

The Discursive Features of Speech Acts in German Media

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to dissect and illuminate the discursive features of speech acts in German media alongside with the comparison with those in Uzbek media. By delving into various media formats: from news reporting and political interviews to advertising and television broadcast, we explore to understand how language functions not just to convey information, but to perform actions that influence, persuade, and engage the public. In an era where media narratives hold significant sway over societal beliefs and behaviors, understanding the mechanics of speech acts becomes paramount. This exploration offers valuable insights into the strategic use of language in media, contributing to the broader field of pragmatics and enhancing our comprehension of communication dynamics in contemporary society.

**KEY WORDS:** discursive features, speech acts, pragmatics, high contextual precision, consensus, framing, cultural neutrality and objectivity.

### INTRODUCTION

In the bustling newsrooms of Berlin, amidst the clatter of keyboards and the hum of broadcast equipment, a subtle yet profound dance unfolds: a dance of words, intentions, and interpretations. Every headline crafted, every interview conducted and every advertisement aired is not merely a transmission of information but a complex performance of speech acts that shape public perception and discourse. This intricate interplay of language functions forms the backbone of our exploration into the discursive features of speech acts in German media. The topic has caught considerable scholarly attention, with various studies delving into their nuances and implications. Two notable contributions in this realm are the works by Trotzke and Reimer (2023) and Adamova et al. (2022), each offering distinct perspectives on the comprehension and function of speech acts in the German linguistic context. In the first representative study, "Comprehending Non-Canonical and Indirect Speech Acts in German", Trotzke and Reimer (2023) investigate how German speakers interpret non-canonical speech acts, such as rhetorical and surprise-disapproval questions, in comparison to indirect speech acts like indirect requests. Their research reveals that non-canonical speech acts are identified with greater accuracy but require more processing time than indirect speech acts, suggesting distinct cognitive mechanisms underpinning these forms. Accompanying to this, Adamova Hanna, Yevtimova Diana, Plokhotna Valeriia, Zahura Oksana & Chernenko Tetiana, (2022), in "Functioning of Directive Speech Acts in Modern German Linguistic Culture", examine the use of directive speech acts (DSAs) within German linguistic culture. They observe that Germans often employ indirect language to issue commands or requests reflecting cultural norms that favor subtlety over directness. Their study highlights the evolution of DSAs in Germany, noting a shift towards greater acceptance over time, influenced by situational factors and social norms. While previous studies have focused on the comprehension and cultural underpinnings of speech acts within

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a single linguistic context, our study offers a broader perspective by highlighting how different medias utilize language to shape societal beliefs and behaviors. For instance, whereas Trotzke and Reimer (2023) provide insights into the cognitive processing of specific speech act types within German, and Adamova Hanna, Yevtimova Diana, Plokhotna Valeriia, Zahura Oksana & Chernenko Tetiana, (2022) shed light on the cultural nuances influencing directive speech acts, our study extends this discourse by exploring how these speech acts are operationalized within media narratives across two distinct cultures. This comparative approach allows us to identify unique patterns and strategies employed in each media context, thereby enriching our understanding of the pragmatic functions of language in media.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech acts, as a fundamental aspect of pragmatics, play a crucial role in media discourse by shaping communication, influencing audiences, and reflecting societal norms. A speech act can be classified into various types, including assertive, directives, commissures, expressive, and declarations (Searle, 1969). Among these, directive speech acts are particularly significant in media contexts as they involve attempts by the speaker to get the listener to perform a certain action (Austin, 1962). In journalistic discourse, directive speech acts can appear in the form of requests, instructions, suggestions, and commands, all of which contribute to shaping public perception and discourse (Moessner, 2010). In German language, directive speech acts manifest in various forms, influenced by linguistic structures and cultural norms. Deppermann (2018) categorizes imperative expressions in German into different types, including Erlaubnisform (granting permission), Befehl (giving a direct command), Aufforderung (making a request), and Anweisung (providing instructions). While these distinctions exist, the boundaries between them are often blurred, and their interpretation depends on the context and the speaker-listener relationship. Furthermore, some imperative forms in German do not necessarily serve a directive function but are instead used as conversational markers, as seen in phrases like “Ja, schon gut!” which signal agreement or closure rather than command (Bystrov, Mintsys & Mintsys, 2020). Unlike English, where direct imperatives are commonly used in various social contexts, German discourse tends to favor indirect forms, particularly in formal and media settings. Studies suggest that German, as a High-Context Culture (HCC), often employs analytic structures to express directives, making them less abrupt and more context-dependent (Condon, 2015). Synthetic imperatives, on the other hand, are more frequently used in hierarchical interactions, such as addressing children or subordinates (Nicenboim et al., 2018). Moreover, politeness strategies in media discourse influence how directive speech acts are framed. While English speakers often prefer direct commands in formal interactions, research indicates that German media favors indirect speech acts, especially when addressing sensitive topics or a broad audience (Karandeeva et al., 2020). The degree of directness is influenced by factors such as power relations, social distance, and the intended level of formality in the discourse (House, 2012). German journalistic norms tend to prioritize neutrality and structured argumentation. As a result, indirect directives and interrogative forms are frequently used to soften the impact of a directive statement while maintaining authority (Keller, 2011). This approach aligns with German cultural communication patterns, where preserving face and avoiding confrontation are central to effective discourse (Lekakou & Quer, 2016). Unlike in Anglo-American cultures, where compliance with directives is often expected, German speakers value a more autonomous and deliberative approach to interaction, which is reflected in their media

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discourse (van Dijk, 2006). The role of directive speech acts in German media has evolved over time, reflecting broader changes in social norms and communication practices. Lingua-Service Deaf (2009) conducted a study showing that contemporary German media exhibits a more positive attitude toward direct speech acts compared to earlier decades. This shift is partly attributed to globalization and increased intercultural interactions, which have made German speakers more adaptable to diverse communication styles. Additionally, the rise of digital media platforms has introduced new dynamics in the use of speech acts, with interactive journalism fostering a more conversational and reader-engaged discourse (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017).

The discursive features of speech acts in German media often contrast with those in Uzbek media due to distinct cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Some of the discursive features in German media are highlighted and represented by examples.

### 1. Politeness and Indirectness:

**High Contextual Precision:** German media is renowned for its precise and structured language, especially in political discourse. Statements are often crafted to maintain

formality and logical coherence. The precise use of terminology in German media, particularly in political reporting, ensures clarity and avoids the vagueness that might arise in less structured media systems. Marina Anatolyevna Chigasheva (2017) in her study on political discourse in German media focuses on the role of terminology in shaping clear, structured, and precise political discussions. She argues that German media, particularly in political reporting, tend to use standardized language to express complex political ideas, ensuring that their statements are both formal and coherent. For example: In a political interview (2017) on ARD Chancellor Angela Merkel stated, “Es wäre sinnvoll, wenn wir die Digitalisierung weiter vorantreiben.” (It would be sensible if we further advance digitalization.) This use of the subjunctive mood (“wäre”) introduces a level of politeness and indirectness, suggesting a recommendation rather than a directive.

**Indirect Speech Acts:** German media frequently employs indirectness to convey suggestions or recommendations subtly. For example: A *Der Spiegel* article discussing environmental policies noted, “Es könnte an der Zeit sein, über alternative Energien nachzudenken.” (It might be time to think about alternative energies.) The phrase “Es könnte an der Zeit sein” (It might be time) serves as an indirect prompt for action, aligning with the German preference for nuanced persuasion. However, in Uzbek Media, directness and simplicity are mostly used, as Uzbek media tends to employ direct and straightforward language, particularly in news reporting. For example: In a news broadcast on O‘zbekiston 24 channel, the anchor stated, “Hukumat yangi qonunni qabul qildi.” (The government has adopted a new law.) This direct statement leaves little room for ambiguity, reflecting the Uzbek media’s preference for clear and concise communication.

### 2. Emphasis on Consensus vs. Authority

German media often builds consensus through logical arguments and balanced presentation. Jürgen Habermas (1981), in his influential work *The Theory of Communicative Action*, discusses the

concept of deliberative democracy in Germany. He explains how persuasive speech acts in media (particularly news outlets) aim to generate public consensus by engaging citizens in rational discourse. According to Habermas, this discourse is rooted in a process of mutual understanding, which contrasts with more authoritative forms of communication that prioritize control or compliance. For example: A Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung article on healthcare reform stated, “Während einige Experten die Vorteile betonen, weisen andere auf mögliche Risiken hin.” (While some experts emphasize the benefits, others point to possible risks). This balanced reporting encourages readers to consider multiple perspectives, fostering informed decision-making. By contrast, Uzbek media often employs authoritative language, especially in state-run outlets, to assert governmental positions. Example: An article in Xalq So‘zi declared, “Prezidentning farmoni bilan yangi iqtisodiy siyosat belgilandi.” (With the president’s decree, a new economic policy has been established.) The use of “Prezidentning farmoni bilan” (With the president’s decree) underscores the authoritative source of the information, reinforcing the government’s directive stance.

### 3. Language and Emotion in Media

**Balance of Emotion and Logic:** German media integrates emotional appeals with

logical reasoning to engage the audience effectively. Jürgen Habermas (1981) in *The Theory of Communicative Action* argues that rational discourse is essential in modern societies, but he also acknowledges the role of emotion in shaping public opinion. According to Habermas, media in democratic societies like Germany strive for balance by combining logical reasoning with emotional appeals to persuade the public without relying solely on one or the other. Example: In a ZDF documentary on climate change, the narrator stated, “Unsere Kinder verdienen eine Zukunft auf diesem Planeten; handeln wir jetzt.” (Our children deserve a future on this planet; let’s act now.) This statement combines an emotional appeal (“Unsere Kinder verdienen eine Zukunft”) with a call to action, aiming to motivate viewers through both sentiment and reason. In contrast, usage of national identity in Uzbek media frequently invokes national pride and collective identity to obtain emotional responses. Example: A public service announcement on Uzbekistan National Television proclaimed, “Yurtimiz taraqqiyoti har birimizning qo‘limizda.” (The development of our country is in each of our hands.) This appeal to collective responsibility and national progress is designed to unite viewers toward common goals.

### 4. Cultural References and Framing

**Cultural Neutrality and Objectivity:** German media strives for neutrality, presenting

multiple viewpoints to allow audiences to form their own opinions. Schröder (2006) discusses the role of press ethics in maintaining neutrality in German media. He states that German journalists are bound by professional codes to present factual information and to avoid partisan bias. This adherence to journalistic ethics ensures that media outlets present a variety of viewpoints, particularly in their coverage of political issues or controversial topics, which allows audiences to form their own opinions. For example: A Süddeutsche Zeitung article on immigration policy stated, “Die Debatte über Migration ist komplex und vielschichtig, mit Argumenten auf beiden Seiten.” (The debate on migration is complex and multifaceted, with arguments on both sides.) This framing encourages

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readers to consider the issue's complexity without imposing a singular perspective. Nevertheless, Uzbek media often aligns with governmental narratives, presenting information that supports state policies. To exemplify it: A news segment on *Yoshlar* television channel reported, "Hukumatning yangi tashabbusi xalq farovonligini oshirishga qaratilgan." (The government's new initiative is aimed at increasing the well-being of the people.) This statement reinforces the government's role in societal improvement, aligning with state-framed narratives.

### 5. Rhetorical Devices and Persuasion

German media utilizes rhetorical questions to engage audiences and provoke thought. Jürgen Habermas (1989) in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* describes how rhetorical questions are commonly used in media to foster a sense of rational-critical debate. Habermas argues that in democratic societies, like Germany, rhetorical questions are often used in the media to engage the audience, stimulate reflection, and encourage public participation in debates. The aim is to involve the audience in the conversation and provoke deeper thinking, particularly in political discourse. For example: In a *Die Zeit* opinion piece on digital privacy, the author asked, "Wollen wir wirklich unsere Daten preisgeben?" (Do we really want to give away our data?) This rhetorical question invites readers to reflect critically on their personal data security. However, Uzbek media employs vivid imagery and emotive language to persuade and mobilize audiences. For example: A television advertisement promoting literacy featured the slogan, "Kitob--marifat chirog'i." (A book is the light of enlightenment.) This metaphorical expression associates reading with illumination and knowledge, appealing to cultural values that esteem education.

### METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative discourse analysis method to examine the discursive features of speech acts in German media. The research focuses on different media formats, including news articles, political interviews, and television broadcasts. Data was collected from leading German media outlets such as *Der Spiegel*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *ARD*. The study also incorporates qualitative content analysis to identify patterns in the use of direct and indirect speech acts, drawing on the frameworks of Searle (1969) and Austin (1962). Additionally, cultural and pragmatic aspects were analyzed using Habermas' (1981) communicative action theory and Deppermann's (2018) categorization of directive speech acts in German. A comparative approach with Uzbek media discourse was applied to highlight cultural differences in media communication strategies.

### RESULTS

Findings indicate that German media predominantly employs indirect speech acts, reflecting a preference for politeness and high-context communication (Trotzke & Reimer, 2023). Directive speech acts often appear in the form of suggestions or rhetorical questions rather than direct commands (Adamova et al., 2022). Additionally, German media discourse demonstrates a strong emphasis on neutrality and consensus-building, aligning with Habermas' (1989) deliberative democracy model. In contrast, Uzbek media exhibits a more direct and authoritative style, frequently

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invoking national identity and government authority. These differences suggest that cultural norms significantly shape the pragmatic use of speech acts in media.

**DISCUSSION**

The results underscore the role of indirectness and logical structuring in German media, which prioritizes consensus over authority (Schröder, 2006). The preference for indirect directives aligns with previous studies on high-context cultures (Condon, 2015). Moreover, the German media's tendency to frame issues with balanced perspectives contrasts with Uzbek media's direct, government-aligned narratives. These findings suggest that speech act strategies are deeply embedded in cultural and political contexts. Future research could explore the impact of digital media on these discursive features, considering the increasing influence of social media on journalistic discourse (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017).

**CONCLUSION**

German media often employs structured, balanced, and nuanced language to inform and persuade, emphasizing logical reasoning and consensus-building. In contrast, Uzbek media favors direct, authoritative, and emotionally resonant language, frequently invoking national identity and collective responsibility. These linguistic strategies reflect and reinforce the distinct cultural and societal norms of each country, shaping public discourse and influencing audience perceptions. By integrating cross-cultural analysis with media discourse, our research contributes to the broader field of pragmatics and enhances comprehension of communication dynamics in contemporary society. The discursive features of speech acts in German media illustrate a complex interplay between language, culture, and pragmatics. While directive speech acts are integral to journalistic discourse, their expression in German media is shaped by norms of indirectness, politeness, and contextual sensitivity. As media communication continues to evolve, future research could explore how digital platforms and cross-cultural exchanges influence the pragmatic strategies used in German media

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