is performed; and the essential rule that explains what the speaker typically tries to accomplish in generating certain illocutionary speech act. Based on these rules, Searle (1999) categorised the performatives into representatives, declaratives, commissives, directives and expressives.

Searle's (1999) speech act taxonomy is concerned with how words are used to perform certain functions. His proposed categories are linear and more general determining the general behaviour in the speech such as expressing, directing, declaring, asserting, and committing (Nordquist, 2019; Benamara, Inkpen & Taboada, 2018; Nodoushan, 2014; Leech, 1983). Identifying the function of a speech act within discourse is not merely a linear exercise like looking for assertives, commissives or expressives; speech acts at the utterance level are sequenced in a certain way to construct a particular discourse (van Dijk, 1992). Therefore, in discourse, *micro* and *macro speech acts* can be explored from the utterance to discourse level where *micro speech acts* at the utterance level inform the *macro speech act* at the holistic level of constructed discourse (van Dijk, 1992).

In social media such as Facebook and Twitter, the affordance of producing and consuming the content at the same time (Ritzer, 2015) have made online communication more dynamic and discursive where the affordance of one to many and many to many communication is leveraged to construct variety of political, social and religious discourses (Hashmi, Rashid & Munir, 2021; Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Idris & Ghani, 2012). Social media users communicate using their own, personalised discourse and make strategic use of performatives to undertake several different functions (Nastri, Peña & Hancock, 2006; Simon, 2008; Herring & Kapidzic, 2015; Hisham & Hashim, 2022). In the light of van Dijk's (1992) proposition, the researchers argue that certain political and religious discourses can be well understood by investigating the function of performatives at sentence level and at the holistic level of discourse where the linear sequences, interplay and hierarchical sequences of speech acts can inform the contextual functions of speech acts in the discourse.

The worldwide consumption of social media has transformed the concept of online discourse, blurring the boundary between information sharing, personal self-expression, and public discourse in virtual space (Oprea, 2019; Pennington, 2018), attracting the attention of marginalised groups such as former Muslims who have found ways to overtly expressing their views of the religion through Facebook, Twitter and Blogs where they seem to engage in several different performatives for variety of communicative functions. This study thus attempts to investigate the former Muslims' engagement in performatives using van Dijk's (1992) proposition of micro and macro speech acts aligned with Searle's (1999) taxonomy.

RECENT STUDIES ON SPEECH ACTS WITHIN SOCIAL MEDIA

Use of language is context dependent and thus, pragmatics is the study of speaker's meaning in context (Yule, 1996). The way people use language is significantly influenced by some social aspects such as gender, social class, age, certain social situations, etc. (Chang, 2019; Khalaf, 2018; Mohamad et al., 2018; Ilyas & Khushi, 2012). Within social media, users' belief plays an important role in sharing the views, promoting the religious identity and attracting likeminded people (Hanoon & Faisal, 2021). Some recent studies showing the performances through speech within social media are reviewed here.

Mohamad et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study to analyse the strategic use of language in the social media postings of an overt apostate. The study's analytical framework used Searle's (1999) speech act taxonomy. The researchers observed the sole research subject's Timeline over two years, generating data from 648 postings directly related to acts of apostasy. The researchers found that the participant frequently used expressives, directives, assertives and commissives, while declarative speech acts was rarely part of the subject's discourse. Mohamad et al. pointed out that the subject not only shared news or gave her views but also attempted to engage other Facebook users and persuade them to accept her ideology and gain their support. They reported that expressive was her most frequent speech act followed by directive, assertive and commissive speech acts, where commissive was the least used speech act. The study concluded that the apostate utilised linguistic resources strategically to gain support from other social media users, and convince the audience of her beliefs.

Pebrianto, Daniarsa and Awaliyah (2018) examined the speech acts used in the comments on Instagram in response to a photo posted by a famous gay American and comedian, Ellen DeGeneres, in which she kissed her wife, Portia de Rossi. The post invited and aroused mixed responses in the comments. The comments on Instagram from October 11th to 13th 2018, were collected as the data set in this study. The findings showed that representatives were used the most (50.4%), followed by expressives (33.6%) whereas the least used speech acts were directives (16%). The study concluded that the netizen used representatives to give their reaction to the post and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender) individuals in general. They used expressives to express their feelings toward LGBTs in general, and Ellen specifically; these feelings included sympathy, anger, love, and sorrow.

Sidiq and Simatupang (2019) analysed types of illocutionary speech acts, the functions of illocutionary speech acts and the strategies of the illocutionary speech acts performed in public figures' tweets. Searle's speech act theory guided the identification of the types of illocutionary speech acts, while Leech's perspectives were employed to draw out the functions of the illocutionary speech acts identified, and Yule's (1996) theories provided the analytical lens to ascertain the strategies used to perform certain illocutionary acts in their tweets. The tweets in the Twitter accounts of two prominent public figures, LeBron James and Dwayne Johnson were observed from November 2018 to March 2019. Eight tweets were selected and categorised according to the type illocutionary speech act performed, its function and the strategy adopted to perform each illocutionary speech act. The findings showed that two assertive speech acts, two commissive speech acts, one expressive speech act, one declarative speech act, and two directive illocutionary acts were performed in the eight analysed tweets.

To synthesise the findings of the reviewed studies on the performative aspects of speech, the social media users make full use of linguistic resources such as speech acts to perform several different functions. Usually, the studies took a mundane approach of providing broader categories

such as expressives, commissives, assertives, declaratives and directives to show the performative aspects of used language in social media postings. This study argues that van Dijk's perspective of performances through speech on micro and macro level can provide deeper insights into how the adverts strategically use language to perform certain illocutionary actions through assertive, declarative, commissive, expressive, or directive behaviour while constructing their postings within Facebook, Twitter and Blogs.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs mainly a qualitative approach though with some quantitative findings of the frequency of identified speech acts. Based on a well-known former Malaysian Muslim's Facebook account that was open to public and using a snowball technique, nine former Malaysian Muslims were identified. It was observed that five of them were active users of Facebook, twitter or both who were retained as the participants of this study. They were given pseudonyms; Emi, Lucy, George, Mike and Smith in order to ensure the participants' privacy. The participants gave their consent, saying that they had masked their identity on social media to protect themselves and that their posts were public in a setting that ensures open access to them for everyone. This study employed an extended observation technique from October 2019 to March 2020 that provided a pool of 435 postings, of which 291 directly dealt with Islamic authoritative discourse and were selected as the data set for the analysis.

CODES

Each of the selected postings was assigned a unique code to facilitate the analysis and discussion.

[Emi, FP. 11] denotes Emi's post on Facebook which is number 11 in the data order.

[Lucy, TP. 54] denotes Lucy's post on Twitter, number 54 in the data order.

ANALYTICAL LENS

This study combined Searle's (1999) speech act taxonomy and van Dijk's (1992) concept of *micro-speech acts* and *macro-speech acts* as an analytical lens to analyse the data set. According to Searle, there are five categories of speech acts.

Assertives

An assertive act counts as an attempt to explain the actual state of affairs comprising phrases used to address a specific idea, proposition or belief. Here the direction of fit is to make words fit the world (Searle, 1999). Making words fit the world means that speech acts with assertive force is used to state what the speaker believes to be the case or not the case.

Directives

Performing speech acts with directive force means that the speaker wants to get someone to do something (Yule, 1996) where the sincerity condition is want, wish or desire and propositional content is always that the hearer does some future action (Searle, 1999). Giving commands and orders are some examples of speech acts with directive force.

Commissives

In these acts the speakers commit themselves to future actions. The direction of fit is to make the world fit words. The sincerity condition is intention whereas; the propositional content is always that the speaker does some future action (Searle, 1999).

Expressives

Performing speech acts with expressive force, speaker wants to show what he/she feels about particular situations (Yule, 1996). In performing expressive speech acts, the speaker is neither trying to get the world to match the words nor the words to match the world; rather the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed (Searle, 1999).

Declaratives

Declarative force has a principle that a speech act uttered by a speaker changes the world or situation (Yule, 1996). The direction of fit here is words change the world and these acts have no sincerity condition until they align with the other category of speech acts such as assertive declarations. The successful performance of declaratives aligns the propositional content with the reality and for the successful performance of declaratives, extra-linguistics constitutive rules are required (Searle, 1999).

According to van Dijk's (1992) perspective of speech acts, the speech act performed at utterance level is a *micro-speech act*, whereas the speech act performed at discourse level is a *macro-speech act*.

In the light of Searle's (1999) taxonomy and van Dijk's (1992) perspective, the speech acts that emerged on micro level of sentence or macro level of posting in the data analysis are briefly outlined below:

- *Assertions* occurred when a speaker made positive statements about the world, certain phenomena, an issue or person including the addresser or addressee. These claims were usually made without evidence.
- *Information* referring to facts or knowledge about something in the world, a phenomenon, issue or person, the including addresser or addressee
- *Claims* were assertions based on evidence or truth claims which could impact on the issue, person, thing or phenomenon of concern.
- *Suggestions* were presented indirectly to encourage the addressee to perform an action.
- *Advice* was the addresser's opinion used to influence the addressee's behaviour or actions according to the addresser's view.
- *Arguments* were the statements containing the evidence or proof offered by the addresser to support a certain claim are arguments in this classification of speech acts.
- *Denials* were the objections of the addresser to previous utterances and included all types of speech acts.
- *Accusations* were charges levelled by the addresser against the addressee, beliefs, phenomena or some aspect of reality. Usually, accusations were based on negative charges.
- *Surprise* refers to expressions resulting from unusual or unexpected happenings.
- *Warnings* were statements about possible unpleasant happenings in the future.
- *Directions* were requests for information or certain actions or to get an action done in a certain way.

- *Persuasion* refers to persuading or convincing something by endorsing and emphasising the integrity and attractiveness of the addresser, issue or phenomenon, an attempt to appeal to the addressee’s emotions, wishes or desires.
- *Promises* were the speaker’s commitments marked by positive intention to perform certain acts in future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants’ construct several discourses which can be categorised under distinct religion related topics thus each posting in this study is considered a distinct discourse which constitute a mega socio-religious discourse within social media. Each posting may contain several micro speech acts but an overall macro speech-act performed at the level of discourse in each distinct posting can be identified.

The analysis of 291 postings showed that the subjects engaged in 13 *micro-speech acts*: assertion, information, claims, suggestion, advice, argument, denial, accusation, surprise, warning, direction, persuasion, and promise. Each *micro speech act* occurred several times in the data, with a total of 556 occurrences, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Frequency of micro-speech acts identified in the data

| No. | Micro-speech act | Number | Percentage |
|-----|------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Assertion | 11 | 1.9 |
| 2 | Suggestion | 49 | 8.8 |
| 3 | Information | 30 | 5.3 |
| 4 | Argument | 136 | 24.4 |
| 5 | Denial | 110 | 19.7 |
| 6 | Direction | 15 | 2.6 |
| 7 | Promise | 13 | 2.4 |
| 8 | Reject | 47 | 8.4 |
| 9 | Warning | 38 | 6.8 |
| 10 | Surprise | 19 | 3.4 |
| 11 | Persuasion | 53 | 9.5 |
| 12 | Advice | 12 | 2.2 |
| 13 | Claim | 23 | 4.1 |
| | Total | 564 | 100% |

*Note: Individual micro-speech acts were identified in 291 postings and the percentage is based on the total number of micro-speech acts; 556.

In addition, nine speech acts were identified at discourse level and considered *macro-speech acts*: assert, inform, argue, deny, direct, promise, reject, warn, and persuade. Each posting was a unique discourse; hence the speech act at discourse level is at posting level. The number of these *macro-speech acts* is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Number of macro-speech identified in the data

| No. | Macro-speech act | Number | Percentage |
|-----|------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Argue | 70 | 24.0 |
| 2 | Reject | 64 | 22.0 |
| 3 | Deny | 35 | 12.0 |
| 4 | Warn | 28 | 9.8 |
| 5 | Assert | 26 | 8.9 |
| 6 | Persuade | 23 | 7.9 |
| 7 | Inform | 22 | 7.5 |
| 8 | Promise | 13 | 4.4 |
| 9 | Direct | 10 | 3.4 |
| | Total | 291 | 100 |

The analysis and subsequent identification of *micro* and *macro-speech acts* are shown in the following exemplary excerpts from the data.

ARGUMENT

According to van Dijk's (1992) speech act theory, argument is a *micro-speech act* at utterance level which shows the intention to argue. On the other hand, at the discourse level, different *micro-speech acts* may be used to put forward or extended an argument, in which case, argument is considered a macro-speech act (Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015; van Dijk, 1992). There are 90 occurrences of argument as a micro speech act (at the level of sentence) (30.2%) in the data. At discourse (posting) level, the *macro-speech act* argument was found in 22 (24.1%) postings. Extract 1 demonstrates argument as macro-speech act along with Searle's (1999) *representatives*, *expressives* and *directives* as *micro-speech acts*.

Extract 1

1. "Don't "insult"(criticise) my religion" is a very bad comeback argument.
 2. How is it that you are totally okay with people praising your religion, but you are not okay with people criticising it?
 3. You can't constantly expect your religion to be praised and protected.
 4. Shutting down people and forcing them to submit themselves to believe that Islam means peace, and no one should criticise it is basically showing that Islam is based on submission, not anywhere near based on "peace" as what Muslims very much love to claim.
 5. But sadly, the hostility that Muslims often show towards this question leads them to send death threats to people who are brave enough to question the legitimacy of the claim that Islam is a peaceful religion.
 7. How is it peaceful to act very hostilely, very arrogantly and ignorantly?
 8. Shouldn't the core of Islam being a peaceful religion strictly reflect on its believers?
 9. Is it peaceful to kill apostates and gay people?
 10. How is it peaceful to send death threats openly just because someone dares to question the legitimacy of your religion?
 11. Most importantly, how is it peaceful that people who don't believe in what you believe in should eventually end up in hell?
 12. The place where you believe the "bad guys" should be sent to.
 13. Using scaremongering to prove that your religion is "peaceful" and forcing people to not raise any questions because those who question the legitimacy of Islam are punishable by death is not peaceful at all.
 14. Is your religion so fragile that it needs its believers to protect it from criticism?
 15. To claim that Islam is the correct right religion while it is so fragile to criticism, again is a very big contradiction.
- [Smith, FP. 26]

Extract 1 starts with Searle's (1999) *assertive* speech act where Smith gives his assessment of the proclaimed Muslims' argument ("*Don't 'insult'(criticise) my religion*") and asserts that it is an illogical argument (line, 1). For the identification of assertives, Searle (1999, p. 354) pointed out "the direction of fit is words-to-the-world" where assertive force represents the psychological state of the speaker's belief about a case. Here in line 1, speaker hypothesises that Muslims' directive speech act "*Don't 'insult'(criticise) my religion*" is a bad comeback argument, and thus it is considered an assertive speech act by the speaker. He constructs arguments with a syntactical structure of question (lines 2, 8 & 9) but the sincerity condition here is not to get the hearer answer the question rather the sincerity condition of questioning Muslims' behaviour of accepting praise and rejecting criticism of the religion seems compatible with the propositional content in lines 2, 8 and 9. Based on the sincerity condition and propositional content it is clear that Smith is showing his disagreement with Muslims proposition that Islam is a peaceful religion. Line 3 shows a direction of fit as 'make the world match the words' where Smith attempts to get the Muslims committed for a future action of not expecting the praise and protection of their religion all the time. The sincerity condition here is want and the propositional content wants the hearer do some future action and thus, line 3 is a *suggestive micro-speech act*. A *micro-speech act* of *accusation* follows, claiming Islam forces people to believe blindly, demanding complete submission, which is arrogant, hostile and ignorant (lines 4, 7, 10 & 13). Lines 4, 7, 10 and 13 are analysed together due to the common sincerity condition and propositional content though the syntactical structure in these lines is different. The syntactical structure in lines 4 and 13 seems assertive whereas lines 7 and 10 offer syntactical structure of questions but the sincerity conditions does not demand an answer rather they seem to represent the psychological state of the speaker about the presuppositions of forcing the people to believe (line, 4); acting very hostilely, arrogantly and ignorantly (line, 7); sending death threats to those who question the legitimacy of the religion (line, 10); and using scaremongering to prove that your religion is peaceful (line, 13). The question arises here that whether the speaker is performing some action on these presuppositions or by these presuppositions. The presupposition in these lines cannot be reduced to simple judgement rather propositional content shows Smiths' psychological state of belief that it is the reality of the religion. Therefore, through these suppositions Smith accuses the religion as an institution of tyranny, arrogance and ignorance that demands a blind belief. The propositional content again shows Smiths' psychological state of disagreeing with the Muslims' claim that Islam is a peaceful religion (lines, 6, 11 & 15). Comparing Muslims' claim with his observation, he argues that the Muslims claims are in contradiction to the reality. The speech act of arguing emerges here that makes these lines distinct from other categories of assertives. Overall, the discourse offers a psychological state of speaker's belief of what the reality is through which he asserts his argument. We considered assertion as a macro-speech act in this discourse but the inter-coder suggested avoiding over generalisation and emphasised that *arguing* in the category of assertives emerges as a *macro-speech act* in this discourse. Therefore, *arguing* as a *macro-speech act* is considered here in this discourse.

Extract 1 is a good example of van Dijk's (1992) micro-speech act sequence in the discourse whereby the speaker performs different speech acts at utterance (sentence) level, equivalent to using different, individual speech acts in written statements. Through the sequencing of *micro-speech acts*, Smith performs the act of arguing at the level of posting and constructs an argumentative discourse and thus *argument* becomes a *macro-speech act* (van Dijk, 1992) performed through the discourse of the posting.

REJECTION

According to Searle (1999), statements or expressions of reject fall in the category of *expressives* which in the light of van Dijk's (1992) perspective at the utterance level, *reject* as a *micro-speech act* which was identified 30 times (8.2%) in the data. As a *macro-speech act* reject was found in 28 (30.7%) postings. Extract 2 illustrates *reject* as a macro-speech act.

Extract 2

1. My poor, sweet, grandmother sends me handwritten letters every month begging me to come back to the fold
2. because she is being driven crazy imagining me burning in hell.
3. I hate this.

[Smith, TP. 85]

Line 1 provides the context of the speakers' discourse. Searle (1999) considers telling the context as giving information and thus, line 1 in Extract 2 contains *information* as a *micro-speech act* whereby the speaker gives the information that his grandmother wants him to return to the religious fold. According to Searle (1999, p. 13) "Conclude' and 'deduce' are also assertives with the added feature that they mark certain relations between the assertive illocutionary act and the rest of the discourse or the context of the utterance". Line 2 clearly marks the relationship between the context in line 1 and the assertive force with which Smith concludes that 'she is being driven crazy imagining me burning in hell'. Therefore, through the assertive force in line 2 he performs the *micro-speech act* of *conclusion* (van Dijk, 1992). Searle (1999) pointed out that an indirect speech can be performed through some other explicit speech act such as expressives and assertives or even through some statement. For example, in line 3, speaker expresses his hate for the grandmother's concern about him. The utterance may account for expressives but the context dependence of the utterance in line 3 shows that he is rejecting his grandmother's invitations in the hand written letters to 'come back to the fold' and thus, the speaker indirectly performs the speech act of *reject* (line, 3) on the level of discourse which in the light of van Dijk's (1992) perspective is considered a *macro-speech act*.

DENIALS

Denials are the descriptive statements objecting to an action or utterance and in the taxonomy of speech acts, falls within the representative speech act category. However, according to van Dijk's (1992) concept of speech acts, denials as a *micro-speech act* was identified 72 times (19.7%) at sentence level in the data set whereas 11 (12.1%) postings were found with denial of religious teachings at the level of discourse which was constructed in each of the postings distinctively. Through the discourse in the following posting, Mike denies respecting the hadith of the prophet of Islam, engaging in denial as a macro-speech act at discourse level.

Extract 3

1. "Whoever changes religion, kill him." (reported by al-Bukhari, al Fath, no. 3017)
2. And it's because of that I was nearly killed.
3. Islam does not respect my existence & calls for my execution,
4. why on Earth should I respect something like that?

[Mike, TP. 38]

Extract 3 starts with the quotation from the book of Hadiths of Muslims' prophet Muhammad that presents a directive speech act by allowing the followers to kill those who leave Muslim faith. The quotation provides the context to the speaker's performances of speech acts in the following lines 2, 3 and 4. According to Searle (1999, p. 25) "there are typically two syntactic forms for assertive illocutionary acts; one of which focusses on propositional content, the other on the object(s) referred to in the propositional content, but both of which are semantically assertive". Line 2 presents the first syntactic form where propositional content represents speaker's psychological state of belief that due to the directive speech act in line 1, he was nearly killed. As the directive speech act in line 1 corresponds to the Muslims and Mike's accusation is contextually dependent on the propositional content in line 1 therefore, accusation corresponds to the Muslims. As a result, Mike is viewed as performing *micro-speech act* of *accusing* (van Dijk, 1992) the Muslims for attempting his murder due to the directive speech act in line 1. In line 3, speaker's psychological state is dependent on the context of Islamic authoritative discourse that Islam respects the whole of humanity, but the speaker presents a claim 'Islam does not respect my existence and calls for my execution' that falls in the category of assertives as direction of fit is to make the words fit the world which means he believes that his claim represents the reality of the religion. Therefore, *claim as a micro-speech* (van Dijk, 1992) act emerges from the utterance in line 3. Line 4 presents the syntactic form of a question but sincerity condition is not want and the propositional content does not seem to demand answering to this question. Similarly, the direction of fit is not to make the world fit the words as in case of questions rather through the rhetorical question, he asserts that he is not going to respect the religion for the reasons given in lines 1, 2 and 3. The propositional content in line 4 levels speaker's denial of respecting the religion and thus *denying as a micro-speech* (van Dijk, 1992) emerges from line 4. Micro-speech acts of claiming and accusing are sequenced to offer reasons why the speaker does not respect Islam, thus at the discourse level *denying respect for Islam is a macro-speech act* (van Dijk, 1992).

WARNING

A warning is an expression referring to some potential bad future event that might negatively affect the addressee (Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015; van Dijk, 1992). In the taxonomy of speech acts, *warning* falls in the category of *directives* and can be considered a *micro-speech act* at sentence level and a *macro-speech act* at discourse level. Warning as *micro-speech act* was found 25 times (6.9%) whereas in nine postings (9.8%) it emerged as a *macro-speech act*. Extract 4 illustrates warning as a *macro-speech act* at discourse level.

Extract 4

1. *Let's get together to show the Muslims our strength and to help the closeted atheists.*
2. *Dear closeted malays, we will not leave you alone.*

[Emi, FP. 72]

Extract 4 starts with a suggestion by the speaker to the other former Muslims to unite. But the propositional content offers more than a suggestion by presenting the speakers intention of showing strength to the Muslims and helping the closeted atheists. The semantic structure of the propositional content shows that suggesting unity cannot produce the effect of speaker's intention rather urging unity is compatible with the speaker's intention of showing strength to the Muslims and helping the closeted atheists. Though the direction of fit for both 'suggest' and 'urge' is to make the world fit the words, but he degree of intensity of the directive force is much higher for the speech act of urge as compared to the speech act of suggest (Searle, 1999). Therefore, Emi's

statement in line 1 is viewed as the performance of urging as a micro-speech act (van Dijk, 1992). Line 2 presents a statement with a commissive force of promise to the closeted Malays that Emi and other former Muslims will not leave them alone. In the light of Searle's (1999) felicity conditions, Emi's ability to fulfil the promise is preparatory condition; Emi's intention of not leaving the closeted Malays alone is sincerity condition; the propositional content predicates here the future action of not leaving closeted Malays alone; and Emi's undertaking of not leaving closeted Malays alone is an essential condition. All the fulfilled felicity conditions count for the performance of speech act of promise and thus, Emi performs *micro-speech act of promise* (van Dijk, 1992) in line 2.

ASSERTIONS

Following van Dijk's (1992) perspective of *speech acts*, assertions present a positive image of a person or phenomenon without offering any evidence. Indirectly, this speech act serves as a means of impression management and face saving (Ilyas & Khushi, 2012; Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015). This speech act is often found in the utterances of former Muslims when they challenge religious discourse on social media. Seven examples of assertion as a *micro-speech act* were found (1.9% of micro speech acts), while *assertion* as a *macro-speech act* at discourse level was in 12 (13.1% of macro discourses overall) individual discourses. Extract 5 statements are positive and suggest rationalism and religion can co-exist, religion can have a positive role, and the speaker's own humanist perspective.

Extract 5

1. *I'm an atheist and rationalist. But I believe you can be both religious and rational (many of my friends and colleagues are).*
2. *Religion is useful to many people to provide a sense of purpose, social belonging, and a moral compass.*
3. *My own moral compass comes from humanism: maximizing the long-term expected values of human well-being and minimizing human suffering.*

[George, FP. 7]

Extract 5 starts with statements that tell how things are, and according to (Searle, 1999, p. viii) assertives "tell people how things are". According to van Dijk (1992), assertives can be deconstructed into micro speech acts, such as the *assertion* that the speaker is an atheist and that atheists are rational (line, 1). Searle (1999) pointed out "The simplest of an assertive is this; can you literally characterise it as true or false". Secondly, the direction of fit for assertives is to make words fit the world, and finally, the propositional content presents speaker's psychological state of belief of what the case is or how the world is. Line 2 presents a statement that fulfils all the necessary conditions of an assertive such as George tells that religion is useful to many people; the propositional content shows his psychological state of belief that Islam provides a sense of purpose, social belonging and a moral compass; and he makes his words fit the reality as he sees it. Therefore, line 2 presents second *assertion* linked to the positive role of religion in human life. Line 3 also fulfils all the necessary conditions of an assertive speech act as stated above through which George presents a positive image of him based on his belief in human wellbeing and minimisation of human sufferings. The sequence of three micro-speech acts in three successive statements in this extract form a *macro-speech act* (van Dijk, 1992) at discourse (posting) level, which is also an *assertion*, because the discourse constructed in this extract is *assertive* in Searle's (1999) terms. This *assertion* is a macro-speech act that presents a positive image of the speaker that even as an atheist, he is not against religion, rather he is a humanist.

INFORMATION

In Searle's (1999) taxonomy of speech acts, informative statements when fulfil the required felicity conditions fall within the category of declaratives but generally the informative statements without a relevant performative verb fall under the category of *assertives* (Roberts, 2018). According to Simon and Dejica-Cartis (2015), giving information is a speech act that may function at the utterance level as *micro-speech act* and at discourse level as a *macro-speech act* in van Dijk's (1992) taxonomy of speech acts. There were 19 'information' *micro-speech acts* (5.3%), and seven on discourse level *macro-speech acts* (7.6%). Extract 6 shows information as a *macro-speech act*.

Extract 6

1. *Do you know, if when a husband comes home and asks for sex from his wife, and she e is not willing, not ready, uncomfortable or not happy, it is a rape?*
2. *Have you ever heard of the concept of rape?*
3. *You've never heard of it, right?*
4. *Because you learn religion which is dying. Even learning religion from a post era.*
5. *Kind of choosing the hadith of the prophet, follow what is suitable for the brain of patriarchy.*
6. *You want to give lost teachings about sex, you don't pick the name of the prophet to make it awesome.*
7. *Your man may have sperm from the fire of hell. The hell is it if you get raped by your man every day after he sees another sexy woman.*

[Emi, FP. 40]

Extract 6 starts with an informative statement about the issue of husbands' forced intercourse with wives (line, 1) an example of information in a *micro-speech act* (van Dijk, 1992; Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015). The syntactic structure of line 1 follows the structure of a question that can be answered in yes or no because the intended information already is there in the question and no extra information is needed for the answer 'yes' and in case of the answer 'no' the question still provides the information and no extra information is needed to answer this question. In the light of felicity conditions (Searle, 1999) of the speech act of informing, the preparatory condition is that Emi knows what she wants to inform; Sincerity condition is that she wants others to know the same; propositional content presents Emi's knowledge; and essential condition is that Emi attempts to do what she wants. Hence, Emi is considered to perform the speech act of informing in line 1. The speaker then poses questions (lines, 2 & 3) to show the existence and gravity of the issue according to her belief that how it should be viewed where again the propositional content and the felicity conditions do not account for the expectation of answers to the questions as Emi herself assumes the answer in line 3 by saying 'You've never heard of it, right?' which shows that she asserts the importance of knowing what she calls 'rape' through the rhetorical questions in lines 2 and 3.. She offers reasons why this issue is still not discussed and why Muslims do not consider it as rape such as in line 5, the propositional content presents her psychological state of belief that the purpose of choosing prophet's hadiths is nothing except that it suits the patriarchy which produces a cause-effect relationship making the assertion an argument. Her words in the statement fit the world as she sees it in terms of what is the cause and what is its effect Searle (1999) calls argument in the category of assertives. Line 6 presents a directive speech act when Emi says '*...you don't pick the name of the prophet to make it awesome*'. The propositional content shows that the direction of fit is to make the world fit the words but at the same time the context and extra-linguistic conditions such as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer do not fulfil the felicity conditions of order and request rather its consideration as a speech act of suggesting makes it felicitous because suggestion does not require any extra-linguistic constitutive

rule as in case of the speech acts of ordering and requesting respectively. Line 7 again present the speakers psychological state of belief and the direction of fit again is to make the words fit the world through which Emi tells that without wives consent the intercourse is a rape and thus, she performs the *micro-speech act* of *assertion* (van Dijk, 1992). (1992) argument (line 5), suggestion (lines 6) and assertion (line 7) are *micro-speech acts* because they are not intended speech acts at discourse level and isolated speech act statements do not represent the overall discourse in this extract. The sequence of *micro-speech acts* in this discourse leads to the speaker's prime aim of providing a *macro-speech act* of information which informs women about non-consenting sex with their husbands and their right to refuse their husbands.

DIRECTION

According to Searle's (1999) classification of speech acts, *requests* and *suggestions* are *directives*. The analysed postings indicate that former Muslims use *directives* to request, suggest or persuade others to accept their stand- point on religion and religious laws in Islamic countries. In the light of van Dijk's (1992) conceptualisation of speech acts, the *micro-speech act* of direction occurs 10 times (2.2%) at sentence level whilst 3 (3.3%) postings offered 'direction' as a separate *macro-speech act* for each of the three. Extract 7 presents example of the *directives*.

Extract 7

1. Three women in Iran have been charged with and sentenced for 'inciting prostitution' for promoting removal of the hijab.
2. Please help and sign the petition.
3. Let's collectively denounce a cancerous modesty culture
4. that continues to harm and hold women back globally.

[Lucy, TP. 75]

Extract 8 starts with an informative statement about women who have been arrested and sentenced to jail under Islamic law (line, 1), a descriptive speech act within the category of *assertives* in Searle's (1999) speech act theory, but a *micro-speech act* of *information* according to Simon & Dejica-Cartis (2015) and van Dijk (1992) because it occurs within a statement but does not represent the whole discourse. The speaker asks addressees to sign a petition and play a role (line 2) through the *micro-speech act* of *request* (van Dijk, 1992). In the sequence of *micro-speech acts*, *suggestion* (Simon & Dejica-Cartis, 2015; van Dijk, 1992) is used to ask the addressees to collectively denounce Islamic laws by signing a petition (line 3). According to Searle (1999, p. 13), directives are "attempts by the speaker to get the hearer do something. They may be very modest "attempts" as when I invite you to do it or suggest that you do it, or they may be very fierce attempts as when I insist that you do it." The syntactical unit 'Let's collectively denounce' (line 3) presents Lucy's modest attempt of suggesting a collective denouncement of cancerous modesty culture, and suggestion falls in the category of *directive* speech acts in Searle's taxonomy. Line 4 contains a *micro-speech act* asserting that Islamic laws are harming and hold women back all over the world which presents her psychological state of belief about what is reality of Islamic laws and she makes the words fit the world or situation as she sees it. In order to draw appropriate responses to the request in this discourse, Lucy's aim and intention is to request the addressees to help get detained women released. In this way, *request* is considered as the *macro-speech act* from van Dijk's (1992) perspective.

The analysis illustrates how former Muslims use the affordances of social media to fully participate in the broader discourse on religions, humanity and atheism. They contribute to such topics by voicing out their viewpoint through constructing online discourses. Their discourse on

social media exemplifies the various speech acts that they use to convey their aims and argument. The performative aspects of their discourse are fully dependent on the affordances of social media through which they mask their identities, feel safer, express overtly and perform the speech acts in their anti-religious discourse. Regarding their anti-religious discourse, their performed speech acts can be fully vulnerable to negative consequences if performed on platforms other than social media.

CONCLUSION

The former Muslims make full use of performatives in their social media postings to construct anti-religious discourse. Their social media discourses attempt to justify their rejection of the religion and acceptance of atheism. They perform assertives, declaratives, commissives, expressives and directives in their social media discourse where assertives emerge as the most utilised speech act category. They perform speech acts mostly to construct a discourse criticising the Muslim faith. On the first place, leaving Islam and overtly declaring it while living in the Islamic countries is unimaginable; second, constructing derogatory discourse by denying, insulting, warning, or disagreeing with the Quranic verses or the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad is a fully sensitive matter that can ignite dangerous consequences in Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran and Saudi Arabia. But social media affordances of many to many communications, masking identity, editing content, setting visibility, and customised deactivation of account have helped many individuals and groups that cannot overtly express their derogatory views of Islam offline or online, to make full use of language and speech acts in their postings to construct anti-Islam discourses. This study showed how combining Searle's (1999) speech act taxonomy and van Dijk's (1992) perspective of micro and macro speech acts provided insights into actual performances through speech and the broader categories of speech acts. The analysis revealed that all five types of speech act: *representatives*, *expressives*, *directives*, *commissives* and *declaratives* were used but such categorisation becomes superficial without exploring the speech acts at micro level of sentence and the macro level of discourse. The deeper speech act analysis showed that at the utterance level, 13 *micro-speech acts* were identified. Nine *macro-speech acts* were found at discourse level, all of which demonstrate the challenges to religions and authoritarian discourse through the *micro and macro-speech acts* of *assertion*, *suggestion*, *argument*, *promise*, *warning*, *information*, *denial* and *persuasion*. The analysis revealed that at utterance level, *argument* was the most used micro-speech act (24.4%), followed by *denial* (19.7%), *persuasion* (9.4%), *suggestion* (8.8%), *rejection* (8.2%), and *warning* (6.9%). At discourse level, *argument* is the most common *macro-speech act* (24.1%) followed by *reject* (21.9%); *denial* (12.2%); *warning* (9.8%); *assertion* (8.8%); *persuasion* (7.9%) and *information* (7.6%). Towards the implications of this study, it provides deep analysis of the speech acts in line with the felicity conditions and constitutive rules that has been rarely devised to conduct speech act analysis in the recent literature, and is considered a valuable contribution. Secondly, new researchers and students of this field can benefit from the practical utility of this study about how to conduct speech act analysis. Finally, it can help Muslims and especially the authorities in the Muslim majority countries to identify such discourses related to the religion to get further insights into the former Muslims' concerns, and to extend dialogue with them. Based on the insights in this study, policies can be made to create cultural and religious harmony in the multi-ethnic societies such as in Malaysia Iran and Pakistan.

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