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## Linguistic Analysis of the Speech act of persuasion in Political speech: A Study of Iraqi P.M. Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's Speech

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### Abstract

*Persuasion via language becomes essential in all the field of life. It is very useful to know how people use language to deal with others especially in the ways of persuasion. This study attempts to get a linguistic analysis for a press conference for the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi held in Baghdad in 07/06/2022 two years after Al-Kadhimi took office. This linguistic analysis is conducted from the perspective of persuasion to examine speech acts as persuasive devices and how Al-Kadhimi employed them to persuade his addressees. It also investigates which type of speech acts Al-Kadhimi relied on as a central persuasive device to achieve the act of persuasion. This study adopts speech act theory in analysing speeches because the later focuses on the interpretation of acts via words and reflects the intent of the addresser in the type of the speech act selected. The importance of this research lies in how to know and use the bases of linguistics in studying the styles of persuasions in English language in general and in political discourse as a special case. This study finds that Mustafa Al-Kadhimi has focused more on commissives and expressive speech acts within the descriptions in the assertives to prepare the addressees for successful persuasion for accepting the directives which are the main goal of his speech.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The political speech is one of the most important speeches that attract researchers and analysts because its strong connection with society, on the one hand, and for the need and the desire of knowing the way by which the politicians introduces themselves and their issues to the society, on the other hand. The need for a new rhetoric or a philosophy, as Donahue and Prosser (1997) argues, that could illuminate human problems of freedom and its absence in life and “suitable for the discussion and resolution of problems peculiar to the age of international conflict and cooperation, technological innovation, and rapid change” (pp. 171-172).

Political discourse is usually associated with the discourse of power, and has a close relationship with it, as it is one of the most important tools among those employed by political forces in their quest for power. Acquiring power is primarily a rhetorical issue, and the legitimacy of its access and possession for a political group is the result of a wide-ranging discursive activity that takes place under different forms and with different goals through various channels of communication. It becomes necessary to know how politicians are harnessing language for achieving their goals, mainly persuasion, and how one can understand the intended meaning of their speeches, that because politicians may use language cunningly and thus there is a need for knowing the credibility of political discourse. In this study, persuasion is understood as the addresser's attempts to influence his audience and it can be achieved through honesty, transparency, respect, appreciation and activation which can be understood as speech acts through the political speech.

Fraser (1985) in his study of the speech act of request across languages concluded that speech act realization is shaped by some universal pragmatic principles while Weizbicka (1985) reported that the realization of speech acts varies greatly from culture to culture. The current study contrasts Iraqis to Americans with respect to the realization of the speech act of offering complaining so as to approach the notion of politeness and provide an evident whether these particular aspects of this speech act are specific or universal across the two cultures. (Pishkar. K. 2023)

The Iraqi arena is full of conflicts, political disagreements and verbal debates that make the analysis of the Iraqi political discourse extremely important. Moreover, it is

found that few studies conducted regarding the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi's speeches. For this reason, this study attempts to find the persuasive means through the analysis of a press conference speech of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi. The analysis examines which speech acts are employed for achieving the goal of persuasion. The current study intends to examine how speech acts are utilized by Mustafa Al-Kadhimi as a prominent Iraqi prime minister to attain persuasion. The study aims to address the following research questions;

- a. How are speech acts employed by Iraqi prime minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi to attain persuasion?
- b. Which speech acts are utilized by Iraqi prime minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi as a central persuasive device?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Previous studies**

Many researches has been conducted by using the speech act theory of persuasion in different fields such politics, literature, marketing, ...etc. Regarding the area of persuasion literature, Mojgan Yarahmadi<sup>1</sup> and Narges Olfati (2011) investigate persuasive speech act in literature by analysing the play *The Seagull* which is one of the famous works of Anton Chekhov. The speech act analysis of the conversations for this play has helped the researchers in revealing the hidden intentions, motives, etc. of characters.

Exploring the area of persuasion in marketing discourse, Shamal Ahmed Hama Aziz and Sara Kamal Othman (2020) conducted a pragmatic study to find the persuasive speech acts in social media in marketing discourse, such as posts of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Videos. They find that marketers use assertive speech acts to persuade their customers and at the same time avoid commitment. Moreover, they find that using commissive speech acts are not promising or guaranteeing because it can be denied.

Regarding the area of persuasion in political discourse, which is the interest of this study, Sahar Altikriti (2016) examined the persuasive speech acts in Barack Obama's three selected political speeches (2009, 2013) based on the adopted model of Bach and Harnish Taxonomy (1979). The analysis showed that President Obama used the assertive

illocutionary acts as a persuasive factor more than other speech acts. Abdulrahman Alkhirbash (2016) investigates the speech acts as persuasive devices in selected speeches of Dr. Mahathir Mohammed (the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia) by adopting a rhetorical analysis on these speeches to identify how the P.M. employed speech acts to persuade his audience to accept or perform a specific action. The study finds that 'Directives and Assertives' speech acts were used as persuasive devices to influence his audience and attain persuasion.

Focusing on the intentions, the study of Ardita Dylgjerii (2017) explored the role of language in the communication and interpretation of intentions by examining some political speech to introduce the significant illocutionary acts that convey the intentions of addressers in political speeches. The study concludes that commissive acts were the biggest percentage of illocutionary acts performed, then come assertive and expressive acts. The study of Edward, et. al., (2018) focuses on speech acts for persuasion in the speeches of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It shows how Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump make use of speech acts to persuade the audience to vote for them. Focusing on illocutionary forces of speech acts, the study of Nguyen Thi Thanh Thanh (2022) also examined persuasion through assertive speech acts of in the presidential election speeches of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016. It finds that the two politicians introduce their political stands and ideologies to persuade the audience through assertive speech acts by highlighting the illocutionary forces of asserting, affirming, avowing, denying, and propounding.

## **2.2. Speech Acts from Austin to Searle**

Austin in his book "*How to do things with words*" (1962) introduced his speech act theory which shows that the process of uttering utterances is not only to say things but, it has the power to do things because utterances do not only carry ideas or opinions, they also accomplish missions and tasks.

In other words, when speakers utter their utterances, they intend not to utter a series of words in a sentence or a phrase, but they intend to change something either in the position of the listeners or in their minds. For example, some utterances change the physical situation or position of the listener, such as, 'sit down' or 'go out of the room', or

saying 'yes' or 'no' which means accepting or refusing a request or an invitation. Other utterances may not change the physical situation of the listeners but their ideologies which also considered as a change that affect their behaviour as well. These utterances may or may not affect or achieve their goals according to the understanding and response of the listeners.

For this reason, Austin divides the speech act of uttering a sentence into three levels, which are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. By Locutionary he means the actual form of words used by the addresser and their meaning at the semantic level. By Illocutionary he means the action intended by the addresser whether this action was physical or ideological. By perlocutionary he means the result and effect of the illocution on the listeners and their response to the intended meaning of the speech act. Austin (1962, p. 150) classifies the illocutionary acts into five categories based on the type of the action (illocutionary force), which are: Vindictive, Executives, Commissives, Behavatives, and Expositive. Then he admits that 'behavatives' and 'expositive' are most troublesome and they are not clear or are cross-classified because they seem too miscellaneous altogether.

Searle (1979, p. 11) makes an extension of Austin's classification of illocutionary acts and proposed "five illocutionary points" which are: Assertive, Directives, Commissives, Expressive, and Declarations. Examples of all these kinds will be given in the data analysis chapter.

### **3. Speech Acts and intentionality of Persuasion**

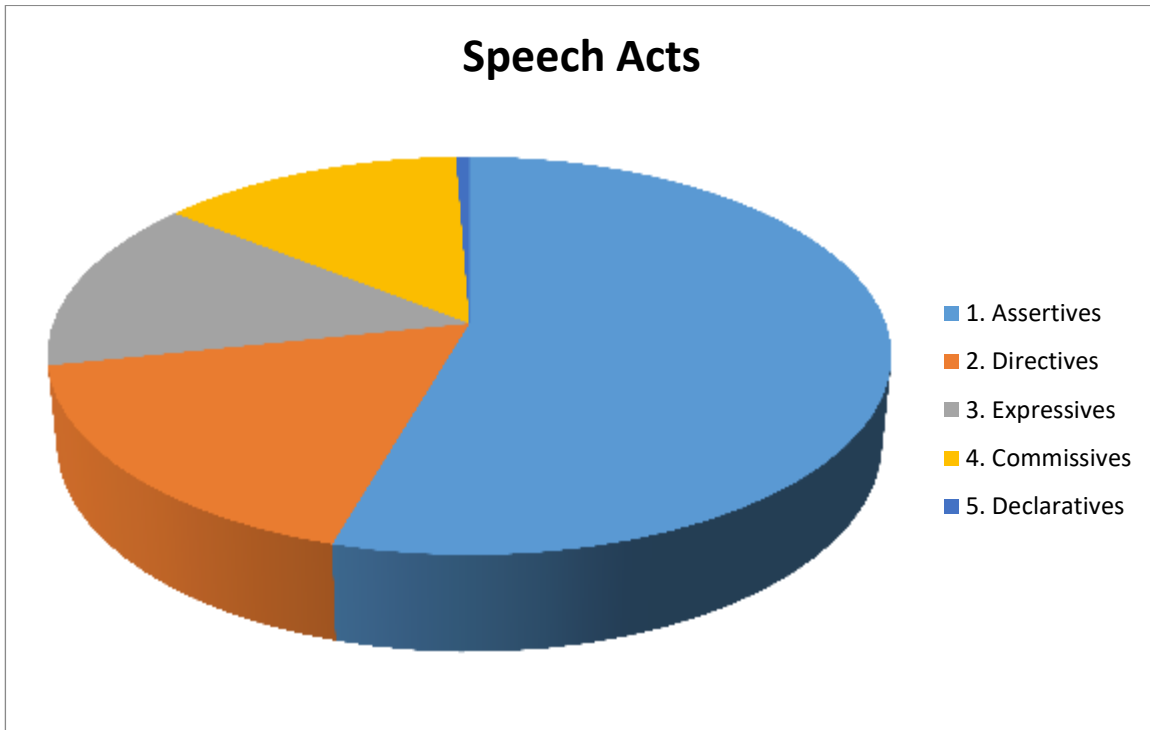
Politicians through their speeches try to achieve intended action by their speech acts. Thus, analysing political speech requires looking for the intended meaning to be transferred to the addressees. To assert the importance of recognising the intention of the addresser Bach and Harnish (1979) state that "*an illocutionary act is communicatively successful if the speaker's illocutionary intention is recognized by the hearer.*"

Sperber and Wilson (1986) claim that while speakers intend their listeners to recognize their intention to inform them some state of affairs, listeners from their side are interested in the meaning of the sentence uttered by the speakers. Charteris-Black (2005) from their side, also assert that persuasion is never devoid of intention because it seeks to confirm or to challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The following section

will show clearly the relationship between the intentionality of the speaker, such as Al-Kadhimi, in using definite ratio of speech acts, and the aim of persuasion that he is looking forward.

#### **4. Data Collection Procedures and Analysis**

This section deals with the analysis for the speech acts employed by Al-Kadhimi in a press conference to convince his addressees. This press conference was held in Baghdad in 07/06/2022 two years after Al-Kadhimi took office. The speech were fully transcribed and analyzed to find out the persuasive strategies which were employed. The study examines the five speech acts, namely; assertives, directives, expressives, commissives and declaratives, used by Al-Kadhimi as tools to influence the addressees' perception. The total number of the words in Al-Kadhimi speech (4742) words which comprise (171) speech acts. The classification of speech acts was as follows: Assertives (93), directives (30), expressives (24) commissives (23), and declaratives (1). Statistically the highest proportion is accounted for Assertive acts with 54% out of the total. Next is that of directives with 17.5%. Both expressive and commissives acts represent the least account in the data with 14% and 13.5 % respectively, while the declaratives records 0.6 % from the speech, as the following diagram shows:



**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of Speech Acts in the data**

#### **4.1. Assertives speech acts**

The analysis of Al-Kadhimi's speech shows that 54 % of the sentences and phrases contain assertive speech acts which represent the highest account among other speech acts found in the data. This explains Al-Kadhimi's intention in conveying the language power of persuasion to the addressees to accept his causes and adopt his ideologies regarding the current situation in Iraq. This intention can be understood only within its context (cf. Fairclough, 2001). The assertive is considered as a supportive device that can provide the intended motivation for the main acts which can be directive, or commissive speech act. In the following example, the assertive speech acts are used to confirm some events that happened in the past as a technique to persuade his addressees.

Today, **we must admit** that the country is going through complex and difficult circumstances.

In the **past years**, electricity stations were built absurdly without planning and without knowledge.

Other technique used by Al-Kadhimi is using the word *some* for two implicated meanings, first, as reference means to others, second as a means of reducing the magnitude of the problems that his government are facing. The word “*some*” is used 39 times during his speech. From them (14) times implicitly refer to his revivals from other parties who tries, as he assure many times, to fail the work of the current government, as the following examples show:

**Some** want to solve the country's problems in a populist and reactionary way.

**Some** are trying to take advantage of some circumstances and promote a bad security situation.

**Some** criticize the Prime Minister that he enters into the details.

It is clear from using such words which carry the illocutionary force, as in the above examples, that Al-Kadhimi tries to create awareness among the addressees about the fact of the existence of revivals from other parties who tries, as it is mentioned, to fail the work of the current government.

The deixis word “*there*” is used 32 times during his speech. From them (4) times implicitly refer to his revivals from other parties, such as:

**There are those** who are trying to create a culture, the culture of despair and frustration.

**There are those** who try every time to look at the government and blame it for the failure of the previous mistakes.

Yes, **there is** a political problem and there is a political blockage.

**There are** attempts by terrorist groups to gain a foothold.

The power of the assertive speech act resides on the, information, predictions, instructions, descriptions and suggestions made by Al-Kadhimi as a contribution or resolutions to change the present situation in Iraq.

The pronoun “*we*” implicitly suggests a generalization used by Al-Kadhimi as an attempt to persuade the audience that finding solutions for the current problems is not exercised on the government only but on all the Iraqi people without exception.

**We** must admit that the country is going through complex and difficult circumstances.

Yes, **we** have a very good surplus. But this surplus needs a law to be spent on it.

**We** must look for a solution. We need to think about the future

**We** must work sincerely for this country.



The word “*but*” is mentioned 19 times in the speech. The word “*but*” implicitly suggests a generalization used by Al-Kadhimi as an attempt to persuade the audience that although the efforts by the government, the situation in Iraq is still needs more efforts from the other side (the Iraqi people and opposition parties). Some examples are:

**But** with these circumstances, unfortunately, there are those who are trying to create a culture. The culture of despair and frustration.

**But** this young democratic process is always going through crises and complex stages of establishment.

**But** there are those who are trying to promote a bad security situation.

**But** there are debts before the year 2020 that Iran demands. The gas was cut off.

Repetition is employed by Al-Kadhimi as another rhetorical device to consolidate his proposition and to support his argument regarding definite issues. For Harvard Business Essentials (2005), repetition of parallel structure helps the audience to hear and remember what is said. In the same dimension, Lucas (2009) shows that repetition an idea by stating it more than once helps to create a strong emotional effect. Through repetition Al-Kadhimi emphasizes on critical issues as a means to persuade his audience their importance. Firstly, to persuade the addressees that Iraq suffers from political crisis and it needs a long time to settle them, and the following examples show:

Yes, **there is a political problem**, there is a political blockage, and we have difficult circumstances.

Yes, **there is a political crisis**, as you mentioned.

Secondly, to persuade the addressees that although these political crises, the current government succeeded in controlling the situation and implementing some projects, as in:

And **we succeeded** in implementing some of them.

**We have succeeded** in many projects

Thirdly, to persuade the addressees that people must accept the current government because it has good vision for solving political crisis, as in:

**This government has this vision.**

And I say frankly, **this government has this vision** in various fields.

Fourthly, to persuade the addressees that two years period is not enough for the government to correct the mistakes of 17 years, as following examples show:

Two years with circumstances you knew **some lay on us mistakes of 17 years.**

Some are trying to lay on the government **failed of years.**

Fifthly, to persuade the addressees that the security situation is under control although other parties try to promote a bad security situation, as in:

Some are trying to take advantage of some circumstances and promote a **bad security situation**.

But there are those who are trying to promote a **bad security situation**.

There are those trying to trade **the security file**.

Through the assertive, Al-Kadhimi gives more information to his addresses because more information and strong arguments were more effective than weak arguments (Fuegen, Kathleen and Brehm, Jack W. (2004:62).

#### 4.2. Directives speech acts

The main point of the political discourse is contained in the directives because they are the main purpose of the whole speech act as they dominate the illocutionary goal. And the realization of the main goal is, of course, the perlocutionary intention that an addresser intends. For this reason, one of the effective strategies used by Al-Kadhimi to influence his addressees is using directives with 17% from the total speech. In the following examples, Al-Kadhimi also used directives effectively to persuade the people about some intended issues. He uses different styles such as the direct speech, such as:

I **hope** you will help us by providing objective constructive criticism...

I would **like** to remind the minister who was happy with gloating an Iraqi official.

I **reassure** the people on the street and tell them frankly ...

It is **shame** on us to disagree with a specific title to settle political scores.

It seems that the use of directives above with using the pronoun 'I' reflects his competence as an element of the ethical proof regarding his duties and responsibilities toward the Iraqi people.

Similarly, he uses the verb **let** which is employed as a persuasive device by Al-Kadhimi to direct and instruct the addressees to share with him a number of acts such as *Let's remember*, *Let's think* as an attempt to persuade them about the reality of his achievements in the present time and in the past, as the following examples show:

Let's remember, memory is important.

Let's think about operations.

Through the speech, he tries to conceive the addresses by using such verbs which carry the illocutionary force. His illocutionary force in the examples above is to persuade the hearers to accept all his clarifications about the current situation in Iraq. Another technique is using the most popular style in the directives that is the interrogative style. Within the speech,

Al-Kadhimi asks his addressees 15 times directly but, intentionally some of these questions were directed to his revivals as well as the Iraqi people indirectly, such as:

Some have been trying to hold the government unsuccessful for years. Why this duplication?

I ask, two years ago how was the security situation and how is today?

Where do I get gas?

Where do I get the 6 billion dollars?

Where is the investment? Where is the new building? Where are the new streets?

Al-Kadhimi uses **one of the** negotiation skills that is **'asking good questions' through his speech**. He could gain more in integrative negotiation by asking lots of questions. Negotiation skills, as Richard Shell and Mario Moussa (2007) show, are a key part of the influence and persuasion process when you are allocating resources, and trying to get your strategic partners to go along with new programs. ( Richard Shell and Mario Moussa (2007:5). Al-Kadhimi used the method of dialogue where he was asking some questions directed to himself or to his addressees and answering them instead of the addressees in a dialogue style.

To sum up, all the directive speech acts utilized by Al-Kadhimi are supported with effective recommendations, reasonable resolutions, and logical suggestions. It is important to note that the purpose behinds using the directive speech acts is to persuade his addressees to adopt his ideas and spread them to create awareness among the people to accept the solutions suggested by him.

#### **4.3. Commissives speech acts**

From the analysis of the commissives speech acts which represent 13.5 % from the data, it is clear that Al-Kadhimi focuses on four sub-types of speech acts: threatening, offering, promising, guaranteeing, as in the following examples:

From this platform, I **warn** the food price manipulators.

In the above example, he uses the verb 'warn' as a kind of threatening for those who manipulate the food prices in Iraq. In the next examples, Al-Kadhimi uses the word **ready** to express his obligation in doing some actions such as:

All the support you need in the country to help access information, we are **ready** to support you.

**I am ready** to take you with me to see by yourselves the first thousand schools in the coming days.

Obligation also come in form of using the pronoun *we* with the auxiliary verb *must* to express most of his commissives in the speech, as in the following:

We must look for a solution. We need to think about the future.  
We must create an opportunity for hope  
We must work sincerely for this country.  
We must make difficult decisions.  
In the future, we must rely on agriculture. Iraq has bounties, water, and  
We must build the elements of trust and good faith.

Moreover, Al-Kadhimi tried to persuade his addresses with his futuristic plans through the promise acts as in:

And at the end of the year, **I promise you**, if things go in these circumstances ...  
By God willing, **I promised that** Baghdad would be more beautiful

Or by using the future form sentences as follows:

**We will** definitely work on this.  
And there are small areas left **that we will complete** in order to control the Iraqi-Syrian borders.  
**We will also work** with international institutions to provide solutions to the...

The least used speech acts in the data were, as mentioned above, commissives and those of acknowledgements.

#### 4.4. Expressives speech acts

The expressive speech acts, which represent 14% from the data, are used by Al-Kadhimi not only to thank or to welcome the attendees in the conference or to praise his efforts, or to express sorrow from the bad behaviour from some of his revivals, but also for the purpose of persuasion. Through expressives, he prepares the addressees emotionally either to conceive by his explanations in the assertives or to accept and implement the directives which he directed for them. To achieve this goal, he sometimes uses explicit verbs such as '*feel*' as in:

I **feel** happy to see foreign tourists in Baghdad ...

Or by using the adverb *Unfortunately* to express his sorrow as in:

**Unfortunately**, one of the former ministers ...  
Now this price, **unfortunately**, with the absence of the budget and the food law  
**Unfortunately**, today, Iraq has become only an importer ....  
**Unfortunately**, you have seen what happened to ...  
Of course, this question has some real **pain in** my heart

Or by using the verb *thank* for his gratitude from doing some actions by himself or by others:

Thanks be to God, we have arrested five senior employees  
It succeeded, thank and praise for God  
Thank for God, this paper is what saved us from the bad situation.

Moreover, he uses the exclamatory sentences which come in the form of interrogative, as in:

Some may say **why** did you accept!  
The official comes and says I have oil to sell and give salaries, and **so!**  
**How** do we run the state well! **How** do we spend! **Does** anyone answer from the parties that demand and raise populist slogans, **how** does the government act!

#### **4.5. Declaratives speech acts**

Al-Kadhimi uses only one declarative sentence which records 0.6 % from the speech.

There is a green Middle East project. Saudi Arabia will donate to Iraq a large number of trees to be planted.

He declares about a big project that is the Green Middle East project from which Iraq will get trees from other countries to be planted to eliminate desertification and provide solutions to the climate issue.

### **5. Conclusion**

The findings revealed that the argument presented in Al-Kadhimi's speeches was developed persuasively supported by speech acts as rhetorical devices to make his argument more convincing to his audience. All types of speech acts were employed Al-Kadhimi to persuade and encourage the addressees accept all the excuses he gave them, because of which there was no significant development in the Iraqi situation in all its fields. The analysis of the study regarding the speech acts concludes the following:

It is found in this study that assertives speech acts were used to support the aim of persuasion because in the "assertives", Al-Kadhimi presents a lot of facts regarding the current situation and the political problems in Iraq as a way to prepare the addressees to accept the directive speech act that he intends to introduce. Assertives were also used to produce some events which had happened in the past as a technique to demonstrate the effect of the past events on the current situation in Iraq. Using Assertions in announcement, as in the technique of repetition, contributed a lot to the goal of attention and memory.

Al-Kadhimi also used *directives* effectively to persuade the people about the issues that he intends to introduce for them. He uses the most popular style in the directives that is the interrogative style by asking some questions directed to himself or to his addressees and answering them instead of the addressees in a dialogue style. Dialogue style in political speeches makes the conversations more vivid and enhances the addresser in achieving his purpose in persuading his addressees to adopt his ideas and also support in creating awareness among the addressees to accept the solutions that he suggests for them.

*Commissives* speech acts were also good technique used by Al-Kadhimi to give promises and guarantees which support and enhance building the confidence between Al-Kadhimi and his addressees. Building the confidence makes the addressees accept and convince by the future commissives and plans that an addresser imposes on himself.

Through *expressives*, he prepares the addressees emotionally either to be conceived by his explanations in the *assertives* or to accept and implement the directives which he directed for them. Even *declaratives* were used as a means of persuasion to assure the Iraqi people about the intention of Al-Kadhimi for preparing good future for Iraq.

To conclude, the use and proportion of the distribution of speech acts in Al-Kadhimi's speech was not randomly, on the contrary, the speech acts support each other for achieving the main goal that is persuasion through the conversation. This was clear from using the directives, commissives, and expressives speech acts in close proportions that proved Al-Kadhimi's intention in utilizing from all these kinds. The study illustrated how speech acts contributed to the overall persuasiveness of the political speech of Al-Kadhimi by the role of each speech act in enhancing another to achieve the main goal.

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