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Royal Words in Transition: A Pragmatic Analysis of Pakubuwono XIV's Javanese Speech Acts

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Abstract
This study examines the pragmatic construction of authority, commitment, and cultural legitimacy in the coronation address of Pakubuwono XIV delivered during the Jumenengan ceremony at the Surakarta Palace. While speech act studies have widely explored political speeches, institutional communication, and public rhetoric, contemporary royal discourse in Indonesia remains underexplored, particularly within Javanese sociocultural settings. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this study analyzes the official speech text as a form of ceremonial-institutional discourse. Data were examined through Speech Act Theory, supported by politeness theory and cultural pragmatics frameworks. The findings reveal that declarative, commissive, and directive acts dominate the address. Declarative acts function to formally enact kingship and legitimize institutional authority. Commissive acts articulate commitments to religion, palace governance, public welfare, and national loyalty. Directive acts guide palace members and the wider public through culturally mitigated forms consistent with Javanese norms of harmony and respect. Expressive acts occur less frequently and primarily communicate ethical stance rather than personal emotion. The study demonstrates that royal discourse continues to operate as a strategic communicative resource for negotiating continuity between traditional kingship and modern statehood. Theoretically, this article extends speech act scholarship into a non-Western ceremonial context. Practically, it contributes to understanding leadership communication in culturally rooted institutions undergoing sociopolitical transition.

Keywords: Coronation Speech, Javanese Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Royal Discourse, Traditional Leadership

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INTRODUCTION

Royal inauguration speeches are not merely ceremonial utterances but strategic linguistic performances through which authority, legitimacy, and leadership are publicly enacted. Recent discourse scholarship increasingly recognizes ceremonial and institutional speeches as communicative events where language performs governance functions, shapes public memory,

and constructs collective identity (Wodak, 2023; Chilton, 2022; Fairclough, 2021; van Dijk, 2022). In such contexts, speech does not simply represent power; it actively produces and stabilizes it.

Within the Javanese monarchical tradition, royal discourse is deeply embedded in sociocultural norms of hierarchy, respect, refinement, and moral obligation. These norms influence lexical choice, indirectness, honorific usage, and the pragmatic organization of authority (Pranowo, 2020; Dwiraharjo, 2022; Saddhono et al., 2021; Wijana, 2022). Javanese court language historically functions not only as communication but also as symbolic capital reflecting cosmology, etiquette, and institutional continuity.

The coronation address of Pakubuwono XIV, delivered during the *Jumenengan* ceremony at the Surakarta Palace in 2025, represents a significant case of contemporary royal discourse in Indonesia. Although the monarchy no longer governs politically in a formal constitutional sense, symbolic authority remains socially meaningful through heritage leadership, cultural stewardship, and moral representation (Heryanto, 2021; Woodward, 2022; Mulyana, 2023). Consequently, coronation discourse becomes an important site where traditional legitimacy is rearticulated within modern national frameworks. Contemporary media coverage also highlights the continuing public significance of the event (Merdeka.com, 2025; TribunSolo.com, 2025).

Speech Act Theory proposed by Austin (1962) and refined by Searle (1979) remains highly relevant for examining how institutional utterances perform social action. Recent studies have applied speech act frameworks to political communication, crisis statements, educational leadership, and religious discourse (Capone & Mey, 2021; Ilie, 2022; Nurhayati et al., 2023; Kecskes, 2024; Arifin, 2025). However, contemporary royal speech in Southeast Asia—especially Javanese coronation discourse—has received limited systematic attention.

Existing Indonesian studies have mainly focused on politeness, code choice, classroom discourse, and everyday pragmatics rather than ceremonial kingship communication (Pranowo, 2020; Sukarno, 2021; Setiawan & Saddhono, 2022; Rahardi, 2022). Meanwhile, studies of political ritual discourse tend to prioritize elections, presidential speeches, or media rhetoric (Hart, 2021; Charteris-Black, 2023; Santosa, 2024). As a result, a clear research gap remains concerning how traditional authority is linguistically constructed in present-day ceremonial institutions.

Pakubuwono XIV's coronation address is especially significant because it foregrounds commitments to Islamic values, palace customs, social responsibility, and loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia. This indicates that contemporary monarchy does not stand outside the nation-state but symbolically negotiates coexistence with it. The speech therefore offers a valuable example of how ritual discourse mediates continuity and change.

This study aims to analyze the types and pragmatic functions of speech acts in Pakubuwono XIV's coronation address. Specifically, it identifies dominant speech act categories and explains how they function to legitimize authority, project moral leadership, and bridge tradition with contemporary governance. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on modern Javanese royal discourse as political-ritual communication and in its integration of speech act analysis with culturally grounded Javanese pragmatics. The study contributes to current discussions on intercultural pragmatics, discourse and power, and leadership communication in heritage institutions (Kecskes, 2024; Wodak, 2023; Tagg, 2022; Kusumo, 2024).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative discourse approaches are appropriate for examining meaning, intention, symbolic authority, and context-sensitive language use in naturally occurring texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Tracy, 2020). The study specifically treats the coronation address as ceremonial-institutional discourse.

The primary data consisted of the official written transcript of the coronation address of Pakubuwono XIV delivered during the *Jumenengan* ceremony at Siti Hinggil, Surakarta Palace, in November 2025. The speech serves as the primary data source and represents an instance of institutional and political-ritual discourse. The transcript was cross-checked with publicly available media reports to ensure textual consistency (Merdeka.com, 2025; TribunSolo.com, 2025). The unit of analysis was the individual utterance or clause functioning pragmatically as a realizable speech act. Utterances were segmented according to semantic completeness, syntactic boundaries, and illocutionary force indicators. The speech was publicly directed to royal family members, *abdi dalem* (palace attendants), invited dignitaries, and the broader public.

The primary research instrument is the researcher, supported by an analytical framework based on Speech Act Theory as proposed byAustin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1979) A coding scheme was developed to classify utterances into four categories of speech acts: declaratives, commissives, directives, and expressives. To deepen interpretation, the analysis also drew on politeness theory and intercultural pragmatics, especially concerning indirectness, hierarchy, and face management (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kecskes, 2024; Pranowo, 2020; Levinson, 2021).

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic steps. First, the speech text was transcribed and carefully read multiple times to ensure familiarity with its content and context. Second, the text was segmented into individual utterances based on pragmatic and syntactic boundaries. Third, each utterance was coded according to its illocutionary force using the predefined speech act categories. Fourth, the identified speech acts were analysed in terms of their communicative functions within the coronation context, including their roles in constructing authority, expressing commitment, and guiding collective responsibility. Finally, the findings were interpreted by considering culturally grounded norms of Javanese politeness and hierarchical communication (Yule, 2021).

To strengthen analytical reliability, repeated coding and peer debriefing procedures were conducted. Ambiguous utterances were re-evaluated using established criteria in pragmatics research. Interpretive validity was enhanced through theoretical triangulation by combining speech act, politeness, and discourse approaches (Nowell et al., 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis reveals that Pakubuwono XIV's coronation address employs various types of speech acts that function strategically within the ritual context of royal inauguration. Among the four major categories identified, declarative, commissive, and directive speech acts emerge as the most prominent, while expressive acts appear less frequently. This distribution reflects the institutional and ceremonial nature of the address, which prioritizes authority legitimation, commitment declaration, and moral instruction over personal emotional expression (Ilie, 2022;

Kecskes, 2024; Kouti, 2025).

To strengthen the empirical basis of the findings, Table 1 presents the distribution of speech acts identified in the text.

Table 1. Distribution of Speech Acts in the Coronation Address

Speech Act Type	Frequency	Main Function
Declarative	2	Legitimizing kingship
Commissive	3	Declaring commitments
Directive	2	Guiding responsibilities
Expressive	1	Signaling ethical stance

The dominance of commissive and declarative forms indicates that the speech primarily functions to establish legitimacy while announcing future obligations.

Declarative Speech Acts

Declarative speech acts are used to formally establish royal authority. This is evident in the following excerpt:

"Ing Watu Gilang iki, Ingsun hanetepake nggenteni kalenggahane Kanjeng Rama Sinuhun PB XII… minangka Sri Susuhunan…" ("At Watu Gilang, I hereby assume the throne… as Sri Susuhunan…")

This utterance performs kingship through language itself. In Austinian terms, the utterance is performative because saying it under legitimate ceremonial conditions enacts institutional reality (Austin, 1962). Such findings align with contemporary discourse studies showing that institutional authority is often realized through ritualized declarations (Fairclough, 2021; Chilton, 2022).

Commissive Speech Acts

Commissive acts are the most prominent and are realized through explicit royal vows:

"*Ingsun prasetya… bakal hanindakake kawicaksanan… adhedhasar Agama Islam lan paugeran Karaton…*" ("I pledge… that I will carry out wisdom/policies… based on Islamic teachings and the laws of the Palace…")

"*Ingsun tansah hanyengkuyung Nagara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia…*" ("I will always support the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia…")

These utterances commit the speaker to future actions involving religious values, palace governance, and national loyalty. Commissives are central to leadership discourse because they project accountability, continuity, and moral credibility (Ilie, 2022; Charteris-Black, 2023). The repeated future marker *bakal* ("will") strengthens commitment force. Unlike campaign promises in democratic politics, these commitments are framed less as persuasion and more as ethical obligation rooted in symbolic office.

Directive Speech Acts

Directive acts function to guide collective behaviour:

"Sabdaningsun iki dadiya sumurupe kabeh para Abdi Dalem… mrih tetep lestari…" ("Let this decree be known… so that the palace remains preserved…")

This utterance guides palace members toward preservation duties. However, the directive is

expressed indirectly rather than coercively. Such mitigation reflects Javanese preferences for refined authority, social harmony (*rukun*), and avoidance of overt confrontation (Pranowo, 2020; Sukarno, 2021; Dwiraharjo, 2022). This finding supports broader Asian pragmatics literature showing that power may be enacted through soft authority rather than explicit command (Kecskes, 2024; Tagg, 2022).

Expressive Speech Acts

Expressive acts appear minimally and are embedded within a formal tone rather than overt emotional expression. This aligns with the ritual nature of the discourse, where institutional function outweighs personal expression. This can be observed in the following excerpt:

"*...kanthi bener, becik, linambaran adil paramarta, sarta bakal ngayomi marang sapa waé kang setya bekti…*" ("…with righteousness, virtue, and justice, and I will protect all those who are loyal and devoted…")

Expressive force appears in the articulation of justice, virtue, and benevolence. Rather than foregrounding personal emotion, the speech expresses institutional ethics. This is consistent with ceremonial discourse, where emotional restraint often indexes dignity and role consciousness (Wodak, 2023). However, consistent with Javanese court discourse, such expressions are restrained and formalized, emphasizing ethical ideals over individual feelings.

The findings confirm that speech acts play a central role in constructing authority and leadership in institutional discourse. The dominance of declarative and commissive acts supports Austin (1962) and Searle's (1979) argument that language does not merely describe reality but actively constitutes social roles and obligations.

In comparison with previous studies, this finding aligns with Ilie and Kouti, who highlight the importance of commissive and directive acts in political discourse for expressing commitment and guiding public behaviour. However, unlike modern political speeches, which often emphasize persuasion and rhetorical strategies, the coronation address analysed in this study foregrounds ritual legitimacy and moral authority, reflecting its unique position as political-ritual discourse (Ilie, 2022; Kouti, 2025).

Furthermore, while studies in the Indonesian context (Pranowo, 2020; Sukarno, 2021) emphasize politeness strategies in everyday and institutional communication, the present study demonstrates that such strategies are also crucial in royal discourse. The use of indirect directives and refined linguistic forms reflects Javanese cultural values of harmony (*rukun*) and respect (*unggah-ungguh*), indicating that power is exercised through cultural legitimacy rather than coercion.

These findings differ from modern political speeches that often prioritize populist rhetoric, adversarial framing, and media soundbites (Hart, 2021; Charteris-Black, 2023). By contrast, the coronation address emphasizes continuity, stewardship, sacred legitimacy, and social harmony.

The study also extends Speech Act Theory into a culturally embedded non-Western setting. Illocutionary force here depends not only on formal authority but also on ritual symbolism, palace tradition, and local pragmatic norms. Thus, speech acts are socially licensed through culture as much as through institution.

Practically, the findings indicate that royal discourse remains communicatively relevant in contemporary Indonesia. Although monarchy has limited political power, it retains discursive power through heritage leadership, identity maintenance, and moral representation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that the coronation address of Pakubuwono XIV functions as a pragmatic instrument of leadership rather than merely a ceremonial speech. The dominance of declarative, commissive, and directive speech acts shows how royal authority is discursively legitimized, moral and religious commitments are articulated, and collective responsibilities are guided within a contemporary institutional framework. In line with Speech Act Theory, these findings confirm that language in ritualized political contexts not only represents but actively constructs social authority and leadership roles (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979; Ilie, 2022).

This study makes several contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence of how speech acts operate within contemporary Javanese royal discourse, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Second, it extends the application of Speech Act Theory to a non-Western, culturally embedded context by demonstrating how illocutionary force is shaped by Javanese norms of politeness, hierarchy, and cultural values. Third, it contributes to the study of institutional and political discourse by highlighting how traditional leadership is pragmatically constructed and maintained within modern governance frameworks.

However, this study has several limitations. The analysis is restricted to a single coronation address, which limits the generalizability of the findings across different royal contexts or historical periods. In addition, the study relies solely on textual data, without incorporating audience reception or ethnographic insights that could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the speech is interpreted and experienced by different social groups.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended. Further studies could conduct comparative analyses of royal speeches across different reigns, regions, or ceremonial contexts to identify patterns of continuity and change in Javanese royal discourse. Moreover, integrating qualitative approaches such as interviews, audience reception studies, or ethnographic observation would enrich the analysis by capturing how speech acts are socially interpreted and negotiated. Expanding the scope to include multimodal elements, such as gesture, tone, and performance, may also provide a more holistic understanding of royal communication in contemporary society.

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