

Conference paper

Reflection of Hierarchical Culture through the Directive Speech Acts in “The Social Dilemma” Documentary

Yusrita Yanti*, Elsa Ariska

English Department of Universitas Bung Hatta, Indonesia

Abstract.

This paper examines the hierarchical cultural values reflected through the directive speech acts contained in “The Social Dilemma,” an American documentary discussing the negative sides of social media that affect its users unwittingly. The data of the research are gotten from the utterances of the casts including fictional and interview sessions presenting researchers, technologists, and activists with concern for humanity. Based on a descriptive qualitative method, it is found that the cultural values of the hierarchy are presented through the directive speech acts as in types of orders, forbidding, suggesting, and requesting. Based on the findings, it is indicated that all data delivered by its speakers in direct strategy utilizing two main values known as authority and wealth. Eventually, these two values lead to two circumstances related to the role and position in the community and also the strong goal of gaining profit from the tech industry, which encompasses the advertising goal (to make money on social media through advertisements), the growth goal (to get users as many as possible), and the engagement goal (to keep people scrolling and staying). As a consequence, based on the reflection of these hierarchical values, reform in social media is highly demanded to be in line with humanism.

Keywords: Hierarchical Cultural Value, Directive Speech Acts, The Social Dilemma Documentary

Corresponding Author: Yusrita Yanti; email: yusrita.yanti@bunghatta.ac.id

Published 24 July 2023

Publishing services provided by Knowledge E

© Yanti, Ariska. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ELEHIC Conference Committee.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological development in this modern era is considered tremendously advanced. It covers all sides of human life, including the field of communication as realized through social media. Unfortunately, public awareness of using social media is relatively low. Therefore, nurturing the public regarding this issue is deemed necessary. The media used may be varied, but the most effective ones are those that are easily absorbed by people. One of them is by injecting it through popular entertainment such as documentaries. It is way fun yet informative.

An American documentary entitled *The Social Dilemma* is presented as a form of concern over this issue. As a non-fiction film that aimed to capture reality based on

 OPEN ACCESS

the purpose of instruction, education, and preservation of a historical record [1], this documentary presents how the dark sides of social media affect society. The screening features tech professionals from the biggest start-up companies and technology corporations such as Facebook and Google discussing the dark consequences of using social media [2]. In fact, not only for social networking, certain groups of people use it as a tool for manipulating and influencing people in a bad way to gain profit.

Based on the show, the writer realizes the thing that makes this documentary alluring is the discovery of the speaker's directive utterances in guiding people to the right way of social media utilization, especially related to hierarchical values. It is found in types of order, prohibition, suggestion, and requests in its delivery manner. This is in line with the thought of Gass and Neu (2006) who stated that speech acts of one culture are different from other ones [3]. It could be the strategy used or the choice of words.

The speakers utilize the directive speech acts to compel listeners to take a particular action, such as to place an order, which is based on Searle (1976) via Cutting (2002) [4]. In a different instance, it can be clarified with the phrase "Could you open the door, Please?" which can be read as both a query and a request. The listener's simple response could be direct "yes" or "no," but indirectly it might be more than that, such as doing an act of opening the door.

Under the study of Pragmatics, in conducting this study we should always go deeper into the deep sense of the speaker's utterances. According to Griffiths (2006), pragmatics refers to the context-based communication between speakers and listeners [5]. This is in correlation with Yule's (1969) theory that occasionally a speaker's meaning is greater than their actual words [6]. As a result, they depend on context to reveal the true meaning.

Related to the theory of context, Crabtree *et al.* (1991) distinguished four categories of circumstances that affect the meaning of words including the social, linguistic, epistemic, and physical context [7], as summarized in Figure 1.

The conversation's physical context describes the setting, the participants, the acts, and the event, whereas the epistemic context emphasizes the shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener. Contrarily, the linguistic context refers to the relationship between preceding and present sentences, which establishes a topic. A social context is unique from the others since it pertains to the interaction between the speaker and the listener.

Looking back to the theory of speech acts, according to Austin (1962), it can be classified as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary [8]. When people use specific language to express what they meant, they are doing elocutionary behaviors. Instead,

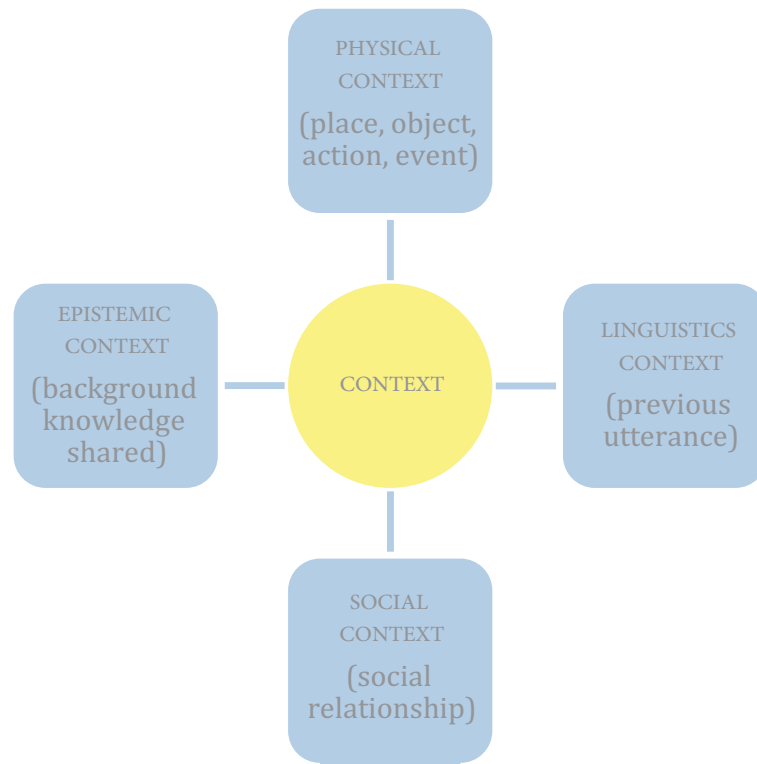


Figure 1: Contexts that Affect How Words are Interpreted (Crabtree *et al.* 1991).

they utilize illocutionary to express what they intended obliquely, while perlocutionary is used to achieve certain goals, like persuasion and dissuasion.

Specifically, Searle (1976) categorized the illocutionary acts into representatives, directives, expressive, commissives, and declarations [9]. In terms of the directive, it is commonly used by a speaker to gain action from their listener as feedback. It includes ordering, commanding, requesting, advising, inviting, suggesting, and forbidding.

Due to the analysis of hierarchical cultural values in speakers' directive speech acts, a cultural values, the main attitudes people display based on a particular social system theory in society are included. Based on the mapping of eight transnational cultural zones of the world, such as Muslim Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, South and South East Asia, Confucian-influenced countries, East Europe, East-Central and Baltic Europe, Latin America, West Europe, as well as English Speaking Country, Schwartz (2013) classified cultural values orientations into seven types, including mastery, embeddedness, hierarchy, egalitarianism, and harmony [10], as can be seen in Table 1.

However, the different levels of power emphasize the value of a hierarchical culture. Its major values are humility, power, wealth, and social influence.

One of the previous studies that inspires the writers to do this research is done by Ariska&Yanti (2022). It also talks about speech acts and cultural values, particularly the

TABLE 1: Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Value Attitudes (Schwartz, 2013).

Cultural Orientations	Main Values					
Harmony	Protect environment with nature	Unity	World of Beauty	World at peace	Accept my portion in life	
Mastery	Capable Ambitious	Daring	Successful	Influential Social	Independent Recognition	Choosing own goals
Hierarchy	Humble	Authority		Wealth Social Power		
Embeddedness	Respect tradition	Forgiving	Social order	Security	Self-discipline	Protect my public image
	Obedient	Moderate	Politeness	Reciprocations of favor	Honor elders	Clean
Egalitarianism	Helpful Justice	Honest	Social	Responsible Loyal	Equality	
Intellectual Autonomy	Broadmindedness Freedom			Creativity Curious		
Affective Autonomy	Exciting Pleasure	life	Varied life	Enjoying life	Indulgent	Self

expressive speech acts displayed in Kamala Harris’ victory speech [11]. But, there are amount of studies have been carried out by researchers related to speech acts (Utami, 2021; Yanti, 2020) [12, 13]. So, as an affirmation of the novelty of the research, this study is focused on the analysis of the directive speech acts and the values in American culture which reflect the culture of hierarchy on speakers’ utterances in a documentary titled *The Social Dilemma*, produced by Netflix in early 2020.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study is a qualitative descriptive one. A qualitative approach, according to Cresswell (1994), is an investigation process for understanding a social problem that focuses on creating a thorough image through words and comprehensive opinions of informants’ representation and conducting it in a natural setting [14]. Furthermore, Maxwell in Seixas, et al. (2017) characterized the descriptive approach as an accurate, correct, and real application of data’s actual properties [15].

To conduct this study, the writer used a Netflix documentary titled *The Social Dilemma* as a data source. Additionally, the cast’s directive speech acts from the documentary as the primary source of the data. It is listed from both fictional and interview scenes.

The method of gathering the data involves several procedures. They involve attentively and repeatedly watching the documentary, evaluating, the suitability of the script and the documentary as a whole, noting every line spoken by the cast, underlining the directive speech acts used under Searle’s theory and compiling them into a data sheet.

In addition, the data were analyzed by repeatedly watching and observing the documentary, noticing all directive utterances found, listing the data by noting all directive utterances, doing classification based on Searle's theory, analyzing the classified data based on context-influence, identifying the strategy of delivering the directive speech acts, figuring out the hierarchical cultural values reflected based on Schwartz's theory, and finally interpreting the results of the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the analysis of the data, it is found that the documentary *The Social Dilemma* has thirteen directive utterances that reflect the cultural value of hierarchy. They are in the form of ten orders, one prohibition, one suggestion, and one request are mentioned in detail. The speakers indicated involving both direct and indirect strategies, even if they are dominated by the direct one.

The result shows that two main values reflect the hierarchical culture in the directive speech acts utilized by the speakers in the documentary. The two values are authority and wealth. The value of authority is related to the role and position in the interview process (between interviewer and interviewee), company (between employer and employee), and also how artificial intelligence runs the system in social media (superior artificial intelligence and inferior intelligence). Meanwhile, the value of wealth can be seen from the strong goal of gaining profit from social media. The three main goals are the advertising goal that drives to make money on social media through advertisements, the growth goal that encourages to get users as many as possible, and also the engagement goal which pushes them to make users keep people staying and scrolling.

Based on data acquisition, the authority value is conveyed through the directive speech acts of ordering, suggesting, and requesting. Meanwhile, the wealth value can be found in the directive speech acts of ordering and forbidding. These two values are a reflection of the hierarchical culture in *The Social Dilemma* documentary. To make it more understandable, the reflection of these values will be depicted in Figure 2, as follows:

Based on the values reflected in Figure 2, it can be explained that these values are intended to fix the people behind the technology industry, especially in social media. Researchers and technologists recognize the advantages and conveniences of using social media. However, on the other hand, they also realize that these people should

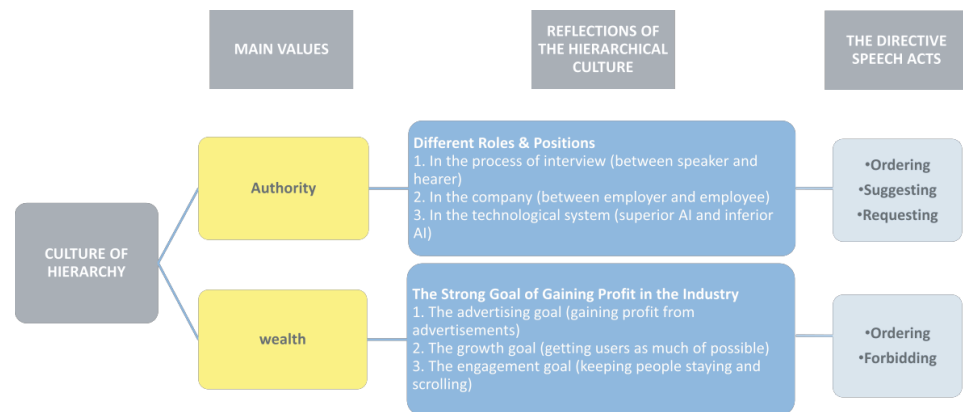


Figure 2: The Hierarchical Values Reflected Through the Directive Speech Acts in *The Social Dilemma* Documentary.

have a high concern for humanity so that this industry can minimize its negative impacts on civilization.

Specifically, the reflection of hierarchical culture will be explained based on the findings of values in each type of directive speech acts, as below.

3.1. The Value of Authority

The existence of a hierarchical system is one of the key traits of hierarchy culture. The goal is to produce responsible, effective people through this system. As in authority, people in society are expected to uphold the task and duties that are assigned to them over their superiors. This value is reflected in the speech acts of ordering, suggesting, and requesting in the documentary, as in the following data.

- (1) **Sit down** and see if you can get comfy.
- (2) ...**Give me 1,000 users** who look like that.
- (3) **Turn the dial.**

The first three data, (1), (2), and (3) came from the directive speech acts of ordering. All of them are delivered in a direct strategy by the speakers. The context-influence explains that datum (1) is presented when the interview is about to begin, so the interviewer asks the interviewee, in this case, Tristan Harris, a former design ethicist of Google and now the President of The Center for Humane Technology, to take a seat, so the show can get started. In giving order to “sit” to the interviewee, an authority value is reflected, because hierarchically the interviewer is authorized to regulate the interview process.

Move to the next datum, “..Give me 1,000 users who look like that.” At this point, Tristan previously explains how a conspiracy theory is propagated on Facebook, and this utterance illustrates how the algorithm leads users to certain features that they are looking for. That it works based on their digital track. It works the same as he ordered the worker to set it as he wanted them to do the most effective way to get the number of users with certain criteria given. Simply, it can be an explanation of how artificial intelligence is authorized to work with the algorithm in manipulating social media users.

The third datum is delivered by Tim Kendall, a former director of monetization at Facebook. He gave the example of Mark Zuckerberg’s authority as the chief executive officer at Facebook. It portrays that he has the right to order his employees to do the dial he needed. Based on this order, as Mark said “*turn the dial*,” intentionally he wants to show us how this smart technology works powered by artificial intelligence.

From the explanation above, it can be recapped that the value of authority is the power possessed by superiors over inferiors in a certain situation, such as how the interviewer order the interviewee to gain action or how a chief executive officer from a great company such as Facebook orders its workers. In this case, neither party is offended or offended because each of them works according to their role.

3.2. The Value of Wealth

Wealth is one of the main values of a hierarchical culture. Because wealth can determine which party has power over the other. This means that wealth also is a determinant of social status in society. No wonder everyone is trying to accumulate as much wealth as possible. This phenomenon is illustrated in the following data.

- (4) *Beautiful. **Let's squeeze in a sneaker ad** before it starts.*
- (5) **Another ad** teed up.
- (6) **Don't show him sports updates.** *He doesn't engage.*

Based on the context-influence, datum 4 explains how the artificial intelligence starts to play with the algorithm to get the user’s attention through his social media since the user put some likes on the previous sneakers posts. The artificial intelligence tried to keep his attention by showing the next sneaker advertisement. Related to the advertising goal, this scene explains that the purpose of advertisements on social media is to make a profit and that when you are watching the ads, you are automatically giving a contribution to the provider. That is how it works in making money.

In line with the previous datum, “another ad teed up” means that the speaker, in this case, artificial intelligence is ordering his fellow worker to show a new advertisement on the user’s page. It indicates that the act of advertising on social media is one way to reap maximum profit.

Other than the two previous data, the last data belongs to the directive speech acts of forbidding. The direct prohibition is confirmed by the words *don’t show*. Based on physical context, knowing that the user is not interested in sports, the artificial intelligence prohibits his fellow to stop showing sports updates on the user’s page, because it is considered useless or not profitable. These two matters are related to engagement and the advertising goal.

The data above shows how ambitious the people behind the industry are to get the maximum profit most effectively. Based on these cases, the experts emphasize to users to be careful in choosing content on social media, so that they do not get caught up in social media addiction. On the other hand, it is not only for users, the warning is also for those who run the industry as well. They are required to create user-friendly products. These products must be in line with humanity, so it is not only beneficial for them, but also for their users, and convenient for human life.

4. CONCLUSION

After visualizing the outcomes of this study, it is possible to depict how the directive speech acts of ordering, forbidding, suggesting, and requesting reflect the value of hierarchy in the documentary. The strategy used by the speaker in delivering them is dominated by a direct strategy.

Based on the discovery, the hierarchical culture in *The Social Dilemma* is revealed through the value of authority and wealth. Through the lens of hierarchy, it is obvious that there are different levels of roles and positions in society in living life. this role forces them to work based on their respective functions. In this case, the value of authority can be seen from the course of work, such as an interviewer instructs the interviewee in managing the interview process, a chief executive officer asks his employees for certain details of the job as a part of running the company so that the company can develop visually, or even how an artificial running the systems in technology. On the other hand, the reflection of wealth value is reflected in the great intention behind the establishment of a technology company, to obtain as much profit as possible.

After all, it can be concluded that based on the hierarchical values reflected through the directive speech acts in *The Social Dilemma*, the reformation of the tech industry,

especially social media is highly demanded in every aspect of the industry. It includes the strong goal of gaining profit from the tech industry through the *advertising goal*, the purpose of making money on social media through advertisements; the *growth goal* the purpose of getting users as many as possible; and the *engagement goal* the purpose of keeping people staying and scrolling. The people who initiate this industry are expected to create products which in line with humanity considering the magnitude influence of social media on society.

References

- [1] Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary. Oxford University Press; 2008.
- [2] The Social Dilemma A Netflix Original Documentary [Internet]. The Social Dilemma. 2022 [cited 2022March14]. Available from <https://www.thesocialdilemma.com/>
- [3] Gass SM, Neu J. Speech Acts Across Cultures: Challenges to Communication in a Second Language. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter; 2006.
- [4] Cutting JL. Pragmatics and Discourse. London and New York: Routledge; 2002.
- [5] Griffiths P. An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Express Ltd; 2006.
- [6] Yule G. Pragmatics. New York: Oxford University Press; 1996.
- [7] Crabtree M, Powers J.. Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics (5th ed.). Columbus: The Ohio State University Press; 1991.
- [8] Austin JL. How to Do Things with World. London: Oxford University Press; 1962.
- [9] Searle JR. A Classifications of Illocutionary Acts. Language in Society. 1976;5(1):1-23.
- [10] Schwartz SH. National Culture as Value Orientations: Consequences of Value Differences and Cultural Distance. Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture. 2014;;547-86.
- [11] Ariska E, Yanti Y. The Expressive Speech Acts In Kamala Harris' Victory Speech: A Study of Multicultural Values. Journal of Cultura and Culingua. 2022;3(1):31-8.
- [12] Utami S, Yanti Y. Speech Act of Protest Expressed by Followers of the World Health Organization Instagram Account. KNE Social Sciences; 2022.
- [13] Yanti Y. Fungsi Bahasa dalam Tindak Tutar Ekspresif. Iktiar falam Bahasa Festschrift untuk Prof. Dr. Mukhaiyar, M. Pd. Padang: UNP Press; 2020.
- [14] Creswell JW. Research Design: A Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches. California: Sage Publications; 1994.

- [15] Seixas BV, Smith N, Mitton C. The Qualitative Descriptive Approach in International Comparative Studies: Using Online Qualitative Surveys. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management*. 2017;7(9):778-81.