



Speech Acts in Headlines of Online Health Food Posters: A Case Study of Lazada

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Abstract

This study aims to classify and interpret the illocutionary acts found in the headlines of Thai food advertising posters using Searle's (1975) speech act theory. This documentary study analyzes the contextual and implicative meanings embedded within these utterances and categorizes the different types of illocutionary acts present in the advertisements. A detailed examination of 21 utterances from 20 Thai food advertising posters reveals that representative speech acts are the most prevalent, with 15 instances. Directive acts follow with four occurrences, while commissive acts are the least common, appearing twice. The findings indicate that commissive speech acts subtly persuade consumers through indirect language, reinforcing the advertiser's commitment, while directive acts encourage specific actions. Representative speech acts play a key role in asserting product attributes, shaping consumer perceptions with factual or seemingly factual information. The study suggests that commissive acts are strategically used to subtly influence consumers by reinforcing the advertiser's perceived commitment. In contrast, directive acts prompt consumer behavior by encouraging actions such as making a purchase. The dominance of representatives underscores their essential function in stating, asserting, and describing product attributes and benefits, thereby shaping consumer perceptions through factual or seemingly factual statements. This research enhances the understanding of speech act structures and functions in Thai food advertising. By examining how different illocutionary acts are strategically employed, the study highlights their significant role in shaping consumer perceptions and behavior. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of persuasive techniques in Thai advertising and their impact on consumer engagement.

Keywords: *Speech Act, Advertising, Headlines, Online Health Food, Illocutionary Acts, Representative, Commissive, Directive*

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, advertisements have become an integral part of daily life, appearing across diverse media platforms, including television, print media, the Internet, and billboards (Belch & Belch, 2017). Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer decisions within today's consumer-driven marketplace (Belch & Belch, 2017). Among various forms, food advertising significantly influences consumer attitudes and behaviors (Panyamaytheekul, 2015), effectively engaging fundamental human needs and desires while promoting a wide range of products (Maslow, 1943). The success of these advertisements often hinges on the strategic use of language, particularly in crafting messages designed to capture attention and persuade consumers (Shariq, 2020).

This study specifically examines the application of Speech Act Theory, developed by J.L. Austin (1962) and further refined by John Searle (1969), to analyze speech acts in food advertising headlines. Speech acts extend beyond mere information conveyance, encompassing actions such as promising, requesting, and expressing emotions (Searle, 1969). The research aims to classify and analyze the various types of speech acts used in food advertising headlines, thereby elucidating how language is strategically employed to attract and influence consumers.

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Despite numerous studies on advertising, there remains a scarcity of comprehensive analyses focusing specifically on the linguistic strategies inherent in food advertising headlines (Cook, 2001). This gap presents an opportunity to explore the nuances of language use in this context, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective advertising strategies (Panyamaytheekul, 2015). Ethical concerns surrounding food advertising tactics, particularly their impact on public health and consumer well-being, have also sparked debate (Harrison, 2018; Brennan & Lu, 2019; Harrison, 2020). By addressing these aspects, this study seeks to provide valuable insights for both academic inquiry and practical applications in advertising.

The primary objective of this research is to shed light on the strategic use of language in food advertising through the lens of speech acts, ultimately enhancing our understanding of consumer influence and decision-making processes (Belch & Belch, 2017; Keller, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017; Ekapanyakul, 2022).

Language functions not only convey meaning but also initiate actions such as questioning, requesting, pleading, or making assertions. Speech Act Theory, first proposed by J.L. Austin (1962), emphasizes language as a means of performing actions rather than merely transmitting information. In this framework, speech acts are viewed as "performative utterances" that enact changes rather than simply describe events (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983).

In linguistics, speech acts are central to pragmatics (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996), a field intersecting disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, artificial intelligence, education, and communication studies (Levinson, 1983). Building on Austin's foundation, H.P. Grice (1975) and John Searle (1969) made significant contributions to this area. Searle categorized speech acts into five types (Searle, 1969; 1975):

1. **Representatives** are utterances that express the speaker's belief about the world and can be evaluated in terms of truth or falsity. Examples include stating, claiming, hypothesizing, describing, telling, insisting, reporting, and concluding as seen in utterances such as: "The sky is blue.", "She said the meeting was postponed.", and "The book is on the table."

2. **Directives** are utterances intended to prompt listener action, ranging from polite requests to commands. Examples include ordering, commanding, requesting, begging, suggesting, and inviting as seen in utterances such as: "Could you pass the salt?", "Close the door.", and "Help me, please."

3. **Commissives** are utterances committing the speaker to future actions. Examples include making promises, offering, threatening, refusing, and pledging as seen in utterances such as: "I promise to call you.", "I'll take you to the airport.", and "If you study, you'll get good grades."

4. **Expressives** are utterances conveying the speaker's emotional states. Examples include apologizing, congratulating, and praising, as well as actions like smiling, laughing, or crying. These acts can be seen in utterances such as: "Thank you for your help.", "I apologize for the mistake." and "Congratulations on your promotion."

5. **Declaratives** are utterances that change reality through their utterance, often requiring institutional authority. Examples include declaring war, baptizing, marrying, or firing an employee. Examples can be found in utterances such as: "I now pronounce you husband and wife.", "You are under arrest." and "I resign from my position." (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levinson, 1983). Declaratives have the power to alter reality solely through utterance, given the social context or established authority. Speech Act Theory systematically examines the communicative purposes of utterances and how intentions are encoded across different contexts. It underscores the idea that language use involves performing actions, not just conveying information.

Sukarini (2022) argues that speech acts are effectively employed in advertising to convey messages and persuade audiences—encouraging purchases or actions related to the advertised products or services. Preliminary analyses of public service advertisements focusing on environmental and social issues reveal that speech acts enhance audience engagement and raise awareness of topics like sanitation and environmental



challenges. These advertisements strategically use various word classes, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives, to resonate with viewers, listeners, and readers.

Siripen (2017) identifies four primary illocutionary acts in advertising—directives, representatives, expressives, and commissives—omitting declaratives. Advertisers frequently use representatives to convey essential information, such as project names, locations, and available facilities, ensuring the content positively influences consumer decision-making.

In contemporary Thai society, there is a growing tendency for people to utilize online platforms more frequently (Cabigting et al., 2022), which has led to the expansion of online businesses and advertising, particularly in the health food sector (Wilson, 2024). Lazada is a leading e-commerce platform in Southeast Asia that has grown rapidly and plays a vital role in changing consumer purchasing behavior in the digital age. With creative advertising strategies and a large customer base, Lazada can offer diverse products and reach consumers widely. Studying the language and persuasion strategies used in Lazada will enhance our understanding of consumer purchasing behavior. Consequently, the researchers are interested in analyzing language use in the headlines of Thai food advertisements to understand how language influences consumer attention and stimulates purchasing decisions. This study aims to illuminate the linguistic strategies employed in food advertising, as well as investigate how the selection of different forms of speech impacts consumer persuasion—whether through information presentation, emotional evocation, or prompting desired actions from the target audience. Furthermore, this research will enhance understanding of the role of language in advertising and marketing communication.

2. Objectives

This study aims to analyze the use of language in Thai food advertising posters through two key objectives: to categorize the types of illocutionary acts present in the headlines of Thai food advertising posters and to interpret the contextual and implicative meanings of utterances found in the headlines of these food advertising posters written in Thai.

3. Materials and Methods

This research is a documentary study that analyzes illocutionary acts in the headlines of Thai food advertising posters. The dataset consists of 21 utterances extracted from 20 food advertising posters sourced from Lazada (<http://www.lazada.co.th/>) between June 1 and July 1, 2024. Utilizing a qualitative research approach, the study categorizes these illocutionary acts based on Searle's (1975) framework, which includes representatives, directives, and expressive acts, and interprets their contextual meanings. Data were purposefully collected from food advertisements on Lazada, with the analysis focusing on identifying, classifying, and exploring the contextual implications of the illocutionary acts. This methodology offers valuable insights into how food advertisements strategically use illocutionary acts to convey persuasive messages to Thai consumers.

4. Results

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of illocutionary acts identified in food advertising, categorized into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. This table provides an overview of the prevalence and function of each type found in the food advertisements studied.

Table 1 Frequency of illocutionary acts

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Representatives	15	71.4%

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Directives	4	19%
Commissives	2	9.0%
Expressives	0	0%
Declaratives	0	0%
Total	21	100%

As displayed in Table 1, the majority of the illocutionary acts were representatives (15 utterances/ 71.4%) followed by directives (4 utterances/ 19%), and commissives (2 utterances/ 9%), respectively. Surprisingly, expressives and declaratives were not found.

Table 2 Frequency of occurrences of paradigm cases

Illocutionary Acts	Frequency	Percentage
Representatives		
Describing	11	52.4%
Stating	3	14.3%
Asserting	1	4.7%
Directives		
Suggesting	4	19.%
Commissives		
Persuading	2	9.5%
Expressives	0	0%
Declaratives	0	0%

Although utterances may share the same speech act type, they may contain different paradigm cases.

Table 2 displays paradigm cases under each speech act type.

4.1 Representatives

4.1.1 Describing

Describing is the most common paradigm case among representatives, indicating that food advertisements frequently emphasize detailed descriptions of their products. This high frequency suggests that advertisers prioritize providing comprehensive information to highlight product features, ingredients, and qualities. Figure 1 is an advertisement for a coffee product. Consider the utterance: “*Nescafe Blend and Brew blends a perfect fit in your style. Nescafe Blend and Brew is a ready-made instant coffee, a three-in-one*”



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product. It is flavor-mixing coffee, and customers can choose from five flavors.” This advertisement employs indirect descriptions to convey product information. The phrase “*perfect fit*” emphasizes the variety of flavors available to consumers, appealing to their personal preferences. Additionally, the sentences offer both factual content about the product and insights into the production process, reinforcing the product’s convenience and versatility.

Figure 1 Advertisement for Nescafé Gold instant coffee ([http://www.lazada.so.th/\(Lazada.\)](http://www.lazada.so.th/(Lazada.)))

4.1.2 Stating

Stating is less frequent under the representative act, with only three samples identified. This category involves making straightforward statements or claims about the product. The moderate frequency suggests that some advertisements aim to deliver clear and concise declarations to inform the audience directly. In figure 2, consider the utterance: “*Begin a good day with Nature’s Bounty. An assortment of these items is classified as supplementary nutrition. Numerous products are suitable for individuals who wish to maintain their health. These products offer various benefits, including serving as an energy source for the body and supporting the cardiovascular and circulatory systems.*” The language in this advertisement explicitly communicates the nature and benefits of the products offered. The phrase “*good day*” suggests a state of well-being, subtly linking product consumption to a positive start to the day. The omission of “*you can*” at the beginning of the sentence makes the statement more assertive, implying that using the product promotes excellent health. When presenting figures, the advertiser should describe the information clearly, highlight key features within the data, and, when appropriate, provide interpretations to enhance understanding.



Figure 2 Advertisement for Nature’s Bounty brand dietary supplements ([http://www.lazada.so.th/\(Lazada.\)](http://www.lazada.so.th/(Lazada.)))



4.1.3 Asserting

Asserting is the least common form of the representative act, with only one sample identified. This involves the advertiser confidently asserting facts or beliefs about the product. In figure 3, consider the utterance: “*Definitely refreshed, no need to care about calories.*” This item is classified as a carbonated beverage, which is said to benefit one's health due to its lack of calories and suitability for individuals of all ages and genders. This advertisement employs assertions to highlight the benefits of the product. The assertion that the product is a non-calorie beverage is implicitly conveyed through the phrase “... no need to care about calories.”



Figure 3 Singha brand carbonated beverage products (<http://www.lazada.so.th/>(Lazada.))



4.2 Directives

4.2.1 Suggesting Suggesting is the only paradigm case under directives, with four samples identified. This category involves gently encouraging the audience to take specific actions, such as trying or purchasing the product. For example, consider the utterance: *“Recharge the power of happiness every morning with a good thing from Muesli.”* The product, identified as Multi Fruit Muesli, consists of dried fruits and cereals and is presented as an effortless, efficient, and tasty breakfast option. This advertisement subtly encourages consumers to purchase the product. The phrase *“Recharge the power of happiness every morning”* conveys the idea of starting the day with a satisfying and uplifting breakfast, appealing to emotional well-being. Meanwhile, the term *“a good thing”* refers to the product itself, emphasizing its quality and benefits in a casual, approachable manner. The combination of evocative language and positive associations is intended to persuade consumers without using overt commands.



Figure 4 Advertisement for Muesli brand cereal products (<http://www.lazada.so.th/>(Lazada.))



4.3 Commissives

4.3.1 Persuading

Persuading is the sole paradigm case under commissives, with two samples identified. This category involves the advertiser committing to persuading the audience of the product's value or benefits. For example, consider the utterance: *“Forward the liveliness with refreshment.”* This advertisement in figure 5, promoting Singha Water’s Care Bear collection – a form of collaboration aimed at both collectors and general consumers – employs persuasive language to influence potential buyers. The statement initially emphasizes "liveliness", which, in this context, associates Singha with energy and positivity. In Thai, the term "liveliness" (สดใส) can be deconstructed into three components: สด (fresh), ใส (clear), and สดใส (vivacious). The words “fresh” and “clear” highlight the product’s qualities, suggesting purity and cleanliness, while “lively” conveys the vibrant essence of the collaboration. The term "refreshment" further appeals to the consumer’s desire for a revitalizing experience after drinking the water. Thus, this statement functions as a persuasive commitment by the advertiser, assuring consumers of the product’s ability to deliver both physical refreshment and an emotionally uplifting experience.



Figure 4 Advertisement for Singha bottled water products ([http://www.lazada.so.th/\(Lazada.\)](http://www.lazada.so.th/(Lazada.)))

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This research aims to analyze and explain the speech acts found in daily life in the headlines of Thai food advertising posters. The primary objective is to classify illocutionary acts and interpret their contextual meanings in written advertisements according to Searle's (1975) in order to gain a deeper understanding of advertisers' genuine intentions as expressed through various illocutionary acts across different products.

The dataset comprises 21 utterances extracted from 20 advertising posters sourced from Lazada. Only utterances presented in Thai on the advertising posters were selected for analysis. The findings reveal that representatives are the most frequently occurring illocutionary act, with 15 utterances, followed by directives with 4 utterances and commissives with 2 utterances. Expressives and declaratives are not found in the dataset. The analysis indicates that representatives are predominantly used in the headlines of Thai food



advertising posters, as evidenced by the frequent use of describing, stating, and asserting utterances. These findings suggest that advertisers primarily focus on providing information and emphasizing product attributes to influence consumer perceptions.

In this investigation, the researchers aim to explore and interpret the use of speech acts in Thai food advertising posters. To fully understand the messages that advertisers seek to convey through language, it is essential to analyze both the context and the products being advertised. The advertisements often employ implied terminology to subtly communicate product attributes and appeal to consumers. Similarly, Sukarini (2022) observes that implicit language is commonly used in written advertisements to enable indirect communication, allowing advertisers to persuade audiences without overt statements.

Thai food advertising posters employ various linguistic techniques, including the use of foreign languages, rhetoric, rhyme, and word repetition. These strategies are intentionally designed to capture attention, enhance memorability, and influence consumer behavior. Li (2023) asserts that such language strategies play a pivotal role in shaping how recipients perceive and respond to advertising messages.

Communicating the truth in advertisements serves as a means of presenting the novelty and benefits of products as well as describing the consumer experience, as noted by Nokchaiphum et al. (2019). It is reasonable to conclude that representatives were mostly employed in advertising posters to effectively convey information, essential details, and methods of consumption through written language. The findings indicate that the majority of the illocutionary acts used in Thai food advertising posters is representatives, with a total of 15 utterances. These representatives include three primary paradigm cases: describing (11 utterances), stating (3 utterances), and asserting (1 utterance). This prevalence underscores advertisers' emphasis on providing factual information by employing the paradigm of informing to highlight product attributes and appeal to consumer needs.

The use of speech acts in food advertising posters frequently aims to describe products, and in this study, describing is the most frequently occurring illocutionary act, appearing 15 times. For example, in the coffee advertisement, "เนสกาแฟ เบลนด์ แอนด์ บรู ผสมผสานความลงตัวในแบบคุณ" "Nescafe Blend and Brew blends a perfect fit in your style", the utterance conveys product information through the phrase "ความลงตัว" (perfect fit) to represent various flavors and tastes, accompanied by an image depicting four presenters, each representing a distinct flavor. Additionally, the phrase "เมล็ดน้อยนิด คุณประโยชน์มหาศาล เพื่อคนที่คุณรัก" (a tiny seed with huge benefits for people you love) implies that the expression "เพื่อคนที่คุณรัก" (for people you love) refers to a family member, such as a spouse or child, since the product requires cooking before consumption. Consequently, it is reasonable to conclude that this statement is aimed at "informing" housewives by using representative acts.

Advertisers employ affirmative sentences to convince and attract customers. As Siripen (2017) notes, advertisers use stating to communicate a product's information. For example, in the dietary supplement advertisement, "เริ่มต้นวันดีๆ ด้วย Nature's Bounty" (Begin a good day with Nature's Bounty), the phrase "วันดีๆ" (good day) signifies that one is in a healthy condition. Additionally, the introductory phrase "you can" is omitted, implying that the advertisement suggests this product may contribute to good health. Furthermore, in a chocolate malt milk advertisement, "เติบโตไปพร้อมสมาร์ท สตาร์ทจากความสุข" (Grow with Smart, start from happiness), the product name "สมาร์ท" (smart) rhymes with the transliterated word "สตาร์ท" (start), while the term "เติบโต" (grow) identifies the target consumers for the product. This is articulated using advertising language techniques.



Directives was the second most frequently found illocutionary act in the food advertising posters. Various methods are utilized to describe the advantages and identities of the products in these advertisements. Directives act often conveys messages to consumers that evoke specific feelings through the use of persuasive language and competitive pricing (Nokchaiphum et al., 2019). The paradigm case identified in this investigation is suggesting.

As Sukarini (2022) states, the act of suggesting and attempting to convince the audience to take action represents the advertiser's commitment to communicate the truth of a proposition. For example, in a cereal advertisement, “เติมพลังความสุขทุกเช้า ด้วยสิ่งที่ดีจากมูสลี่” (Recharge the power of happiness every morning with a good thing from Muesli), the term “สิ่งที่ดี” (a good thing) refers to the product, Muesli, while the phrase “เติมพลังความสุขทุกเช้า” (Recharge the power of happiness every morning) conveys the idea of a satisfying breakfast. It is reasonable to presume that the advertiser intends to highlight the product's benefits, advantages, and strengths to influence customers' purchasing decisions, a strategy evident in various food advertising posters.

Commissives was the least frequently employed illocutionary act in this study, with persuading identified as the sole paradigm case (2 utterances). The primary purpose of persuasion is to encourage consumers to purchase products by offering a positive experience. Similarly, Keioma (2008) notes that commissives are used to make promises and “Recharging the power of happiness every morning” is also an incentive. For instance, in a chicken essence and bird's nest advertisement, “ส่งต่อสิ่งดีๆ ให้คนที่คุณรัก” (Share a good thing with people you love), the term “ส่งต่อ” (share) is used to persuade consumers to buy the product, while “สิ่งดีๆ” (a good thing) suggests care for or the preservation of one's health. In this context, “คนที่คุณรัก” (people you love) may refer to a significant other, a family member, or another important individual, further appealing to emotional connections.

Although expressives and declaratives were not utilized in this study, they may be employed in other media, such as television advertisements or promotional videos. These two illocutionary acts may be less suitable for advertising language in a poster form. Expressives require the reflection of emotions and attitudes, while declaratives aim to provoke sudden actions—factors that may not align with the objectives of written advertising. As Mongkolyos (2017) emphasizes, advertising language must be creative and distinctive to attract customers. Additionally, it should effectively convey the product's identity by highlighting its benefits, identifying the main ingredients, and prominently displaying the company's name.

However, interpreting a headline in an advertising poster necessitates consideration of the poster's overall context, including the product and an accompanying image. Ekapanyakul (2020) notes that images and text are the most frequently employed elements in poster design, working together to communicate the intended message. To fully grasp the creator's intended communication, audiences must engage with both elements simultaneously. Moreover, examining the product's details—including its target customers and key features—is essential for the accurate understanding and interpreting of the utterances used in advertising posters.

Therefore, analyzing speech acts in advertising posters requires a comprehensive approach that considers context, product information, and visual presentation. According to Panyamaytheekul (2015), advertisers employ various linguistic techniques to persuade consumers, leveraging both language and imagery to encourage product purchases.



Discussion

This research not only serves as a linguistic analysis but also reveals critical insights into persuasive strategies in advertising. The findings align with related studies, reinforcing the importance of speech acts in effective advertisements. communication:

Sukarini (2022) argues that speech acts effectively convey messages and encourage audience engagement. This study reveals that representatives is the dominant form of illocutionary act used and this finding supports this assertion, as it provides essential information while persuading consumers.

Siripen (2017) identifies key illocutionary acts in advertising and emphasizes the use of representatives to convey valuable information. The results of this study support Siripen's findings by demonstrating how representatives play a crucial role in influencing consumer decision-making.

With the emergence of online platforms, as noted by Cabigting et al. (2022), this research illustrates how e-commerce businesses like Lazada utilize strategic language to shape consumer behavior effectively. The use of compelling and descriptive language resonates with consumers in a saturated digital marketplace.

In conclusion, this study enhances the understanding of linguistic strategies in Thai food advertising, particularly highlighting the dominance of representative speech acts and the nuanced utilization of directives and commissive acts. These insights, when compared with existing literature, illustrate the critical role of language in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors across various advertising contexts.

6. Recommendations

Future research should extend beyond food advertising posters to explore other media, such as interviews, movies, and comics, by utilizing Searle's speech act theory. This broader approach would offer deeper insights into how speech acts function across diverse communicative contexts. Additionally, the analysis of Thai food advertising posters could benefit from alternative linguistic frameworks, such as sociolinguistics and cognitive linguistics, to investigate the social and cognitive factors that shape marketing language. These perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how language reflects cultural norms, consumer behavior, and cognitive processing in advertising. Lastly, conducting a comparative study of food advertising posters in English using Searle's theory would further illuminate linguistic and cultural differences in persuasive strategies. Such research could offer a broader perspective on how advertising language varies across cultures, enhancing cross-cultural marketing strategies and deepening the understanding of global advertising practices.

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