

## SPEECH ACT BEHAVIOR OF GENERATION Z TIKTOK USERS IN COMMUNICATION WITH PARENTS IN PEMATANG GAJING VILLAGE SIMALUNGUN

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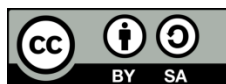
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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the speech act behavior of Generation Z TikTok users in communication with their parents in Pematang Gajing Village, Simalungun Regency. The increasing use of TikTok among Indonesian Gen Z has encouraged the transfer of slang expressions, body gestures, and facial expressions from digital content into everyday face-to-face interaction, including within family communication. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews and observation involving six Gen Z informants and six parents as supporting informants. Data were analysed using Austin and Searle's speech act theory through the dimensions of locution, illocution, and perlocution. The findings reveal three patterns of intergenerational communication dynamics: semantic gaps that trigger conflict, positive adaptation that strengthens relationships, and violations of relational norms that lead to serious tension. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on rural intergenerational communication within a strong traditional cultural setting, showing that the transfer of TikTok-mediated communication styles does not merely create linguistic shifts but also reconfigures family relational norms. This study contributes to pragmatic and sociolinguistic scholarship by demonstrating that parental openness is a key variable in determining whether digital speech patterns produce conflict or relational adaptation in family communication.*

**Keywords:** *Speech Act, Generation Z, TikTok, Intergenerational Communication.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of short video-based social media has transformed the way young people construct their identities, express their emotions, and practice everyday communication. TikTok can no longer be understood solely as an entertainment platform, but rather as an information and cultural space that shapes the attention patterns, expressive styles, and interaction habits of its users. In this context, Generation Z holds a crucial position because they grew up as digital natives with a high affinity for digital media and social networks, making it easier to absorb communication patterns circulating

through the platform. TikTok's memetic character, content imitation, and algorithmic logic also enable certain language, gestures, and expressions to be quickly reproduced and normalized in the daily lives of young users (Chang & Chang, 2023; Lee et al., 2025; O'Brien et al., 2025).

This transformation does not stop online but extends to offline interactions, including communication within families. Research on family communication patterns in Indonesia shows that the presence of digital technology has changed the way family members interact across generations, while simultaneously giving rise to shifts in the meaning of symbols, challenges in the quality of face-to-face communication, and the need for value adjustments in family life. At the same time, studies on family communication also show that the effectiveness of interactions between parents and children in the digital age is greatly influenced by active mediation, openness, and the ability of both parties to understand the changing communication context. Therefore, family communication in the digital age is not simply a matter of frequency of interaction, but also a matter of interpreting meaning and negotiating intergenerational norms (Kertamukti, 2025; Rutkowski et al., 2021).

However, previous studies tend to focus the issue of digital media within families on issues of supervision, parental mediation, perceptions of social media, or the psychosocial impact of digital communication. Several studies highlight that parents' experience with social media influences their monitoring patterns toward their children, while barriers to mediation are often related to values of trust, adolescent autonomy, and concerns about family conflict. Other research indicates that digital communication between parents and children has become a common practice, but the quality of its impact is determined more by the type of communication content than simply its frequency. This trend suggests that discussions of parent-child relationships remain largely confined to the media management level, without specifically examining speech behavior when TikTok's language and expressive styles are introduced into face-to-face family communication (Trager et al., 2025; Wallace, 2022; Young et al., 2024).

This gap in research becomes even more significant when placed within the context of rural families, which still adhere to hierarchical communication norms and a culture of respect for elders. Classic research on intergenerational family communication in rural settings demonstrates distinct differences in perceptions between younger and older generations regarding communication issues, family communication resources, and communication satisfaction. In the Indonesian context, changes in family communication patterns due to digital technology are not always linear, as families retain local cultural values that influence how symbols, language, and expressions are interpreted. Therefore, when TikTok's distinctive expressions enter rural family spaces, the issue lies not only in whether the message is understood, but also in whether the form of speech aligns with local relational norms and communication ethics (Kertamukti, 2025; Weigel & Weigel, 1993).

In such situations, speech act theory becomes relevant because it allows for analysis of communication not only at the level of spoken words, but also at the speaker's intended meaning and the social impact it has on the interlocutor. This theory positions speech as a social act with locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions, making it highly appropriate for analyzing how slang, gestures, or expressions considered normal by Gen

Z may be perceived differently by their parents. By using a speech act perspective, research can move beyond merely descriptive explanations of TikTok use to a more in-depth analysis of the clash of meanings, the functions of speech, and the relational consequences of intergenerational communication (Safitri et al., 2021).

Based on the above description, the gap in this research lies in the limited number of studies that directly connect TikTok communication culture, Generation Z speech behavior, and face-to-face communication with parents in a traditional rural context. This research is therefore directed at analyzing how slang, body gestures, and expressions internalized from TikTok are manifested in Generation Z speech acts when communicating with parents in Pematang Gajing Village, Simalungun Regency. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of pragmatics, intergenerational communication, and rural cultural contexts to explain that the shift of digital expressions into the family space not only results in linguistic changes but also influences the structure of meaning, relationships, and communication norms within families in the digital era (Lee et al., 2025; O'Brien et al., 2025; Weigel & Weigel, 1993).

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive approach, aiming to deeply understand how communication styles internalized from TikTok are manifested in Generation Z's speech acts when interacting with parents in a rural family context. The research location was Pematang Gajing Village, Gunung Malela District, Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra, as this village represents a social space that still maintains hierarchical intergenerational communication norms, making it relevant for analyzing the clash between digital expression and family communication ethics. The study was conducted from January to March 2026. Informants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: belonging to Generation Z, residing in Pematang Gajing Village, living with their parents, actively using TikTok, and demonstrating a tendency to use slang, gestures, or expressions derived from the platform in everyday communication. The criterion of using TikTok for at least four hours per day was not set arbitrarily, but rather as a threshold for intensive exposure so that informants truly represent users with high levels of engagement, allowing researchers to more clearly observe the process of internalizing digital content into offline communication behavior.

This study involved twelve informants, consisting of six primary informants from Generation Z and six parents as supporting informants. This number was deemed adequate because the data obtained demonstrated recurring patterns, particularly regarding utterance forms, illocutionary intent, parental responses, and relational consequences that emerge in intergenerational communication. Therefore, the adequacy of informants was determined based on the principles of depth of information and the achievement of thematic saturation, not solely on the number of participants. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews allowed researchers to explore experiences, the context in which TikTok language or gestures were used, their frequency within the family, and parental responses to such behavior. Direct observations were conducted in everyday interaction situations at home or in the surrounding environment, focusing on locutionary forms, illocutionary intent, and perlocutionary effects evident in communication between

children and parents. Documentation was used to corroborate field notes, interview transcripts, and observations throughout the research process.

This study also adhered to ethical procedures to ensure the data collection process was conducted safely and responsibly. Prior to the interviews and observations, all informants received an explanation of the research objectives, the nature of their involvement, and the right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time. Informants' consent was given consciously, and their identities were kept confidential by using pseudonyms or only displaying information relevant to the analysis. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, namely through the iterative stages of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Next, the data were interpreted using Austin and Searle's speech act theory to identify the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions in intergenerational communication. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checking, so that the resulting interpretations were not only based on the researcher's views but also received confirmation from the informants involved.

### 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

#### **TikTok Language and Gesture Internalization Patterns among Gen Z**

All Gen Z informants in Pematang Gajing Village demonstrated a strong tendency to internalize communication elements from TikTok content into their daily lives. This internalization encompasses three dimensions: verbal slang, kinesic gestures, and a combination of the two. Findings indicate that the internalization process occurs through two distinct mechanisms. First, conscious internalization, where individuals intentionally adopt TikTok slang or gestures for specific social motivations, such as a desire to appear trendy or build closeness with peers. Second, habituation, where the use of slang or gestures, initially conscious, gradually transforms into spontaneous and automatic behavior due to massive and repeated exposure to the content. TikTok usage duration ranged from 4 to 10 hours per day; the higher the intensity of exposure, the faster the conscious internalization transitioned into habituation. Rafadli (18, a university student), with 10 hours per day, was the highest-intensity user and the strongest case of habituation in this study.

In the verbal dimension, Asty Eradita (22 years old) adopted the word "anjay" from TikTok entertainment content as an interjection of admiration. She stated, "I'm interested in saying that because it's fun to have anjay in every conversation, making it more relaxed and also to keep up with the times." Shazlin Fazhira (25 years old) adopted the word "slebew" accompanied by a crossed hand gesture from a TikTok artist's vlog, which was initially conscious but turned into a spontaneous response. Beby Janiari (19 years old) used the word "slay" learned from TikTok's comment section consciously as a social strategy. Tia Velysa (19 years old) used the phrases "santai aja cuy" and "ayu healing" which were initially conscious but became spontaneous with the intensity of content consumption.

In the non-verbal dimension, Tria Aningrum (21 years old) imitated the "metal" gesture (thumb, index finger, and little finger raised) as a reflexive expression of appreciation and pleasure. Rafadli Ramadhan Pohan (18 years old) consciously imitated the Thai dance

"pakpongpong" due to his admiration for the content. This finding aligns with research (Nisa et al., 2024) that found that intensive exposure to TikTok content encourages imitation of slang, gestures, and facial expressions, which are then internalized in everyday life.

Overall, the internalization profiles of the six informants can be summarized in the following table.

Table 1: Summary of TikTok Content Internalization Profiles for All Gen Z Informants

Informant	TikTok duration/day	Behavior Adopted from TikTok	Internalization Mechanism	Dimension
Asty Eradita (22 th)	±5 hour	The word "anjay" as an interjection of admiration	Habituation	Verbal
Shazlin Fazhira (25 th)	±6 hour	The word "slebew" + crossed hand gesture	Habituation	Verbal + Non-verbal
Tria Aningrum (21 th)	±4 hour	The "metal" gesture as an expression of appreciation	Habituation	Non-verbal
Beby Janiari (19 th)	±5 hour	The word "slay" as an aesthetic assessment	Conscious Internalization	Verbal
Tia Velysa (19 th)	±6 hour	The phrases "ayu healing" and "santai aja dude"	Habituation	Verbal
Rafadli R. Pohan (18 th)	±10 hour	The "pakpongpong" dance as an expression of annoyance	Conscious Internalization → Habituation	Non-verbal

The internalization profile above indicates that communication behaviors adopted from TikTok have become part of the six informants' daily repertoire. The next question that needs to be answered is how do these internalized behaviors impact Gen Z when they interact directly with their parents? This question is answered through speech act analysis in the following section.

### **Illocutionary Acts and Intergenerational Communication Patterns of Gen Z**

To understand how Gen Z speech act behaviors adopted from TikTok impact direct communication with parents, this study conducted speech act analysis of interview and observation data from the six informants. This analysis aimed to identify the illocutionary forms used by Gen Z and the perlocutionary acts produced in intergenerational interactions in Pematang Gajing Village. The data obtained were then mapped using the Austin-Searle speech act framework to identify emerging communication dynamics. The results of this analysis are presented through an intergenerational illocutionary framework and summarized in the following table.

Figure 1: Intergenerational Illocutionary Speech Act Framework in Pematang Gajing Village, Simalungun



The figure above shows the intergenerational illocutionary speech act framework formed from the research data analysis. At the top of the framework are the main categories of speech acts used by Gen Z TikTok users with their parents. These main categories then branch out into Searle's five types of illocutionary speech acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. Each of these illocutionary acts produces three dynamic patterns of intergenerational communication: semantic gaps that lead to conflict, positive adaptations that strengthen relationships, and violations of relational norms that result in serious conflict. This structure demonstrates that the perlocutionary acts produced by Gen Z speech acts are not singular but are determined by a combination of the illocutionary types used and the prevailing relational context.

Table 2: Summary of Speech Act Analysis for All Informants

Informant	TikTok Behavior (Locution)	Illocution (Intent)	Perlocution (Impact)	Dynamic Patterns
Asty	"Anjay" (verbal)	Expressive: spontaneous admiration	Parents are angry, communication distance	Semantic conflict
Shazlin	"Slebew" gesture (verbal + nonverbal)	Commissive: maintaining the flow of conversation	Parents are confused and offended, emotional distance	Semantic conflict
Tria	Metal gesture (nonverbal)	Expressive: joking, creating cheerfulness	Parents respond positively, relationship grows closer	Positive adaptation
Beby	"Slay" (verbal)	Assertive: aesthetic judgment	Parents misunderstand, minor conflict, then successful clarification	Successful value negotiation

Tia	"Let's heal" (verbal)	Directive: inviting someone to go for a walk	Parents don't understand and are offended, communication distance	Semantic conflict + norms
Rafadli	Pakpongpong dance (nonverbal)	Expressive: expressing annoyance	Parents are disappointed, ignored for a day, serious relational distance	Relational norm violation

Based on the recapitulation in Table 2, the speech act analysis of the six cases yielded five illocutionary forms and three patterns of intergenerational communication dynamics. The following is a description of the analysis of each illocutionary form.

#### *Assertive Speech Acts*

Assertive speech acts are utterances that express the speaker's belief or viewpoint regarding a fact or real situation. In this study, assertive speech acts were evident in the case of Beby Janiari (19 years old). In an interview, Beby explained that her social media posts and everyday conversations often serve as ways to express her views or judgments. Beby stated that when she said, "People in soap operas are really slay, not really men," while watching soap operas with her mother, she only meant to express her aesthetic judgment of the soap opera characters' appearances.

Beby's statement demonstrates assertiveness because it conveys a direct view of a situation. However, the resulting perlocutionary impact did not go smoothly: her mother was confused and thought the word "slay" was offensive language, leading to a moment of tension. Informant Beby then provided an explanation, and the misunderstanding cleared up, indicating a successful negotiation of values. This demonstrates that assertive speech acts using TikTok vocabulary are not always immediately understood by parents, requiring additional clarification from Gen Z.

#### *Directive Speech Acts*

Directive speech acts are utterances aimed at getting the listener to do something, whether in the form of a request, invitation, command, or suggestion. Directive speech acts emerged in the conversation of informant Tia Velysa (19 years old). Tia explained in the interview that she often invites her parents to do certain activities using the language she learned from TikTok. She cited one example when she said, "Come on, Mom, let's heal. I'm bored, just staying home" to her mother when she was bored at home.

In Tia's narrative, she intended to invite her mother outside for a moment to refresh her mind, a speech act that encourages the listener to do something. However, her statement indicates that she did not consider whether her mother understood the word "healing" in that context. As a result, her mother didn't understand the word, felt confused, and was slightly offended because Tia's way of speaking sounded like she was speaking to a peer, not a parent. Tia's case demonstrates that directive speech acts using TikTok vocabulary not only create a semantic gap but also violate the prevailing norms of intergenerational communication in Pematang Gajing Village.

### *Commissive Speech Acts*

Commissive speech acts are utterances that bind the speaker to a future action, such as a promise, commitment, or determination. In this study, commissive speech acts were found to be a response among Gen Z members following communication conflicts with their parents. This pattern was repeated in almost all informants who experienced conflict, including Tia Velysa, who, after being reprimanded, stated, "Yes, I promise I won't use those words with my parents again."

Although not always expressed in a direct sentence during the interviews, this commissive pattern reflects a common commitment made by informants after experiencing communication conflicts. This commissive speech act binds the speaker to future actions and has a positive impact on their perlocutionary behavior: parents feel valued, and family relationships gradually return to normal following Gen Z's commitment to adapting their speech patterns to their parents. These findings suggest that commissive speech acts play a crucial role as a mechanism for relational recovery following intergenerational conflict.

### *Expressive Speech Acts*

Expressive speech acts are utterances that express the speaker's inner feelings or attitudes, such as admiration, annoyance, joy, or disappointment. The most diverse manifestations of expressive speech acts in this study were found in the cases of Asty, Tria, and Rafadli. Informant Asty Eradita (22 years old) explained that she spontaneously said "Oh my, that's so cool, Mom!" during a casual conversation with her mother as an expression of admiration. Asty stated that within the TikTok user community, the word functions as a neutral and pleasant interjection. However, for her mother, the word has a negative connotation, causing her to become angry and reluctant to continue the conversation.

Informant Tria Aningrum (21 years old) explained that she used the metal gesture while jokingly teasing her mother while she was cooking. Tria stated that she used the gesture to express joy and a desire to create a cheerful atmosphere at home, being expressive and playful without any specific message. Her perlocutionary effect was positive: her mother responded with the same gesture even though she didn't fully understand its meaning, resulting in a warm atmosphere and a closer relationship between the two.

In contrast to these two cases, informant Rafadli Ramadhan Pohan (18 years old) admitted in an interview that when his mother was reprimanding him and repeating orders, he spontaneously performed the pakpongpong dance, a dance he learned on TikTok, as a way to express his frustration. Rafadli explained that the gesture just happened without him planning it. As a result, his mother was very disappointed and offended, considered it a lack of respect, and then ignored Rafadli for an entire day.

### *Declarative Speech Acts*

Declarative speech acts are utterances that directly change a status or actual condition through speech. In this study, declarative speech acts occur when parents directly affirm the communication norms that apply within the family. Statements such as "If you talk to

elders in this village, you have to be polite. That's the rule" not only state something but performatively establish or update the rules that bind Gen Z within the family.

These declarative speech acts originate from the informant's parents, as those with normative authority within the family. The perlocutionary act is normative: all Gen Z informants stated that they knew and acknowledged the norm that communication with elders in the village should use polite and understandable language. This declarative speech act also serves as a reaffirmation of broader communal norms, reflecting the strong normative pressures of rural communities in regulating intergenerational communication patterns.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the internalization of TikTok slang and gestures into family communication is not simply a symptom of linguistic imitation, but rather a process of forming a new communication repertoire in Generation Z. In the context of Pematang Gajing Village, this repertoire is present through words, phrases, and nonverbal expressions initially learned from digital content and then re-practiced in face-to-face interactions with parents. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the view that social media is not only a medium for distributing messages but also an arena for the production of communication styles, identities, and expressive habits of young users. Thus, TikTok functions as a symbolic socialization space that shapes how Gen Z speaks, reacts, and displays emotions in everyday life (Deviona & Alamiyah, 2024; Nisa et al., 2024). Within the framework of speech acts, this shift is significant because seemingly simple locutions carry different illocutionary and perlocutionary consequences when transferred from the digital space to the family room.

At this point, the main issue revealed is not simply the use of new vocabulary, but rather the emergence of a semantic gap between generations. Words like "anjay," "slay," "slebew," or "healing" are understood by Gen Z as symbols of familiarity, spontaneous expression, or a relaxed style of speech, but this is not always the case for older people. From Austin and Searle's perspective, this difference demonstrates that the success of a speech act is not limited to what is said, but also depends on whether the interlocutor shares a shared framework for interpreting the speaker's illocutionary intent. When this semantic framework is not shared, the resulting perlocutionary process is not understanding, but rather confusion, misinterpretation, and even conflict. This finding aligns with studies by Budiana et al. (2025) and Mikraj et al. (2025), which assert that digital slang tends to widen the gap in meaning between younger and older generations, especially when digital terms are introduced into direct communication contexts that demand adherence to certain social norms.

However, this research demonstrates that this clash of meanings cannot be explained solely as a linguistic issue. In rural contexts like Pematang Gajing Village, language is always linked to relational ethics, namely how one positions oneself in the presence of elders. Therefore, the communication failures that emerged in the cases of Tia, Asty, and Rafadli were not only caused by parents' inability to understand TikTok terminology, but also by the speech styles and expressions they used, which were perceived as shifting the hierarchy of politeness within the family. In other words, what was disrupted was not just the transmission of messages, but also the very fabric of relationships. This finding

deepens Handayani et al.'s (2025) study on intergenerational communication by showing that in traditional families, overly egalitarian forms of speech can be interpreted as a violation of norms even if their literal content is not intended to be offensive. This is where the sociolinguistic contribution of this study becomes apparent: that the meaning of utterances is always co-produced by language, cultural context, and the structure of social relations.

Another crucial dimension is the mechanism of habituation. Field findings indicate that some Gen Z communication behaviors no longer emerge as fully conscious choices but have become spontaneous responses resulting from repeated exposure to TikTok content. This is particularly evident in the use of automatic verbal expressions and nonverbal gestures that occur without full consideration of the context of the interlocutor. From a pragmatic perspective, this explains why speakers may be aware of politeness norms but still fail to apply them consistently in real interactions. Digital habituation causes language acts to precede speakers' social reflections. This explanation is consistent with Nisa et al.'s (2024) findings regarding behavioral transformations resulting from exposure to TikTok, and also supports Deviona and Alamiyah's (2024) argument that Gen Z's communication style on social media tends to be performative, fast-paced, and expressive, making it easily carried over to other social spaces without adequate normative filtering.

However, this discussion also demonstrates that intergenerational communication does not always end in conflict. Tria's case demonstrates that when parents have a more open disposition, expressions derived from digital culture can be negotiated into warm interactions and even strengthen relationships. This finding is important because it demonstrates that the perlocutionary nature of speech acts is not solely determined by the type of illocution, but also by the listener's emotional and interpretive readiness. In other words, parents are not passive parties in the communication process, but rather actors who contribute to determining whether their child's speech is interpreted as a threat to norms or as an acceptable form of generational expression. This finding expands on the study by Hasibuan et al. (2023), which highlighted changes in communication behavior due to social media, adding that parental openness serves as a mediating variable that can mitigate the clash between digital language and family values.

This research confirms that intergenerational communication in the digital era is an arena of continuous negotiation between platform culture and family norms. From a pragmatic perspective, this finding enriches the use of speech act theory because it demonstrates that illocutionary and perlocutionary speech cannot be interpreted separately from the local cultural context. From an analytical perspective, some forms of speech that previously appeared to be readily classified into specific illocutionary categories actually require careful reading based on their dominant function within the conversational context. Therefore, this discussion emphasizes that the primary focus is not on categorical labeling alone, but rather on how TikTok utterances and gestures operate socially in generating semantic conflict, positive adaptation, or violations of relational norms. Thus, the main contribution of this study lies in explaining that the transfer of communication styles from TikTok to family communication in rural areas not only creates linguistic changes but also reexamines the boundaries of respect, closeness, and authority in parent-child relationships (Searle et al., 1980; Handayani et al., 2025; Mikraj et al., 2025).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the speech behavior of Generation Z TikTok users in communicating with their parents in Pematang Gajing Village is formed through the internalization of slang and digital gestures that occur consciously and through habituation, then giving rise to three main patterns of intergenerational communication dynamics, namely semantic gaps that trigger conflict, positive adaptations that strengthen relationships, and violations of relational norms that cause serious tension. Theoretically, this finding confirms that pragmatic studies, especially speech act theory, need to be read together with a sociolinguistic perspective because the meaning of utterances is not only determined by the speaker's intention, but also by the cultural context, relationship structure, and the ability of the interlocutor to interpret new generational expressions. Practically, this study shows the importance of Generation Z's ability to adapt communication styles to the family context and the importance of parental openness in understanding changes in language and digital expressions, so that family communication in the digital era remains warm, respectful, and dialogical.

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