

POWER PLAY VIA SPEECH ACTS IN WORKPLACE MEETING NEGOTIATIONS: AUTHORITY, INFLUENCE AND RESISTANCE

AZU FARHANA, A.

*Fakulti Sains Sosial dan Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.
e-mail: azufarhana[at]ukm.edu.my*

(Received 19th June 2026; revised 31st August 2026; accepted 13th September 2026)

Abstract. Workplace meeting negotiations are crucial communicative spaces where organizational actors exchange information, negotiate solutions, and make decisions. Drawing on Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this qualitative study investigates how speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance. Data comprise five transcribed, naturally occurring meeting negotiations between representatives from a Malaysian Company (MC) and an Iranian Company (IC) addressing operational issues. Utterances were analyzed across four stage (speech act coding, functional interpretation, CDA, and cross-case comparison) using Searle taxonomy and Fairclough framework. Findings reveal that authority was enacted through directives and declaratives (commands, warnings, decisions), while influence relied on assertives and commissives (explanations, commitments). Resistance emerged through assertives and expressives, utilizing hedging, humor, and indirect disagreement to challenge authority without disrupting harmony. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that power in negotiations is not fixed but continuously constructed, negotiated, and contested. By integrating Speech Act Theory and CDA, this research contributes to workplace discourse literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of how linguistic actions shape authority, influence, and resistance during organizational decision-making.

Keywords: *Speech Act Theory (SAT), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), workplace negotiations, authority, influence, resistance*

Introduction

Communication plays a pivotal role in workplace negotiations, where organisational actors use language not only to exchange information but also to exercise power, influence decisions, and manage interpersonal relationships. Meeting negotiations are particularly significant because they serve as institutional spaces where participants discuss problems, propose solutions, allocate responsibilities, and make decisions that affect organisational outcomes. Within these interactions, language functions as a strategic resource through which speakers negotiate authority, persuade others, and resist proposals. Speech Act Theory, introduced by Searle (1969), provides a useful framework for understanding how language performs actions. Through speech acts such as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, speakers accomplish various communicative purposes that extend beyond the literal meanings of their utterances. In workplace settings, these speech acts often reflect organisational hierarchies and power relations. For example, directives may be used to issue commands or demands, while assertives may be employed to justify decisions or present evidence. Similarly, expressives and commissives can facilitate relationship management and organisational cooperation. Recent studies in workplace discourse have increasingly recognised that power is not merely a structural phenomenon but is continuously negotiated through interaction (Ekström and Stevanovic, 2023; Stevanovic, 2021). From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, language serves as a site where authority is enacted, influence is exercised, and resistance is expressed (Fairclough, 1995). Despite growing scholarly interest in workplace

communication, limited research has specifically examined how different speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance during meeting negotiations. This study addresses this gap by analysing five workplace meeting negotiations involving representatives from a Malaysian Company (MC) and an Iranian Company (IC). By integrating Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, the study investigates how speech acts are strategically employed to construct, maintain, negotiate, and challenge power relations during organisational decision-making processes.

Background of the study

Workplace meetings are among the most important communicative events within organisations because they facilitate information sharing, problem-solving, decision-making, and coordination of tasks. In contemporary organisations, meetings often involve participants from diverse professional, cultural, and hierarchical backgrounds, making communication a crucial factor in achieving organisational objectives. During negotiations, participants do not simply exchange information; they also engage in complex processes of persuasion, influence, compliance, and resistance. Speech Act Theory has been widely used to investigate communicative behaviour in institutional settings. According to Searle (1969), speech acts can be categorised into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, each performing specific social actions. Previous studies have shown that speech acts play important roles in leadership communication, workplace interactions, and meeting negotiations. Directives, for instance, are frequently associated with authority and organisational control, whereas assertives often function as tools for persuasion and justification. In parallel, Critical Discourse Analysis emphasises the relationship between language and power. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse both reflects and reproduces social structures, including organisational hierarchies and institutional authority. Language and linguistics play a central role in professional interactions and workplace negotiations. Through linguistic choices such as repetition, questioning, hedging, humour, and pronoun use, speakers negotiate power relations and professional identities within workplace interactions and negotiations. Although previous studies have examined speech acts in professional communication, many have focused primarily on linguistic categorisation without exploring how speech acts contribute to broader power dynamics. Furthermore, relatively few studies have investigated the interrelationship between authority, influence, and resistance within naturally occurring workplace negotiations. This study therefore combines Speech Act Theory and CDA to provide a comprehensive analysis of how power is discursively enacted during meeting negotiations.

Problem statement

Power relations are a fundamental aspect of workplace communication, particularly during meeting negotiations where organisational decisions are discussed and implemented. Although formal authority is often defined by organisational hierarchies, power is frequently exercised through language. Participants use linguistic strategies to direct actions, justify positions, persuade others, negotiate solutions, and challenge proposals. Speech acts therefore function not only as communicative tools but also as mechanisms through which authority, influence, and resistance are enacted. Understanding how speech acts contribute to power relations is essential for explaining

interactional and negotiational dynamics in workplace settings, specifically in meetings. Previous studies on Speech Act Theory have primarily focused on identifying and classifying speech acts across educational, political, and professional contexts. While these studies provide valuable insights into communicative intentions, they often pay limited attention to the role of speech acts in the enactment of power. Similarly, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research has demonstrated how language constructs authority, ideology, and social relationships within institutional contexts. However, the integration of speech act analysis with investigations of workplace power relations remains relatively underexplored. Recent workplace discourse studies highlight the importance of communication in shaping organisational processes, leadership practices, and decision-making activities. Nevertheless, fewer studies have examined naturally occurring workplace meeting negotiations where power is continuously negotiated among participants with different organisational roles, expertise, and interests. Furthermore, research on business negotiations has largely focused on negotiation strategies (Anuar et al., 2025) rather than on how speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance. To address this gap, the present study investigates speech acts in negotiations between representatives of a Malaysian company and an Iranian company, integrating Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how power relations are discursively constructed during workplace negotiations. Thus, this study aims to: (1) identify and analyse the speech acts (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives) employed during workplace meeting negotiations and (2) to examine how speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance in workplace meeting negotiations.

Literature review

Speech Act Theory and workplace communication

Speech Act Theory, initially proposed by Austin (1962) and later refined by Searle (1969), posits that language is not merely a vehicle for conveying information but a form of social action. Through speech acts, speakers perform communicative functions that influence social relationships and institutional practices. Searle (1969) categorised speech acts into five major types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Assertives commit speakers to the truth of propositions, directives attempt to get hearers to perform actions, commissives commit speakers to future actions, expressives convey psychological states, and declaratives alter institutional realities through language. In workplace settings, speech acts play crucial roles in coordinating tasks, managing relationships, and facilitating decision-making. Research has demonstrated that organisational communication frequently relies on directives to allocate responsibilities, assertives to provide information and justification, commissives to establish commitments, and expressives to maintain rapport among colleagues (Cheung et al., 2025; Anuar et al., 2025). Consequently, speech acts provide an effective analytical lens for examining how organisational actors negotiate meaning and accomplish workplace objectives. Recent workplace discourse studies have further suggested that speech acts are closely linked to power dynamics because they regulate negotiations and shape organisational outcomes (Anuar et al., 2025; Alsamhori et al., 2025; Ekström and Stevanovic, 2023; Stevanovic, 2021). Thus, analysing speech acts in meeting negotiations enables researchers to understand not only what participants say

but also how they use language strategically to exercise power and achieve communicative goals.

Operational definitions

These definitions provide a clear analytical foundation for the themes of authority, influence, and resistance in the study (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Operational definitions of concepts on this study.

Concept	Definition in this study
Authority	The discursive exercise of organisational power used to direct actions, enforce accountability, and make decisions during negotiations.
Influence	The ability to persuade others and shape decision-making through explanations, expertise, and commitments.
Resistance	The discursive challenge to proposals, decisions, or authority through indirect and face-saving communicative strategies.

Authority in workplace (Meeting) negotiations

Authority refers to the legitimate power possessed by individuals to direct actions, allocate responsibilities, and make decisions within institutional contexts. In workplace negotiations, authority is frequently enacted through language, particularly through directive and declarative speech acts. Directives such as commands, requests, warnings, and demands enable speakers to regulate the behaviour of others, while declaratives establish institutional decisions and realities (Searle, 1969). Studies on workplace discourse have shown that authority is often conceptualized through imperatives, interrogatives, repetition, and topic control (Anuar et al., 2025; Ekström and Stevanovic, 2023; Stevanovic, 2021). Managers and supervisors frequently exercise questioning strategies not only to obtain information but also to evaluate performance and reinforce accountability. Similarly, declarative statements allow leaders to announce decisions and terminate discussions. From a CDA perspective, authority is not merely possessed by organisational participants but continuously reproduced through discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Linguistic choices such as pronoun selection, repetition, and agenda management contribute to the construction of hierarchical relationships. Consequently, authority in workplace or meeting negotiations should be viewed as an interactional accomplishment achieved through speech acts rather than solely a consequence of formal hierarchical structures.

Influence as discursive persuasion

Unlike authority, which is often associated with institutional power, influence refers to the ability to shape attitudes, decisions, and actions through persuasion. Organisational participants may exert influence regardless of their formal hierarchical positions by presenting evidence, demonstrating expertise, and negotiating alternatives. Research suggests that assertive and commissive speech acts play significant roles in influencing workplace decisions (Anuar et al., 2025; Ekström and Stevanovic, 2023). Assertives such as explanations, justifications, and factual reports enable speakers to construct credibility and persuade others through evidence-based reasoning. Commissives, including promises and assurances, facilitate trust-building and encourage cooperation among participants. Influence is particularly important in

negotiation settings because participants often possess different forms of expertise and knowledge. Through carefully constructed arguments and commitments, speakers can shape decision-making processes even when they lack formal authority. Therefore, influence represents a discursive process through which speakers or participants negotiate acceptance for their viewpoints and recommendations.

Resistance in organisational (Meeting) interactions

Resistance refers to communicative practices through which individuals challenge, negotiate, or modify dominant positions and decisions. In workplace or meeting negotiations, resistance is rarely expressed through direct confrontation. Instead, employees often employ subtle and indirect linguistic strategies to protect professional relationships while defending their interests and expertise. Previous studies have identified hedging, humour, indirect disagreement, alternative suggestions, and mitigation as common resistance strategies in professional communication (Anuar et al., 2025; Cheung et al., 2025). Such strategies allow speakers to challenge authority without openly threatening harmony. For example, hedges such as “I think” and “maybe” reduce the force of disagreement, while humour enables participants to express criticism in socially acceptable ways. CDA views resistance as an integral component of power relations because power inevitably generates forms of negotiation and contestation (Fairclough, 1995). Resistance therefore does not necessarily seek to overturn authority but rather functions as a mechanism through which participants influence decisions, defend expertise, and negotiate alternative outcomes.

Speech acts, power and critical discourse analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a valuable framework for examining the relationship between language and power. Fairclough (1995) argues that discourse simultaneously reflects and shapes social structures, making it possible to investigate how power is enacted through daily interaction or negotiation. The integration of Speech Act Theory and CDA offers a comprehensive approach to workplace discourse analysis. Speech Act Theory identifies the communicative actions performed through language, whereas CDA explains how these actions contribute to broader power relations. Through this integration, speech acts can be examined not only as linguistic categories but also as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance. Although previous studies have explored workplace communication from either pragmatic or critical perspectives, relatively few studies have combined Speech Act Theory and CDA to investigate naturally occurring meeting negotiations. This study addresses this gap by examining how speech acts function as discursive resources through which speakers construct authority, exercise influence, and express resistance during workplace negotiations.

Conceptual framework

The present study proposes that speech acts function as the primary linguistic mechanisms through which conceptualizes power is enacted. Authority is expected to be mainly through directives and declaratives, influence through assertives and commissives, and resistance through assertives and expressives. These speech acts are further mediated by linguistic features such as repetition, pronoun selection, hedging, interrogative structures, humour, and topic control. Accordingly, the study power in

workplace negotiations as an interactional process whereby authority, influence, and resistance are continuously negotiated through speech acts. This study is situated within the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis because it examines how language functions as a mechanism of power in meeting interactions and negotiations. While Speech Act Theory was employed to identify the communicative actions performed by participants, Critical Discourse Analysis enabled the interpretation of how these speech acts contributed to the construction of authority, the exercise of influence, and the expression of resistance. Following Fairclough (1995), discourse is viewed not merely as communication but as a social practice through which institutional relationships are produced and negotiated. Consequently, the study investigates how speech acts operate as discursive resources that reproduce, maintain, and challenge organisational power relations during meeting negotiations (*Figure 1*).

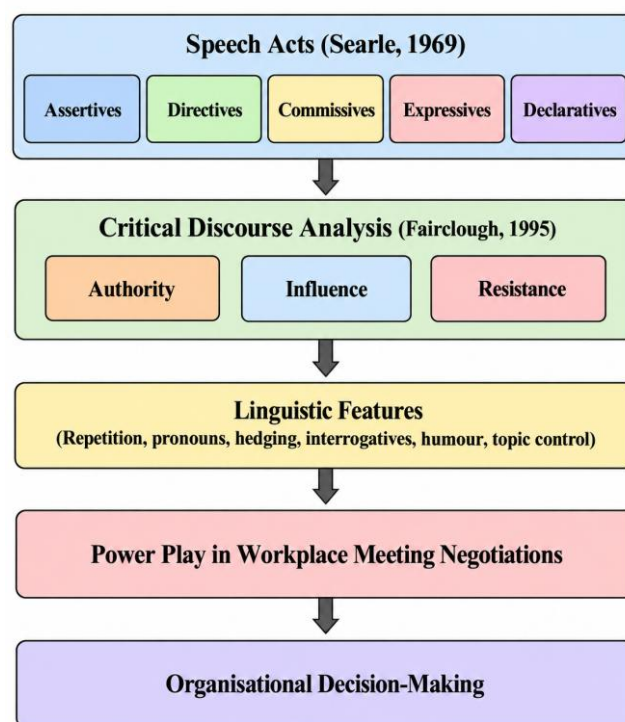


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study.

Materials and Methods

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytic approach to investigate how speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance in workplace meeting negotiations. The study is grounded in an interpretivist approach, which views language as a form of social action through which participants construct meanings, relationships, and power relations within negotiational and interactional contexts. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the objective is not to quantify linguistic occurrences but to examine how speech acts are strategically employed to negotiate decisions and manage power in naturally occurring workplace discourse. The study integrates Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and Critical Discourse Analysis

(CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) as complementary analytical frameworks. Speech Act Theory facilitates the identification of linguistic actions performed through utterances, while CDA provides insights into how these actions contribute to the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of power relations. The integration of these frameworks enables both micro-level analysis of speech acts and macro-level interpretation of authority, influence, and resistance within meeting negotiations in an organisation. A multiple-case interactional analysis was employed whereby each meeting negotiation episode was treated as a separate analytical case. This approach allows for both within-case and cross-case comparisons, providing a comprehensive understanding of speech-act deployment across different negotiation contexts.

Research context and participants and data collection

The data were collected from a series of workplace meetings involving representatives from two companies engaged in project-based collaboration (*Table 2*). The meetings were conducted in English as a lingua franca and centered on operational and managerial issues requiring collaborative decision-making. The interactions involved discussions concerning resource shortages, supplier management, budget allocation, equipment procurement, and project implementation. These contexts provided rich opportunities to examine how participants utilised language to negotiate solutions, exercise authority, influence decisions, and resist proposals. The dataset comprises five naturally occurring workplace meeting negotiations, each focusing on a specific project-related issue (*Table 3*). Data were collected through audio recordings of workplace meetings with participants' consent. To enhance contextual interpretation, field notes were also taken during data collection. These notes documented interactional features such as pauses, laughter, gestures, facial expressions, gaze direction, and changes in intonation that could contribute to the pragmatic interpretation of speech acts. All recordings were transcribed verbatim using Holmes' (2008) transcription conventions, preserving interactional details including: Hesitations (e.g., erm, uh-uh, mhm); Repetition (e.g., push=push=push); Pauses and overlaps; Laughter and other paralinguistic features; Emphatic stress (e.g., VERY, HIGH). These discourse features were retained because they contribute significantly to the interpretation of speaker intention, interpersonal positioning, and power negotiation.

Table 2. Participants of this study.

Company	Participants	Role
Malaysian Company (MC)	A, B, and Z	Project team members
Iranian Company (IC)	F	Project coordinator

Table 3. Interactions involved in the meeting negotiations.

Interaction	Issue discussed
Interaction 1	Insufficient Tubes
Interaction 2	Insufficient Allocation for Sulphites
Interaction 3	Solution on Changing Gel Dye
Interaction 4	Insufficient Tubes and Tube Supplier
Interaction 5	Proposal on Purchasing New Refrigerator

Analytical framework and data analysis procedures

The analysis was conducted in two interconnected stages: Speech Act Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. The first stage involved identifying and classifying speech acts according to Searle's (1969) taxonomy (*Table 4*). Each utterance was coded according to its dominant illocutionary force (Searle, 1969). Where an utterance served multiple communicative functions, the speech act was categorised according to its primary interactional purpose within the negotiation sequence. Following classification, speech acts were further analysed according to their functional contribution to the negotiation process, including: Exercising authority; Influencing decision-making; Building consensus; Managing interpersonal relationships; Demonstrating resistance; Maintaining organisational objectives. The second stage applied Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework to examine how speech acts functioned within broader power structures. The CDA analysis focused on: Authority construction; Influence strategies; Resistance practices. Particular attention was given to linguistic features associated with power enactment, including (Cheung et al., 2025; Anuar et al., 2025; Mammadova, 2025): Repetition; Pronoun selection (e.g., I, we, you); Hedging devices (e.g., maybe, I think); Interrogative structures; Direct and indirect speech acts; Humour and sarcasm; Topic control and agenda management. This stage enabled the researcher to move beyond speech-act categorisation and examine how linguistic choices reproduced or challenged organisational authority. The analysis followed four systematic stages (*Table 5*).

Table 4. Speech Act category.

Category	Description
Assertives	Statements that commit speakers to the truth of a proposition (e.g., reporting, claiming, explaining, justifying)
Directives	Attempts to get hearers to perform actions (e.g., requesting, ordering, warning, demanding)
Commissives	Commitments to future actions (e.g., promising, assuring, offering)
Expressives	Expressions of psychological states or attitudes (e.g., thanking, apologising, praising, humour)
Declaratives	Utterances that change institutional or social reality (e.g., announcing decisions, declaring authority)

Table 5. Data analysis stages.

Stage	Analytical Stage	Analytical Focus	Output
1	Transcription	Verbatim representation of meetings	Complete meeting transcripts
2	Speech Act Coding	Identification of speech act categories and sub-functions	Categorised speech-act dataset
3	Functional Interpretation	Examination of communicative purposes	Authority, influence, and resistance functions
4	Critical Discourse Analysis	Investigation of power relations and discourse practices	CDA themes and interpretations
5	Cross-Case Comparison	Comparison across five interactions	Recurring patterns of power negotiation

Results and Discussion

Overall distribution of Speech Acts and functions

Based on the analysis of the five meeting extracts between the Malaysian Company (MC) and the Iranian Company (IC), here is the consolidated distribution of their speech acts and corresponding negotiational and interactional functions. The analysis revealed that all five speech act categories proposed by Searle (1969) (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives) were employed throughout the negotiations. However, their frequency and functions differed substantially between the Malaysian Company (MC) and the Iranian Company (IC). *Table 6* presents the distribution of speech acts employed by the Malaysian Company (MC) and the Iranian

Company (IC) during the meeting negotiations. The findings reveal distinct communicative orientations and power positions reflected through the participants' speech act choices. Although both parties utilised all major speech act categories except declaratives for MC, the functions and frequencies of these speech acts differed considerably, indicating contrasting negotiation strategies. The findings are organised according to the three central dimensions of the study: Authority, Influence, and Resistance. Within each dimension, the analysis focuses on how specific speech acts functioned as strategic linguistic resources during the meeting negotiations. The framework summarizes that speech acts are the micro-level linguistic actions, while authority, influence, and resistance are the macro-level power outcomes revealed through Fairclough's CDA. Linguistic features such as repetition, pronoun choice, hedging, humour, and interrogatives serve as the mediating discourse mechanisms through which speech acts become instruments of power in meeting negotiations. This integration allows the study to connect individual utterances with broader organisational power relations (*Table 7*).

Table 6. Distribution of Speech Acts in meeting negotiations.

Speech Act Category	Malaysian Company (MC)	Dominant Functions (MC)	Iranian Company (IC)	Dominant Functions (IC)
Assertives	Reporting, explaining, claiming, supporting, clarifying, justifying, highlighting, excusing, adding information	Presenting information, providing evidence, defending decisions, persuading others, mitigating responsibility, maintaining credibility	Stressing, emphasizing, asserting, mentioning	Reinforcing authority, highlighting urgency, legitimising decisions, demonstrating expertise
Directives	Suggesting, requesting	Seeking solutions, proposing alternatives, reducing confrontation, collaborative problem-solving	Requesting, questioning, demanding, ordering, warning, threatening, advising, repeating demands	Exercising authority, obtaining information, enforcing compliance, accelerating task completion, controlling outcomes
Commissives	Assuring, guaranteeing, promising, offering, convincing	Building trust, maintaining rapport, demonstrating commitment, reducing uncertainty, preserving relationships	Assuring, guaranteeing (limited occurrence)	Securing cooperation, reinforcing commitment to decisions
Expressives	Agreeing, thanking, apologising, humour, disagreement, avoiding responsibility	Maintaining harmony, showing politeness, preserving face, managing conflict, strengthening interpersonal relationships	Praising, thanking, complaining, sarcasm, humour, agreement, objection	Expressing dissatisfaction, reinforcing authority, rewarding compliance, maintaining rapport
Declaratives	None identified	-	Announcing, declaring, dismissing, accepting decisions	Establishing authority, closing discussions, legitimising decisions, demonstrating institutional power

Table 7. Orientation of dimension of fairclough CDA to Speech Acts.

Dimension	Dominant Speech Acts	Main Participants	Primary Function	Linguistic Features
Authority (Exercising organisational power and control)	Directives, Declaratives	F (IC)	Control actions, decisions, and accountability	Commands, warnings, threats, repetition, first-person pronouns ("I"), topic control
Influence (Persuading others and shaping outcomes)	Assertives, Commissives	MC and IC	Persuade, justify, negotiate outcomes	Explanations, justifications, evidence, promises, collaborative pronouns ("we"), hedges
Resistance (Challenging proposals without direct confrontation)	Assertives, Expressives, Mitigated Directives	MC	Challenge proposals while maintaining rapport	Hedging, humour, apologies, disagreement, alternative suggestions, delayed responses

Authority through Speech Acts

Authority in the studied meetings was primarily constructed through directive and declarative speech acts (*Table 8*). These speech acts were predominantly used by participant F (Iranian Company), who occupied the role of project coordinator and principal decision-maker. The findings reveal that authority in the meeting negotiations was predominantly constructed through directive and declarative speech acts, particularly by participant F. Institutional authority is reproduced through recurring discursive practices that normalise hierarchical relationships. This can be observed via directives such as commands, demands, warnings, and repeated interrogatives enabled F to control the negotiation, assign responsibilities, and monitor performance. Examples such as “Go and recalculate everything” and “You have to be very well prepared” demonstrate how authority was enacted through linguistic forms that imposed obligations on other participants. These utterances positioned F as the legitimate evaluator of work performance and project progress. The CDA analysis further shows that authority was reinforced through linguistic features such as imperatives, repetition, and interrogative structures. The repeated questioning sequence, “Why next week? Why not next year? Why not next century?”, was not intended merely to seek information. Rather, it functioned as a discursive strategy to challenge explanations, emphasise urgency, and pressure subordinates into providing more acceptable responses. According to Fairclough (1995), control over questioning often reflects institutional power because it allows speakers to regulate both the content and direction of negotiation.

Table 8. Speech Acts category of analysis.

Speech Act	Example Utterance	Linguistic Feature	CDA Interpretation
Authority			
Directive (Order)	"Go and recalculate everything."	Imperative structure	Explicit exercise of authority through direct command.
Directive (Demand)	"What is the actual HIGH figure?"	Interrogative + emphatic stress (HIGH)	Demands accountability while asserting epistemic superiority.
Directive (Warning)	"You have to be very well prepared."	Modal obligation ("have to")	Establishes behavioural expectations and authority.
Directive (Threat)	"If you cannot handle the problem then you are the problem."	Conditional clause	Links performance failure to personal responsibility, reinforcing power asymmetry.
Declarative	"I'm in charge of making sure the project is completed on time."	First-person pronoun ("I") + declarative statement	Explicit claim of institutional authority and legitimacy.
Declarative	"Stick with J."	Short imperative/declarative closure	Terminates discussion and finalises decision.
Directive	"Why next week? Why not next year? Why not next century?"	Repetition + rhetorical questions	Challenges explanation and intensifies pressure.
Influence			
Assertive (Explanation)	"It takes a lot of time."	Factual statement	Provides justification to influence decision-making.
Assertive (Evidence)	"We need to purchase new machines."	Technical explanation	Uses expertise to persuade others.
Assertive (Justification)	"The cost is higher than the current one."	Comparative structure	Introduces economic considerations to shape outcomes.
Assertive (Reporting)	"The tubes are on the way."	Informative statement	Manages information flow and negotiation expectations.
Commissive (Promise)	"I will recheck with the store department ASAP."	Future commitment ("I will")	Builds credibility and trust.
Commissive (Assurance)	"I will contact J after our	Future-oriented	Demonstrates accountability

Commissive (Commitment)	meeting." "We can do this."	commitment Inclusive pronoun ("we")	and cooperation. Creates solidarity and collective responsibility.
Resistance			
Assertive (Mitigated Disagreement)	"I think I agree upon the purchase but..."	Hedge ("I think") + contrastive marker ("but")	Softens disagreement while resisting proposal.
Assertive (Alternative Proposal)	"I suggest we stick to the liquid."	Suggestive structure	Challenges preferred option indirectly.
Assertive (Justification)	"Maybe arrive around next week."	Hedging ("maybe", "around")	Reduces accountability and softens opposition.
Directive (Suggestion)	"Why not we check with the store department?"	Indirect directive in interrogative form	Redirects discussion without overt disagreement.
Expressive (Humour)	"Our add math is A plus plus."	Humorous expression	Relieves tension while indirectly questioning calculations.
Expressive (Humour)	"I will try to threaten—I mean speak to J."	Self-repair + humour	Critiques situation indirectly while maintaining rapport.
Expressive (Complaint)	"We need our sleep."	Humorous complaint	Expresses dissatisfaction without direct confrontation.
Expressive (Apology)	"Sorry F, but..."	Apology marker + contrastive marker	Mitigates disagreement and preserves face.

Authority was also realised through declarative speech acts. Statements such as “I’m in charge of making sure the project is completed on time” explicitly established F’s institutional role and legitimised his subsequent directives. Similarly, declaratives such as “Stick with J” and “So next project it is” transformed ongoing discussions into final decisions. These utterances illustrate Searle’s (1969) argument that declaratives possess the capacity to alter social reality through language. Once produced, they effectively closed negotiations and established organisational outcomes. From a CDA perspective, authority was therefore not merely a reflection of organisational hierarchy but was continuously reproduced through discourse specially language and linguistics. By controlling topics, asking evaluative questions, issuing commands, and declaring decisions, F maintained a dominant position throughout the meetings. This finding supports previous workplace discourse studies that identify directives and declaratives as central linguistic resources for the enactment of managerial authority (Alsamhori et al., 2025; Ekström and Stevanovic, 2023; Stevanovic, 2021).

Influence through Speech Acts

This study reveals that while authority was concentrated in F’s discourse, influence was distributed among all participants. The findings demonstrate that influence was primarily achieved through assertive and commissive speech acts. MC participants frequently employed assertives to shape decision-making indirectly. Rather than openly rejecting proposals, they presented evidence, technical explanations, and operational constraints (*Table 8*). Assertive speech acts enabled MC participants to shape decisions indirectly by presenting technical information, operational constraints, and factual explanations. Workplace negotiations involve continuous processes of persuasion in which participants mobilise professional knowledge to gain support for their proposals. This can be demonstrated through the utterances such as “It takes a lot of time”, “We need to purchase new machines”, and “The cost is higher than the current one”. These utterances provided evidence-based arguments that challenged the practicality of proposed solutions. Although these utterances appeared informational, they functioned strategically to influence decision-making. Through repeated explanations and technical justifications, MC participants successfully persuaded F to reconsider certain proposals, particularly in the discussion concerning the gel dye conversion. The effectiveness of

assertives was strengthened by linguistic features associated with expertise and rationality. Technical terminology, detailed explanations, and logical reasoning allowed MC participants to position themselves as knowledgeable professionals whose opinions deserved consideration. This finding aligns with Latif et al. (2026) stated that workplace influence is often achieved through epistemic authority rather than formal authority.

Commissive speech acts further contributed to influence by fostering trust and accountability. Promises such as “I will recheck with the store department ASAP” and “I will contact J after our meeting” demonstrated commitment to future actions. These utterances reassured F that concerns would be addressed and helped maintain cooperative relationships despite disagreements. The frequent use of the inclusive pronoun “we” in statements such as “We can do this” also created a sense of collective responsibility and shared goals. From a CDA perspective, such discourse reflects what Fairclough (1995) describes as the relationship between knowledge and power. Participants who lacked formal authority were still able to shape outcomes by providing credible information, demonstrating expertise, and expressing commitment. Similarly, workplace influence frequently emerges through collaborative communication practices that enable speakers to establish expertise and credibility. Thus, influence emerged as a discursive process through which speakers negotiated acceptance and support for their positions.

Resistance through Speech Acts

One of the most significant findings of the study is that resistance was rarely expressed through direct confrontation. Instead, participants employed indirect and subtle speech acts to challenge authority while preserving professional relationships. Resistance was realised mainly through assertive and expressive speech acts, supported by linguistic features such as hedging, humour, indirect suggestions, and mitigated disagreement (*Table 8*). MC participants rarely rejected F’s proposals directly. Instead, they employed hedging devices such as “I think”, “maybe”, and “around” to soften disagreement and reduce the risk of confrontation. For example, the utterance “I think I agree upon the purchase but...” initially signals agreement before introducing an opposing position. The contrastive marker “but” enables the speaker to challenge the proposal while maintaining politeness and respect. Such linguistic strategies reflect what Cheung et al. (2025) describe as face-saving resistance in professional settings. Alternative suggestions also functioned as forms of resistance. Utterances such as “I suggest we stick to the liquid” and “Why not we check with the store department?” redirected discussions away from F’s preferred solutions without openly challenging his authority. These indirect directives allowed participants to negotiate alternative outcomes while preserving workplace harmony.

Resistance in institutional discourse frequently occurs through subtle linguistic strategies rather than explicit opposition. This can be seen through expressive speech acts, particularly humour, which played a crucial role in resistance. Such strategies allow speakers to maintain organisational norms while simultaneously expressing alternative viewpoints. Remarks such as “Our add math is A plus plus” and “I will try to threaten...I mean speak to J” allowed participants to express dissatisfaction and critique situations indirectly. Humour reduced interpersonal tension and created a safe space for expressing disagreement. Rather than undermining authority, it functioned as a socially acceptable means of contesting assumptions and highlighting practical concerns. The use of resistance strategies demonstrates that power was not exercised unilaterally.

Although F possessed institutional authority, other participants actively negotiated and occasionally modified decisions through subtle discursive practices. This finding supports Fairclough's (1995) argument that resistance often emerges through everyday linguistic choices rather than overt opposition. Furthermore, workplace negotiations often require participants to balance organisational expectations with professional expertise. Resistance in the present study therefore functioned as a mechanism for protecting professional expertise, defending organisational interests, and influencing outcomes while maintaining collaborative relationships.

Comparative summary of Speech Acts

The findings demonstrate that power in workplace negotiations is not static but interactionally produced through speech acts. Authority was most visible in F's directives and declaratives, which established control and institutional legitimacy. Influence emerged through factual persuasion and commitment-building, allowing less powerful participants to shape decisions indirectly. Resistance, meanwhile, was predominantly subtle and relational, relying on hedging, humour, justification, and alternative proposals rather than overt confrontation (*Table 9*). Together, these patterns reveal a recurring negotiation dynamic (*Figure 2*). Thus, speech acts functioned not merely as communicative forms but as strategic resources through which organisational actors constructed, maintained, and contested power during meeting negotiations.

Table 9. Comparative summary of Speech Acts.

Dimension	Dominant Speech Acts	Main Participants	Primary Function
Authority	Directives, Declaratives	F (IC)	Control actions, decisions, and accountability
Influence	Assertives, Commissives	MC and IC	Persuade, justify, negotiate outcomes
Resistance	Assertives, Expressives, Mitigated Directives	MC	Challenge proposals while maintaining rapport

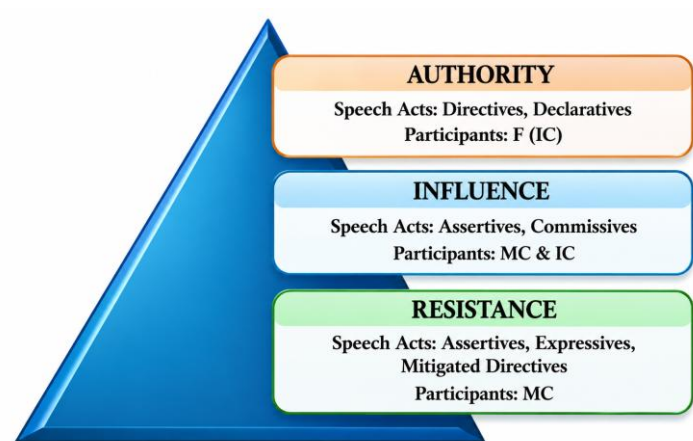


Figure 2. Speech Act distribution across power dimensions.

Conclusion

This study examined how speech acts function as mechanisms of authority, influence, and resistance in workplace meeting negotiations. By integrating Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995), the study explored the relationship between language and power in five naturally occurring

negotiations involving representatives from a Malaysian Company (MC) and an Iranian Company (IC). The findings revealed that all five speech act categories (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives) were employed throughout the negotiations. However, their distribution and functions varied according to participants' institutional roles and communicative objectives. Authority was predominantly realised through directive and declarative speech acts, particularly in the discourse of participant F, who exercised organisational control through commands, demands, warnings, and decision-making declarations. Influence was mainly enacted through assertive and commissive speech acts, enabling participants to shape decisions through explanations, justifications, expertise, and commitments. Resistance emerged primarily through assertive and expressive speech acts, where participants employed hedging, humour, indirect disagreement, and alternative proposals to challenge decisions while maintaining professional relationships. The study demonstrates that workplace negotiations are not merely sites of information exchange but complex interactional arenas where power is continuously constructed, negotiated, and challenged through language. Authority, influence, and resistance were found to operate as interconnected discursive processes rather than independent communicative phenomena. The recurring pattern of authority, influence, resistance, and negotiated outcomes highlights the dynamic nature of organisational power and the central role of speech acts in shaping decision-making processes. Overall, the findings confirm that speech acts serve not only pragmatic functions but also constitute important discursive resources through which organisational actors enact authority, exercise influence, and express resistance in workplace meeting negotiations.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on workplace discourse by extending Speech Act Theory beyond its traditional focus on speech-act classification. Rather than treating speech acts as isolated linguistic categories, the study demonstrates how they function as mechanisms through which organisational power is enacted and negotiated. The integration of Speech Act Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis also provides a more comprehensive analytical framework for examining institutional communication. While Speech Act Theory explains what communicative actions speakers perform, CDA reveals how these actions contribute to broader power structures and organisational hierarchies. The study therefore offers empirical support for combining pragmatic and critical approaches in workplace discourse research. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the literature on organisational communication by demonstrating that authority, influence, and resistance are interactionally achieved through language rather than solely determined by formal organisational positions. The findings offer several practical implications for workplace communication and organisational management. First, managers and organisational leaders should recognise the impact of directive and declarative speech acts on employee engagement and workplace relationships. Although directives facilitate task completion and accountability, excessive reliance on commands and warnings may reduce opportunities for collaborative problem-solving. Balancing authority with participatory communication may improve organisational effectiveness and employee commitment. Second, the study highlights the importance of assertive and commissive speech acts in influencing workplace decisions. Employees can enhance their persuasive effectiveness by providing evidence-based explanations, technical justifications, and clear commitments when negotiating organisational issues.

Third, the findings demonstrate that resistance is not necessarily disruptive. Indirect forms of resistance, such as humour, hedging, and alternative suggestions, may contribute positively to organisational decision-making by introducing diverse perspectives and preventing premature conclusions. Organisations should therefore encourage open communication environments where alternative viewpoints can be expressed constructively. Finally, the study provides useful insights for leadership training, negotiation skills development, and intercultural workplace communication. Understanding how speech acts function within power relations may help organisational actors communicate more effectively and navigate complex negotiation processes. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was based on a relatively small dataset comprising five meeting negotiation interactions from a specific workplace context, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Second, the analysis focused primarily on verbal communication and speech acts, while non-verbal elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and body language were not systematically examined. Third, the participants represented only two organisational groups, which may not fully capture the diversity of communicative practices across different industries, organisational cultures, or national contexts. Future studies may expand the scope of investigation by analysing larger datasets involving multiple organisations, industries, and cultural contexts. Comparative studies between different organisational hierarchies or national cultures may provide deeper insights into how power is negotiated through speech acts across diverse workplace environments. Researchers may also incorporate multimodal discourse analysis by examining non-verbal communication, including gestures, gaze, facial expressions, and body language, alongside speech acts. Such approaches could provide a more comprehensive understanding of authority, influence, and resistance in workplace meeting negotiations. Additionally, future research may explore the relationship between speech acts and leadership styles, conflict management strategies, or virtual meeting environments, particularly in increasingly digital and hybrid workplaces.

Acknowledgement

This research is self-funded.

Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

REFERENCES

- [1] Alsamhori, M.A.O., Seine, M.I., Al-Zuriqat, Z.K. (2025): Speech acts as a means of influence and social interaction: Perspectives from Austin and Searle. – *Journal of Posthumanism* 5(3): 627-637.
- [2] Anuar, A.F., Paramasivam, S., Darmi, R., Jalaluddin, I. (2025): Speech acts for negotiation by an Iranian and a Malaysian company in project meetings. – *Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 6(4): 202-221.
- [3] Austin, J.L. (1962): *How to do things with words*. – Clarendon Press, Oxford 166p.

- [4] Cheung, N., Grieve, A., Wilby, K., Tran, T., Lim, A. (2025): Use of linguistic communication strategies (hedges and intensifiers) in simulated pharmacy education shared decision-making. – *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 89(10): 7p.
- [5] Ekström, M., Stevanovic, M. (2023): Conversation analysis and power: Examining the descendants and antecedents of social action. – *Frontiers in Sociology* 8: 13p.
- [6] Fairclough, N. (1995): *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. – Longman, London 265p.
- [7] Holmes, J. (2008): *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. – Longman, London 504p.
- [8] Latif, M.S., Ali, M., Soomro, A.F., Syed, M.I., Alam, M.M., Ansari, M.M.A. (2026): Leadership beyond formal authority: Cognitive, emotional, and moral foundations of strategic influence in complex organizational systems. – *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies* 4(1): 786-800.
- [9] Mammadova, G. (2025): The power of language in social contexts. – *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum* 2(3): 134-140.
- [10] Searle, J.R. (1969): *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. – Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 203p.
- [11] Stevanovic, M. (2021): Deontic authority and the maintenance of lay and expert identities during joint decision making: Balancing resistance and compliance. – *Discourse Studies* 23(5): 20p.