

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Commands are expressions used to tell someone to do something in communication. A command can be very direct, like saying *close the door!*, or more indirect, like *it is cold in here*. Even though the form is different, the purpose is the same, which is to make the other person do something. If a person commands other people, they expect the addressee to comply. Meaning, a command will only be effective if the speaker is in a higher hierarchy than the addressee.

Commands are one of the most common types of speech acts we use in daily life, which belong to what experts call directive speech acts, utterances meant to get someone else to do something. Directives are types of speech acts that a person uses to convey their wants and needs to someone else. Here are some examples of directives speech act/command; 1) *Gimme a cup of coffee. Make it black.*, 2) *You are standing in front of the TV* (Yule, 1996, pp. 54–55). As stated in example 1), the person who utters the sentences told the other person to make him/her a black coffee. This counts as an imperative sentence or a direct speech act, as the speaker gives the command to the hearer in a direct manner without any implicational words/meanings. However, example 2) serves a different explanation. The speaker told the hearer that he was standing in front of the TV, which looked like an act of giving information. However, what the speaker truly meant was for the hearer to move, as he was blocking the speaker's vision. Thus, it counts as a declarative sentence or an indirect speech act. Usually, when we think about commands, we imagine someone in a position of higher authority, like a teacher or parent, giving instructions to someone below them in the social hierarchy. However, not all commands fit this picture. Sometimes, people give commands to

peers or even superiors, and they do not always sound like orders. They can be wrapped in humor, disguised as suggestions, or delivered casually in everyday conversations.

That is why this research turns to *Impractical Jokers*, an American reality TV show where four lifelong friends challenge each other with awkward or embarrassing tasks in public. They are referred to as “Jokers,” in which their goal is to accomplish the missions given by other Jokers who are watching from behind the scenes through surveillance cameras. The challenged Joker is expected to embarrass himself in various public places. At the end of the game, he will receive either a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down based on his performance. If a Joker refuses to do the missions or challenges, he will be given a thumbs-down immediately. The Joker who received the most thumbs-down must receive a punishment. What makes this show fascinating is the way commands are given, not in serious or formal contexts, but as part of a game that blends performance, friendship, and humor. A cast member might say something like, go yell out loud right now! which is technically a command, but because it is done among friends and in a humorous setting, the social dynamics change completely.

This mix of seriousness and play, authority and equality, is what makes *Impractical Jokers* such rich material for studying how people give commands and how others respond. It reflects a situation where communication is both spontaneous and performative. The language used is not scripted, allowing us to see how people improvise with their words in real-time situations. Commands in this show are part of a social game, and humor is used to soften or even disguise the directness of those commands.

In analyzing commands, it is important to distinguish their types, whether they are delivered directly or indirectly. Another thing that should be distinguished is their forms. It should be clear whether they are delivered as imperatives, declaratives, or interrogatives.

These aspects help explain how the same intention can be delivered through different structures, depending on the context. In humorous and casual settings, this variation becomes even more meaningful, as the form of a command can affect how it is perceived.

Although studies on commands have been done before, mostly focusing on scripted films or cartoons, there has not been much attention given to real-life and unscripted interactions like the ones found in *Impractical Jokers*. Reality shows, by nature, offer something different. They reveal how people talk when they are under pressure, trying to be funny, or just being themselves in front of hidden cameras. This research hopes to explore how the use of commands in this show reveals more than just language patterns. It shows how people use language strategically in social play and peer dynamics.

This study aims to understand how commands work when traditional social rules are bent for the sake of humor, by analyzing the types and forms of commands based on speech act theory. In doing so, the research will contribute to the broader field of pragmatics, offering insights into how communication adapts in informal, unconventional, and playful situations.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Speech act of command or just a command in general can be found easily in daily life. People use it to get someone to do something for them. However, it is also interesting to observe that commands can be used creatively among peers, especially in humorous and informal situations. Studying how these commands appear both in their types and forms, can give deeper insights into how people express intentions in different contexts. Thus, these two questions were derived from the research:

1. What forms of commands are used by the cast of *Impractical Jokers*?
2. What types of commands are used by the cast in delivering the commands?

### 1.3 Objective of the Research

In general, this thesis aims to find out what types and forms of commands are used by the Jokers in the show *Impractical Jokers* and how these commands function in humorous peer interactions. The two main purposes of conducting this research are:

1. To analyze the forms of commands used by the cast of *Impractical Jokers*.
2. To identify the types used in delivering the commands.

### 1.4 Focus of the Research

This research focuses only on the command utterances that are spoken by the main cast of *Impractical Jokers* in selected scenes. In addition to the four main cast members (the Jokers), the show features numerous unexpected members of the public who unknowingly interact with the Jokers during the challenges. These individuals serve as participants in spontaneous social interactions, responding in real time to the Jokers' actions or commands. In the selected episodes, approximately 10–15 such individuals appear per episode, typically as customers or staff in grocery store settings.

This research specifically focuses on identifying the types and forms of commands used in grocery store challenges, as this setting provided recurring interaction patterns, routine public behaviour, and relatively equal social positions between the Jokers and the civilians. These conditions allow command utterances to emerge naturally, without formal authority, making them suitable for analyzing how commands are delivered and responded to in everyday public interactions. This research refers to speech act theory and the classification of command forms based on syntactic structure.

### 1.5 Method of the Research

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. The data are taken from spoken utterances that appear in the reality show *Impractical Jokers*, especially those that contain

command expressions. The method is used to describe how the commands are used. Additionally, it will also describe how the forms of command are structured in the interaction.

### 1.5.1 Data Collection

(Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 30) state that qualitative research is descriptive, meaning that the data collected are in the form of words or images rather than numbers. This research applies a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. The data for this study are taken from an American reality television show, *Impractical Jokers*. Rather than selecting episodes based solely on sequence, this research applies a theme-based sampling approach by focusing on all grocery store challenge segments found in Season 1 and 2.

*Impractical Jokers* currently consists of thirteen seasons in which the Jokers perform a wide variety of challenges in public settings, including grocery stores, parks, shopping malls, restaurants, and retail stores. Since the interactional settings vary considerably across the series, this study does not analyze the entire show. Instead, it applies a theme-based sampling approach by selecting all grocery store challenge segments found in Season 1 and 2. These segments were chosen because they provide the largest number of command utterances within a relatively consistent interactional setting, allowing the researcher to examine command speech acts under comparable communicative conditions.

The grocery store setting was selected because it provides recurring interactional patterns, similar task structures, and a consistent public environment. These conditions allow for more controlled comparison in analyzing how command utterances are produced in spontaneous interactions. The data are in the form of spoken utterances produced by the Jokers during these challenge segments. However, not all utterances are included. Only utterances that function as command speech acts, namely utterances that carry directive

illocutionary force and are intended to make the hearer perform an action, are selected as the data for analysis.

The participants in this study are the four main cast members of *Impractical Jokers*, referred to as the Jokers, who interact with each other and with civilians in public settings. The civilians serve as interlocutors who respond naturally to the Jokers' utterances. There were no preparations made in advance, such as informing or requesting participation from the individuals involved, since the data are obtained from a publicly broadcast television program. *Impractical Jokers* was chosen as the data source because it features unscripted and spontaneous interactions, allowing the researcher to observe naturally occurring speech acts.

Research instruments are essential components in language research, functioning as tools to collect and analyze data. In this study, observation and note-taking are used as the primary instruments. The researcher acts as the main instrument in identifying, selecting, and recording relevant utterances. To collect the data, several steps were taken. First, all grocery store challenge segments in Season 1 and 2 were identified. Second, the selected segments were carefully watched and re-watched to ensure accurate observation. Third, utterances that function as command speech acts were identified and noted. Finally, orthographic transcription was conducted to document the utterances systematically for further classification and analysis.

### **1.5.2 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of systematically applying qualitative techniques to describe, interpret, and evaluate the data. After the command utterances were collected from all grocery store challenge segments in Season 1 and 2 of *Impractical Jokers*, the data were organized into tables for classification and analysis. The dataset consists of 47 utterances that function as command speech acts.

This study applies speech act theory proposed by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), supported by Yule (1996), to analyze the collected data. The analysis is conducted in accordance with the research questions. Since speech act analysis begins with the linguistic realization of an utterance before interpreting its communicative function, the command utterances are analyzed in two stages.

First, the utterances are analyzed based on their grammatical forms, namely whether they are realized as imperative, interrogative, or declarative structures. This stage focuses on the locutionary aspect of the utterance, specifically its grammatical realization. Second, after the grammatical forms have been identified, each utterance is analyzed in terms of its command type to determine whether it functions as a direct or indirect command. This classification is based on the speaker's illocutionary force, namely the intention to make the hearer perform an action.

To ensure systematic analysis, the following steps were applied:

- 1) Identifying utterances that function as command speech acts.
- 2) Classifying the identified utterances according to their grammatical forms (imperative, interrogative, or declarative).
- 3) Determining the command types (direct or indirect) based on the illocutionary force of each utterance.
- 4) Interpreting each utterance by considering its contextual factors, including the relationship between the speakers, social distance, and the situational context of the grocery store challenges.

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

**Speech Act:** A linguistic utterance that performs an action, such as requesting, commanding, or apologizing.

**Command:** A directive speech act that expresses an attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.

**Impractical Jokers:** An American unscripted comedy TV show in which four friends challenge each other with humorous and often embarrassing public tasks, providing naturally occurring examples of directive speech acts.

