



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Language and Linguistics*

## Minang oral discourse in minority ethnic communities in developing Lake Toba tourism area, Indonesia: A sociopragmatic perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the strategies of minority communities in the Lake Toba tourist area in maintaining harmony through a sociopragmatic study. It recommends developing tourism potential by strengthening local branding and effective communication patterns between minority and majority ethnic groups. This study uses sociopragmatic theory to analyze data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, literature, and field notes in 7 district locations around the Lake Toba area. This study explains the blending and politeness of speech acts in the Minang community in the Lake Toba area. The indigenous community and newcomers from different cultures agreed to merge through an indirect agreement. The Minangkabau community practices assertive communication behavior and follows certain sayings and proverbs. Various speech acts of the Minang community can be categorized as assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive. The study also noted that the most dominant speech act is the directive act.

**KEYWORDS:** communication patterns, discourse, sociopragmatics, social integration

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## I. Introduction

This research was conducted in an effort to contribute to the development of the Lake Toba tourism area as a leading destination. This research provides insights from the perspective of social humanities. From that aspect, more research still needs to be conducted, mainly regarding speech behavior reviews. So far, the government has implemented various stimuli in the form of facilities and infrastructure, yet Lake Toba has not maximally attracted tourists. Various problems then arose, including the rejection of halal tourism by residents, as well as the potential for cross-cultural conflicts that could emerge due to communication clashes between minority/immigrant business entities (in this case, referring to the Minang and Javanese ethnic groups) and local ethnic groups (Batak Toba/Karo/Dairi) in the seven districts (Samosir, Toba, Dairi, Karo, Simalungun, Humbang Hasundutan, and North Tapanuli) surrounding Lake Toba.

Various research results still indicate the presence of social conflicts driven by differences in culture, religion, and language in areas with high tourism potential, such as the Lake Toba region, which encompasses 7 districts/cities: Karo, Toba, Tobasa, North Tapanuli, Humbang Hasundutan, Simalungun, and Dairi. For instance, Sarmita (2014) researched the potential for conflict in areas with migrants caused by the lack of compatibility between migrant cultures and local cultures, regional fanaticism, jealousy over the success of migrant residents, and the behavior of migrants that disrespects the customs and traditions of the local community. In addition, Fajri & Nurdin (2015) also stated that the underlying factors causing interethnic conflict are largely hidden due to the dominance of a particular ethnic group in terms of economic resources, power, religion, and culture. Furthermore, Ritonga (2012) and Kasmanto Rinaldi (2022) found that ethnic dominance impacts conflicts in various ways: psychological impact, economic impact, social impact, and cultural impact.

One of the reasons behind this research is the ethnic conflict that occurred, particularly between Christians and Muslims, which once took place in North Tapanuli and nearly destroyed the harmony that had been established in the Batak land. The conflict occurred in 2013. The incident news was published in the national newspaper *Republika* on March 5, 2013, and in the local newspaper *Sinar Baru Indonesia of North Sumatra* on March 6, 2013. Through his research on the incident, the cause of the conflict in North Tapanuli is the lack of preparation to coexist with the development of Islam and the Muslim community in the region (Yusuf et al., 2014). It is known that the largest Christian community in North Sumatra inhabits the Tapanuli Utara region. Data from the Central Statistics Agency of North Tapanuli Regency shows that in 2022, the Christian population was 305,856, while the Muslim population was 15,464 (source: [BPS Tapanuli Utara](#)). This number is also not much different from that in the other six districts (Samosir, Toba, Humbang Hasundutan, Simalungun, Dairi, and Karo) surrounding Lake Toba's tourist area. Since that conflict, there have been no further reports of interethnic or interreligious conflicts in North Tapanuli Regency or the other six regencies. However, the potential for conflict is always present in the process of societal interaction, as seen in Sarmita's research (2014). The various phenomena described show how diversity if not well cared for, can create opportunities for conflict. We refer to empirical experiences related to conflicts that have occurred in several regions of Indonesia, such as Aceh and Jayapura. This study then focuses on uncovering the strategies of migrant communities, which are essentially a minority in the Lake Toba tourist area, in maintaining harmony through a sociopragmatic analysis.

Regarding the development of the Lake Toba tourist destination, Tarigan et al. (2021) revealed that one of the issues in developing the flagship tourist destination of Lake Toba is the development of the surrounding community as business actors to implement the Indonesian Tourism Pentahelix. In addition, Simatupang et al. (2022) explain that the failure to enforce "zero cages" as a measure for the environmental preservation of Lake Toba is also due to the communication and perceptions of the local community towards incoming developers. Therefore, Marizki et al. (2022) recommend strengthening local branding that prioritizes local-based tourism by all layers of society, especially the Batak Toba community. In addition, Dung (2020) also identified the importance of communication factors among minority ethnic groups that influence the success of tourism. Furthermore, Maruyama et al. (2023) also mentioned that the attitudes of minority residents and their emotional solidarity significantly influence tourism development. The spatial changes of the Mirotas ethnic

group also influence tourism development (Su & Sun, 2020). In addition, Lonardi (2022) in his research provides a systematic, transparent, and replicable review of previous contributions regarding tourism and minority languages. Another finding, Levy et al. (2021) also stated that the involvement of minority ethnic groups with electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) promotions on social media can enhance the productivity of the number of tourists visiting a place. Another case in China shows that preserving minority ethnic cultures amidst the social life of the local majority can enhance the local economy and tourism (Liu et al., 2023).

To develop the tourism potential of Lake Toba to be more complex, in addition to road and building infrastructure, it is also necessary to enhance the capacity of human resources in the community, both for newcomers and locals. Therefore, the results of this research in the following section elaborate in depth on the intensity of the communication patterns between migrant micro-entrepreneurs (minority ethnic group) and the local community (majority ethnic group). Specifically, this article discusses 1) the forms of communication behavior patterns of the minority ethnic group micro-entrepreneurs when interacting with the Batak Toba ethnic community in the Lake Toba tourist area, 2) the application of local wisdom by the minority ethnic group micro-entrepreneurs in the Lake Toba tourist area, and 3) the forms of speech acts in trading accompanied by verbal and nonverbal contexts of the minority ethnic group micro-entrepreneurs in the Lake Toba tourist area.

## **II. Method**

This study utilizes sociopragmatic theory in the analysis of data. Data collection techniques were done through observation, in-depth interviews with informants, documentation, literature, and field notes (field notes). The research was conducted in 7 Lake Toba districts, including Tobasa, Toba, North Tapanuli, Humbang Hasundutan, Karo, Dairi, and Simalungun. The informants for this study are business actors in the Lake Toba area who come from regions outside Lake Toba and belong to ethnic groups other than the local community. The steps taken are (1) Bracketing, which is the process of identifying and suspending every belief and opinion that has previously been formed; (2) Intuiting, the process that occurs when the researcher remains open to the meanings associated with the phenomenon; (3) Analyzing; (4) Describing, which aims to communicate and offer differences, or a critical description in written or verbal form.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

### *A. Communication Strategies of Ethnic Minorities When Interacting with Local Communities*

#### *1. The Process of the Entry of Minang and Javanese Ethnic Minority Communities into Batak Land*

The entry of the Minangkabau ethnic group into several areas predominantly inhabited by the Batak Toba ethnic group was marked by new developments that occurred in the 19th century. The arrival of the Minang community (for example, in North Tapanuli) resulted from the Paderi expansion into Batak land between 1818 and 1820. At that time, the Paderi soldiers who entered the Silindung area established a building as a gathering place for the Paderi troops to take shelter (Rozi, 2017). Next, in the 1960s, there was a significant wave of migration of the Minangkabau ethnic group to Tarutung. In strengthening the existence of the Minangkabau community in the diaspora, the Minang people generally establish associations in their places of settlement. Along with the development of the Minangkabau community in Tarutung, in 1962, a Minangkabau association was established in Tarutung, namely the Minangkabau Migrant Brotherhood (PPM), which was formed to gather the Minangkabau ethnic group present in Tarutung. Until now, the Minangkabau Migrant Brotherhood (PPM) has continued to grow, attracting more and more members of the Minangkabau ethnic community to migrate to the Batak land.

#### *2. The Communication Patterns of the Minang Community in Social Harmonization*

The beginning of change in the integration process is communication. Inter-marriage can occur because the indigenous people and the immigrant community, who have different cultures, agree to merge through an indirect agreement. Baser (2014) states that to sustain and maintain different groups, two forces continuously influence the integrity of two ethnicities in a migrant area. First, the host community expects newcomers to

continue their cultural mission and maintain their ethnic identity; secondly, newcomers must adapt to the cultural background of the indigenous people.

Based on the results of the observation, the Minang community, in their strategy to build social harmony in the Lake Toba region, is applying assertive communication behavior patterns. According to Wardany et al. (2022), assertiveness is behavior that aims to achieve a win-win outcome that satisfies both parties during communication. When interacting with the Batak community, the assertive communication behavior of the Minang community can be observed through the nonverbal communication used when facing difficulties in understanding the Batak language. In that situation, the Minang people would smile or gently pat the speaker's shoulder while expressing that they are having difficulty understanding the speaker's words in a polite tone, yet still maintaining their confidence. Thus, the pattern of assertive communication behavior can be defined as a form of communication in which both the communicator and the communicant can express their feelings openly with clear language without harming either party while maintaining self-confidence.

According to Alberti & Emmons in Postolati (2017), assertive behavior is more adaptive than passive or aggressive. Assertiveness fosters high self-esteem and satisfying interpersonal relationships because it allows individuals to express what they want directly and clearly, leading to a sense of happiness for both themselves and others. Communicating with assertive communication patterns can reduce stress and conflicts experienced, preventing oneself from falling into negative situations.

Based on the observation results, the Minang community, which has settled for more than ten years and consists of 14 respondents, exhibits a primary communication pattern in their daily speech. Meanwhile, the Minang community, which has settled for less than ten years and consists of 11 respondents, tends to have a circular communication pattern in everyday discourse. In a circular communication pattern, feedback occurs, and the flow from the communicator to the communicator is the primary determinant of successful communication. In addition, based on social perception indicators, the daily communication between the Batak ethnic group and the Minang ethnic group reflects Schramm's communication model.

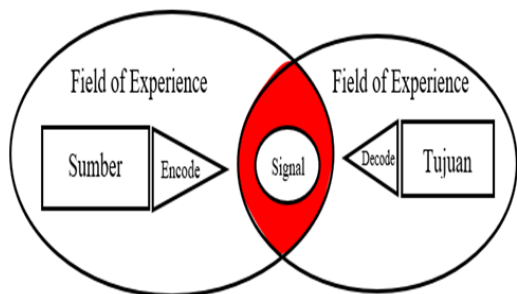


Figure 1 Schramm's Communication Model

This model describes communication as a dynamic process in which messages are transmitted through encoding and decoding. Encoding is the translation carried out by the message source, while decoding is the translation performed by the message recipient from the source. The relationship between *coding and decoding* is a connection between the source and the recipient, influencing each other simultaneously.

### B. Implications of the Local Wisdom of the Minangkabau Community during Migration

According to Istiawati (2016), local wisdom is how people behave and act in response to changes in the physical and cultural environment. A conceptual idea that lives within society, continuously growing and developing in the collective consciousness, ranging from matters related to the sacred to the profane. *Local wisdom* can be understood as local ideas that are wise in nature, full of insight, and hold good value, which are ingrained and followed by their community members.

Based on the interview results, during their migration in the Lake Toba area, the Minangkabau people apply several proverbs or pieces of advice, including (1) "Avoid seeking conflict, avoid confrontation." (2) "If there's no rattan, roots will do; if there's no wood, use bamboo." (3) "Be careful in your endeavors, so

*that you don't end up with broken dreams; be cautious in foreign lands so that you don't make mistakes.” (4) “If you become a stone, don't be a burden; if you become a flower, don't wilt.” (5) “When the waves are high, look at their strength; when the wood is large, look at its durability.” (6) When the data is opened, it will be compared with the existing information. If the food is not thrown away, nature is wise. (7) The clock is ticking, and Jan is walking down the road.*

Proverbs or sayings in Minangkabau culture are an essential part of the daily life of the Minangkabau people. Proverbs contain values, wisdom, and advice passed down from generation to generation. They express the thoughts and worldview of the Minangkabau people through concise yet meaningful expressions. However, among the several pieces of advice mentioned above, three proverbs have become deeply ingrained in the Minang community living abroad.

*1. Jika Buyung pergi merantau, ibu cari dunsanak cari, induk semang cari dahulu*

When leaving the Minangkabau land, the Minang people prioritize finding relatives and their employers first. The Minang have a principle of seeking out family members first to have companions when living abroad. Meanwhile, the landlord mentioned in this proverb refers to the indigenous Minang people who have migrated to that area.

*2. Bajalan Usah Malendo, Bakato Usah Manggadang*

This proverb means that when embarking on a journey, one should conduct themselves well and avoid encountering anything unfamiliar. When you say something, don't brag or exaggerate. The word “malendo” in this sentence means to walk. This proverb teaches that when someone migrates to a new place, they should not just talk or walk aimlessly but occasionally make an effort to observe their surroundings politely and speak with courtesy. Don't say things that hurt others, especially boasting about something.

*3. Dima Bumi Dipijak, Disinan Langik Dijunjuang*

This proverb teaches newcomers to learn to adapt to local conditions, not to lose their identity, and always to be honest so that others will respect them. This philosophy emphasizes that individuals must always respect and honor their cultural roots, ancestral heritage, and place of origin. Remembering and honoring the homeland is considered a solid foundation for success and glory in the future. This philosophy also reflects an attitude of humility, valuing others, and an awareness of the importance of identity and cultural roots in life.

Table 1  
Speech Acts of the Minangkabau Community in the Lake Toba Area Accompanied by Verbal and Nonverbal Contexts

No	Speaker	Utterance	Type of Utterance	Situation of Utterance			
				+P+S	+P-S	-P-S	Nonverbal
1.	Sir Arman Tanjung	“Please come in, Ma’am.	The speech act of directive.		✓		Pak Arman slightly bent his body and smiled at his conversation partner.
		“Have breakfast first, Ma’am.”	Illocutionary act Directive		✓		Mr. Arman’s right-hand gestures for a woman to enter his stall. He slightly bent his body and smiled at his conversation partner.

		“Excuse me, sir, you were the one who had the omelet, right?”	Expressive illocutionary acts		✓		Mr. Arman slightly bent his body and smiled at his conversation partner.
2.	Mr. Ilham	“Ask your mother.”	Illocutionary acts of directive speech			✓	He was pointing at his wife without averting his gaze. His face did not show any signs of anger or happiness.
		“Make the tea first, Boru Regar.”	Illocutionary acts of directives			✓	It was told with a loud enough voice without diverting its gaze.
		“What is that for?”	Expressive Illusion Acts			✓	Her facial expression showed discontent; she wasn’t smiling, and one eyebrow was raised.
		“Which cake do you want?”	Illocutionary act of commissive		✓		Smiling at the conversational partner and the tone of speech is very gentle.
3.	Mrs. Feni Chaniago	“Just the same data, Mr. Secretary.”	Assertive speech acts		✓		It was told with a flat expression and a tone as if emphasizing something.
		“Eni will come later.”	Illocutionary acts of directives	✓			Patting a colleague on the shoulder while smiling.
4.	Mr. Izam Koto	“Excuse me, Pung.”	Expressive illocutionary acts			✓	Bending the body and smiling slightly.
		“May you be with Mr. Angel.”	Illocutionary acts of directives		✓		Pointing towards Mr. Angel with a flat expression.
		“First, ask for your change.”	Illocutionary acts of directives		✓		Gently nudging her partner’s shoulder to move towards the cashier.
5.	Mrs. Dewi	“Yes, sis. The fabric material is different, too.”	Assertive illocutionary acts		✓		His face showed disappointment, and his tone of voice slightly rose as he refuted the claims made by his partner.
		“I’ll find it for you tomorrow if you want it at that price.”	Locutionary act		✓		While folding the uniforms that didn’t sell, her face was disappointed, and she didn’t smile.
		“Share your number, sis.”	Illocutionary acts of directive speech.	✓			At the same time, smiling and stroking her partner’s arm.

The situation of the speaker and their conversation partner in this study is divided into three categories: +P+S, which means the speaker respects and is close to the conversation partner; +P-S, which means the speaker respects but is not close to the conversation partner; -P+S, which means the speaker does not respect but

is close to the conversation partner. After the data has been grouped and analyzed, conclusions are drawn regarding the forms of verbal and non-verbal communication used by the immigrant community, specifically the Minang ethnic group in the Lake Toba area, as a means of politeness to minimize potential ethnic conflicts in a multicultural community. After analysis, 53% of the speech act data collected consists of directive acts. Directive speech acts are speech acts that function to encourage their conversational partners to do something. Directive acts are intended to create an effect from the actions of the conversational partner. In addition to directive acts, the collected data found assertive acts at 13% and expressive acts at 20%.

The data is consistent with the nonverbal speech act data that follows almost all the data collected in this study. This proves that a person will psychologically create nonverbal actions during interactions to convey something. Locutionary acts are also found in data collection—as much as 7% of the utterances that serve as research data are locutionary acts. The same percentage was obtained for commissive acts, which is 7%. The politeness of speech acts in interactions is represented in various ways through different speech acts. In general, speech politeness is classified into four categories: assertive acts, directive acts, commissive acts, and expressive acts. (Saleh & Baharman, 2017).

#### *a. Direct and Indirect Speech Acts*

There are two types of speech acts according to Nadar in (Astuti, 2019), namely direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech acts occur when the mode and utterance used are appropriate. In other words, the form of speech used by the speaker aligns with the function of that speech form. Conversely, indirect speech acts occur when there is a mismatch between the mode and the speech used, where the form of speech and its function are not related.

This research focuses on the speech acts expressed by Minangkabau ethnic migrants living in Tarutung. The most commonly used direct speech by the Minang community in Tarutung is directive speech in the form of requests, utilizing words like “want,” “ask,” “share,” and others. The non-verbal forms of the utterance also differ according to the relationship between the speaker (P) and the interlocutor (S). When the dialogue takes place with someone who is respected and familiar, the visible non-verbal form is a touch on the shoulder or arm of the interlocutor to persuade them to carry out the speaker’s words. However, if the conditions of P and S during the utterance are either disrespectful and familiar or respectful and unfamiliar, the non-verbal forms are more often reflected in the speaker’s facial expressions and tone of voice.

According to the analysis results, 40% of the utterances between the Minang community and the Batak ethnic group contain elements of direct speech acts. In contrast, 6% consist of indirect speech acts, reflecting the harmonious coexistence of the Minang and Batak ethnic groups in Tarutung. The limited use of indirect speech acts suggests that the Minangkabau community is still in the process of adaptation, as they are not yet fully comfortable using indirect speech with their conversational partners. However, in the theory of linguistic politeness (Johnson et al., 1988), the use of indirect speech (offer cord) is considered a high form of politeness. The indirectness of the speech used can help the speaker avoid potential ethnic conflicts that may arise, highlighting the cultural sensitivity and respect in the Minangkabau community’s communication.

#### *b. Honorifics*

According to Yule in Alfi & Rosita (2019), politeness is a tool to demonstrate awareness of another person’s face in an interaction. The concept of face, which refers to a person’s self-image, becomes central in politeness. One strategy for maintaining someone’s negative face is showing respect, one form of which is using honorifics. Honorifics are terms for aspects of language structure that encode the social identity of participants, or the social relationships among them, or between one of them and the person or entity mentioned in the communication event (Brown, 2010; Johnson et al., 1988).

Of the recorded and analyzed utterances, 33% are honorific speeches. The use of honorifics is one of the markers of politeness in the speech of the Minang migrants in Tarutung. In situations with respected individuals or with close acquaintances, the Minangkabau people almost always use honorifics. Titles such as Pak, Bu,

Opung, and Boru signify that politeness and social harmony in Tarutung have been well established. According to the research, 60% of the recorded utterances use honorifics at the end of their sentences. Adding honorifics is one of the efforts to minimize potential ethnic conflicts that may arise in Tarutung.

### *c. Hedging*

Hedging is also often used to indicate politeness, as expressed by Johnson et al. (1988). The limiting devices serve as markers of politeness based on the assumption that the longer the utterance is used in interaction, the more polite the perception of the conversational partner. The boundaries used by the migrant community, the Minangkabau people in Tarutung, are permission, apologies, and others.

Based on the analysis results, 13% of the recorded utterances are those that use hedging. This significant percentage underscores the prevalence and importance of hedging in the communication of the Minangkabau community. Barriers can also be one of the efforts to minimize the occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Tarutung. In various situations that serve as criteria, when someone uses a barrier, the nonverbal form they will display is a slight bow and a polite smile. This boundary is mostly used by newcomers or when speakers meet new conversation partners. (tidak akrab).

### *d. Types of Speech Based on Speech Functions*

After analysis, 53% of the speech act data collected consists of directive acts. Directive speech acts are speech acts that function to encourage the interlocutor, the person being spoken to, to do something. Directive acts are intended to create an effect from the actions of the interlocutor. In addition to directive acts, the collected data also found assertive acts at 13% and expressive acts at 20%. This data is consistent with the nonverbal speech acts that accompany almost all the data gathered in this study. This proves that in order to convey something, a person will psychologically create nonverbal actions during interactions.

Locutionary acts are also found in data collection—as much as 7% of the utterances that serve as research data are locutionary acts. The same percentage was obtained for commissive acts, which is 7%. The politeness of speech acts in interaction is represented in various ways through different speech acts. In general, speech politeness is classified into four categories: assertive acts, directive acts, commissive acts, and expressive acts (Saleh & Baharman, 2017).

Assertive speech acts, also known as representative acts, are speech acts that explain what something is and how it is in reality or as it truly is. Assertive actions usually involve the speaker's commitment to the truth of the expressed proposition. Based on the collected data, the most commonly used form of assertive action is informing. This study's most frequently occurring forms of directive speech acts are commanding, requesting, and advising. Directive speech acts are speech acts that function to encourage the interlocutor to do something intended to produce specific effects on the interlocutor.

Furthermore, expressive acts are speech acts that convey feelings and attitudes. This action serves to express, convey, or communicate the speaker's psychological attitude towards a statement of a situation anticipated by the illocution, the intended effect of the speech act. In this study, the forms of expressive acts that emerged are apologizing, asking for permission, and suspecting the conversational partner. Meanwhile, commissive acts were the least found speech acts in this study. A commissive act is a speech act that functions to encourage the interlocutor to do something. This commissive act involves the interlocutor in several future actions. The form of commissive speech acts gathered in this study is an act of offering.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The beginning of change in the integration process is communication. Merging can occur because the indigenous community and the immigrant community, which have different cultures, agree to blend through an indirect agreement. Baser (2014) stated that to maintain and preserve different groups, two forces continuously influence the integrity of two ethnicities in a particular area of migrants. First, the originating community hopes that newcomers will continue to carry out cultural missions and maintain their ethnic identity; secondly, newcomers



must adapt to the cultural background of the indigenous people.

In the Lake Toba area, the Minang community, as newcomers, adopts an assertive communication behavior to maintain social harmony. This proactive approach fosters high self-esteem and satisfying interpersonal relationships, as it allows individuals to express their needs and wants directly and clearly. This not only leads to personal and collective happiness but also helps in reducing stress and conflicts, thereby preventing negative situations. The Minang community's communication patterns are further characterized by two types of communication used during interactions, namely primary communication patterns and circular communication patterns, which are in accordance with the psychopragmatic condition of the communicator.

Furthermore, while living away from home, the Minangkabau community residing in the Lake Toba area applies several sayings or proverbs. The most frequently mentioned and ingrained proverb is (1) "When Buyung goes to seek his fortune, the mother looks for him, the relatives look for him, and the landlord looks for him first." (2) Do not let the past weigh you down, strive to move forward. (3) The sky is upheld wherever the earth is stepped on. After analysis, 53% of the collected speech acts were directive, encouraging the interlocutor to do something. Additionally, 13% were assertive acts, which state or explain something as it is. Furthermore, 20% were expressive acts related to feelings and attitudes, 7% were illocutionary acts, and 7% were commissive acts focused on making offers.

The politeness of speech acts in interaction is represented in various ways through different speech acts. In general, speech politeness is classified into four categories: assertive acts, directive acts, commissive acts, and expressive acts (Saleh & Baharman, 2017). Assertive actions are manifested in the form of informing, while expressive actions are seen in the form of apologizing, seeking permission, and suspecting the conversational partner. The form of commissive actions observed in this study is offering. Furthermore, the most dominant act is the directive act, which is evident in commanding, requesting, and advising.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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