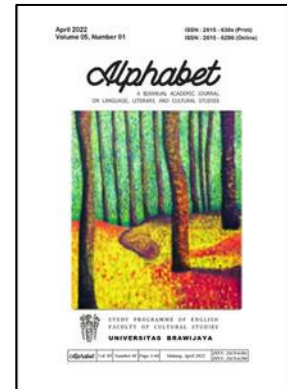


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Assertive Acts in Premier's Reading Challenge: Portraying an Australian Muslim Writer's Concerns of the World

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Alphabet / Volume 05 / Number 01 / April 2022, pp. 20-32
doi: 10.21776/ub.alphabet.2022.05.01.03, Published online: April 2022

How to cite this article :

Tania, S.B. & Rohmah, Z. (2022). Assertive acts in Premier's Reading Challenge: Portraying an Australian muslim writer's concerns of the world. *Alphabet*, 05(01), 20-32. doi: 10.21776/ub.alphabet.2022.05.01.03

Assertive Acts in Premier's Reading Challenge: Portraying an Australian Muslim Writer's Concerns of the World

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Program of English, Faculty of
Cultural Studies, Universitas
Brawijaya

ISSN: 2615-630X (print)
2615-6296 (online)
Vol. 05, No. 01

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Abstract

An interview is a discourse between the interviewer and the interviewee with the goal of exchanging information. Seen from the perspective of speech act's theory, one of the functions of an interview is to deliver information from the speaker to the hearer where assertive acts are prominent. However, research on assertive acts to date has devoted little attention to the Islamic discourse. Therefore, this present study discusses assertive acts uttered by the guest speaker talking about her work and experiences as a Muslim living in Australia. This current study collected data from the transcription of a New South Wales Premier's Reading Challenge interview with Randa Abdel-Fattah episode. This study applied descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis in approaching data. In analyzing the data, the researchers were indebted to Searle and Kreidler, especially on their classifications of assertive acts. The results show seven types of assertive acts noticeable in Randa Abdel-Fattah's responses to the interview with *telling* as the most often evident act.

Keywords:

Assertive Acts, Illocutionary Act, Islamic Messages, Muslim Writer, Speech Act

When both speakers and listeners comprehend the intent behind an utterance, communication becomes meaningful. People not only convey information, thoughts, feelings, or ideas through their words, but also perform some actions. Thus, the hearer is expected to properly interpret the speaker's utterances to understand the intended message. Performing an action through an utterance is called a speech act (Yule, 2010, p. 133).

As the title suggests, this study is a pragmatics study focusing on illocutionary

acts, particularly assertive acts. The concept of the assertive act was proposed by John R. Searle, developed from Austin's (1962) speech act categorization: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary act. Searle (1976) then refined this concept and classified the illocutionary act into five basic kinds of action: representatives or assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. According to Searle, assertive acts commit the speaker to the certainty or truth of conveyed statement; the speaker believes the statement to be true (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.) (Levinson, 1983, p. 240).

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Therefore, assertive acts commonly occur in conversations.

Several studies on assertive acts have been conducted on various discourses to analyze their use and functions, such as in prominent figure's speeches (Rohid & Mahdi, 2018; Ramadhani et al., 2019), talk show programs (Suryanti & Irma, 2019), indirect conversations between call center with the customers (Anam et al., 2019), interviews (Izar et al., 2020; Haucsa et al., 2020), movie (Rizki & Golubović, 2020; Suyono & Widiastuti, 2021), Muslim preach (Annahlia et al., 2020), comic (Sugianto et al., 2020), local guide's utterances (Indrawati et al., 2021), and teacher's utterances in EFL classes (Milal & Kusumajanti, 2020). Those earlier studies have found the use of assertive acts from either real-life conversations or fictional dialogues. All of the previous studies on assertive acts devoted little or no attention to the Islamic discourse. This recent study aims to fill this gap by analyzing an interview conducted by New South Wales (NSW) Premier's Reading Challenge with a Muslim writer, Randa Abdel-Fattah, related to her fictional books entitled 'When Michael Met Mina,' 'Does My Head Looks Big in This?,' 'Ten Things I Hate about Me,' and 'Where the Streets Had a Name,' which introduce Islam as a culture that needs to be paid attention and promotes multiculturalism.

Furthermore, to the best of the researchers' knowledge concerning the Islamic discourse, there was only one study conducted by Sugianto, Zulfa, and Purwanto (2020) that focused on how assertive acts were used to teach religious values through an Islamic-oriented comic. The study observed the characters' dialogue by borrowing Searle's speech act theory. The assertive act types found in the conversation include: telling (providing logical dialogue), reporting (including responsibility), declaring (attitude towards something good), predicting (giving awareness of something that might happen), and bragging (constructing something considered wrong and needs to be fixed). The study revealed that assertive acts in the comic

had the power to convey good messages (Sugianto et al., 2020). This means that assertive acts could be performed to teach people Islamic values, Islamic views of the world, and positive messages through Islamic-oriented discourses.

By considering the argument mentioned above that assertive acts have the power to deliver Islamic values and good messages, this current study focuses on Randa Abdel-Fattah's speech during her interview with the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education regarding her fictional Islamic books. The researchers believe that the writer tries to convey the overall messages she wishes to communicate in her works through the interview. The researchers also believe that the writer tries to deliver how concerns of religion, race, and identity are addressed in Australia within the Muslim communities, in this case, through assertive acts.

This study aims to describe the types of assertive acts uttered by Randa Abdel-Fattah, an Australian Muslim writer, in her fictional Islamic books interview with the NSW Department of Education. Many studies have been conducted to discuss the types and functions of assertive acts spoken by different people in various discourses. Meanwhile, only limited studies focused on assertive acts spoken by a Muslim in an Islamic discussion. Amidst those limited discussions are suggestion acts by Islamic Preachers or *Da'i* (Nugroho et al., 2018), another illocutionary acts study on an Islamic preacher (Annahlia et al., 2020), and speech acts study on Omar Mukhtar's utterances in *Lion of the Desert* movie (Rizki & Golubović, 2020).

Nugroho, Tarjana, and Purnanto (2018) found that Islamic Preachers (*Da'i*) in dialogic *da'wah* in the city of Surakarta tended to use speech acts of suggestion, namely imperative, providing options, impersonal, hedging, and hints. Because of the powerful influence carried by the experts in the aspect of religion, as well as *da'i*'s aims to lessen the level of facial threats to the *mad'u*'s questions, those types of suggestions were commonly

employed (Nugroho et al., 2018). Annahlia, Edward, and Fauzi (2020) also conducted a study on an Islamic preacher. The study aimed to investigate Zakir Naik's illocutionary acts in his speech/preach about Islam's view on terrorism and *jihad*. The study found that most uttered illocutionary acts were representative or assertive: stating, asserting, predicting, answering, calling, and retelling. Based on the study's result, Zakir Naik used representative acts to clarify and educate the audience not to misunderstand the message (Annahlia et al., 2020).

Moreover, Rizki & Golubović (2020) analyzed Omar Mukhtar's utterances in *Lion of the Desert* Movie. The study focused on all four of John R. Searle's (1976) speech acts types: representative (or assertive), directive, commissive, and expressive. Among all four classifications, representative acts were primarily spoken by the main character. It could be found in scenarios where he talked to express his faith in Allah, informed, foretold, predicted, or stated something (Rizki & Golubović, 2020). However, all those studies were focused on suggestions and all types of illocutionary acts. In contrast, this present study only focuses on assertive acts to make the analysis more narrowed down. In addition, none of the studies above takes the discourse of an interview with a Muslim writer.

Therefore, this current study aims to analyze the types of assertive acts spoken by Randa Abdel-Fattah, a Muslim writer from Australia, in an interview with the New South Wales Department of Education regarding her books, 'When Michael Met Mina,' 'Does My Head Looks Big in This?,' 'Ten Things I Hate about Me,' and 'Where the Streets Had a Name,' which are fictional multicultural books, introducing Islamic culture as one aspect of culture that needs consideration from Australian society. To limit the scope of discussion, the researchers focus on the types of assertive acts uttered by Randa Abdel-Fattah without concentrating on the interviewer's utterance. However, the interviewer's words are used to understand the

context. Moreover, the researchers do not cover the different two speech acts, both locutionary and perlocutionary acts. This study does not discuss other illocutionary acts such as directive, commissive, expressive, and declarations, either. Thus, this study focuses its analysis on the assertive acts which are notable features in the interviewee's account to tell about her works and her life related to her writing activities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Speech Acts

The main focus of speech act theory is on what individuals do with language in terms of its functions. Yule (1996) describes speech acts as "the actions performed by speakers through their utterances" (Yule, 1996, p. 133). The speakers intend the hearers to interpret or take the meaning of the utterance being conveyed. Thus, the hearers are expected to understand the actions being addressed to them. The speech act term depicts actions like informing, commanding, promising, questioning, or requesting. Further to this, Yule divides speech acts into two groups: direct and indirect speech acts. In direct speech act, there are specific syntactic structures where the structure is directly related to the utterance's communicative function. Thus, the speaker explicitly expresses the meaning behind the words. Compared to the direct speech act, the indirect speech act has no relationship between its structural forms and the communicative function. The speaker implicitly illustrates the intention behind the words. For example, in an indirect case, a syntactic structure that is associated with a question function could intend as a request. Apparently, the use of indirect speech acts, such as requesting indirectly through questioning, is generally considered more polite than direct speech acts.

The speech act theory covers the speaker's intention and the hearer's inference. Austin states three types of acts that people perform simultaneously (Birner, 2013). One of them is

the locutionary act, the primary language act that refers to the literal meaning. On the other hand, an illocutionary act carries the speaker's implicit intention by making an utterance. The act of illocutionary could raise a response called a perlocutionary act. A perlocutionary act deals with the conveyed utterance's influence or effect on the listener's action after accepting the message (Birner, 2013, p. 186-187).

The study carried out by Zakiah (2018) on the world economic forum interview supports Searle's assertive acts and Austin's direct – indirect speech acts theory. An interview dialogue makes use of a representative/assertive act. The assertive act is employed to convey factual information in an argumentative communication strategy. Speaker frequently uses assertive act when they want to communicate the context of their speech (Zakiah, 2018).

Assertive Acts

According to Searle (1979), assertive acts commit the speaker to the fact of conveyed proposition; the speaker believes the proposition to be true. Searle categorized assertive acts into stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming, and reporting (Leech, 1983, p. 105). The paradigm cases include asserting and concluding. In addition, Leech (1983) classified assertive acts into seven types, including affirming, alleging, asserting, forecasting, predicting, announcing, and insisting (Leech, 1983, p. 221). Borrowing Searle's four illocutionary categorizations (assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive), Leech states that some verbs are polysemy; they could belong to two or more categories. For example, tell, suggest, warn, threaten, and advice could fit both assertive and directive acts.

In line with Searle, Kreidler (1998) states that assertive utterances deal with knowledge and tell about information that the speaker knows or believes. Assertive utterances could be verified or falsified, so they are either true or untrue. Kreidler classified assertive

utterances into indirect and direct assertive. The direct assertive utterances begin with "I" or "we," followed by assertive verbs, including allege, announce, agree, report, remind, predict, and protest (Kreidler, 1998, p. 184).

Kreidler (1998) further classifies assertive verbs or utterances into a class that introduces information (Kreidler, 1998, p. 184-185). The first is "focus on information," which includes announcing, mentioning, declaring, relating, explaining, reporting, indicating, and expressing. The second is "focus on truth-value of utterance," which includes affirming, swearing, asserting, and claiming. The third is "focus on the speaker's commitment or involvement in what is reported," including denying. The fourth is "focus on the manner of communicating," which includes implying, emphasizing, and hinting. The fifth is "focus on the nature of the message." It has dictating (when a person speaks out the messages, and another person writes down the message), narrating or recounting (the utterances are a complete sequence of events), and preaching (the speeches contain ethical or moral content or relate to what is wrong and right on behaving). The last is "focus on the aspect," which includes predicting (the utterances are about what might happen in the future) and recalling (the words refer to previous events).

METHOD

This present study applied a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the use of assertive acts in an interview. The collected data were in the form of utterances, words, quotations, phrases, or clauses. This qualitative study included spoken communication in a natural occurrence of an interview session transcribed into a written text. This study applied contents analysis where the transcript of the interview with Randa Abdel-Fattah was used as the data.

The subject of this study is Randa Abdel-Fattah, an award-winning writer, a former lawyer, a consistent media commentator, and a Ph.D. candidate focusing her research on Islamophobia in Australia. Her first novel,

'Does My Head Look Big in This?' was one of the bestselling novels in Australia which is now in the process of adaptation into a movie. Randa actively intervenes in the existing popular culture to reshape the prevailing narratives around racism and multiculturalism. Randa is a productive writer who has written eight other books, for example, 'Where the Streets Had a Name,' 'Ten Things I Hate About Me,' 'Noah's Law,' and 'No Sex in the City.' With her husband and three children, now she lives in Sydney.

The data of this recent study were a written transcription of Randa's, as the guest speaker, and the interviewer's utterances. The transcribed data were taken from the interview video conducted by the NSW Department of Education on February 21st, 2017. The interview is in the form of an archived video stream uploaded on the "NSW Department of Education – Learning System" channel under the title "PRC Live in Conversation with Randa Abdel-Fattah" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pe24YhvvmXc>. The Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC) is an Australian state government literacy program developed to encourage learners and children to read more literature. The video contains a recording of Randa and the interviewer's conversations for forty-three minutes and thirty seconds. The video is provided with official English close captions from the official channel. Therefore, the researchers transcribed the subtitle using an online video transcriber at <https://anthiago.com/transcript/> to change the audio into written text.

The collected data were in the form of texts containing both the interviewer's and Randa's conversations during the interview transcribed from the Youtube video. However, this study only focuses on Randa's utterances, specifically the assertive acts when she answered the interviewer's and audience's questions. The data collection consists of four steps. The first step was watching the video thoroughly while turning on the official close captions from the YouTube channel that conducted the interview. The second step was

transcribing the footage into a typed document using an online video transcriber and saving it into a .txt format. The transcription of the online video transcriber is only in the form of a paragraph without any space that distinguishes the speaker and the interviewer's speech. Thus, the third step was transferring raw transcription to MS Word for naming and labeling turn according to the conversation format. The fourth step was checking the accuracy of the transcribed text with the interviewee and interviewer's utterances in the video. The data collected from the video transcription then were analyzed using assertive acts theory to reveal its function or intended meaning. Three steps were involved in the data analysis. The first step was to highlight the utterances and classify the assertive acts based on their types. After that, the researchers analyzed the findings by interpreting or describing the assertive acts' functions in their context. The final step was to conclude the study's findings.

FINDINGS

The types of assertive acts found in Randa's utterances include telling, reporting, showing something, describing, explaining, agreeing, and suggesting. In this discussion session, the unnamed interviewer is represented with the letter I, while the guest speaker, Randa Abdel-Fattah, is represented with the letter R. The total turn of both the interviewer and Randa Abdel-Fattah in this interview is one hundred and thirty turns. Focusing only on Randa's utterances, the study found twenty turns for telling acts, eleven turns of explaining acts, seven turns of agreeing acts, five turns of suggesting acts, four turns of describing acts, two turns of reporting acts, and one turn of showing something act.

Telling

To tell is to "give information about something; make somebody knows something words" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). There are twenty turns in total Randa uttered the act of

telling. Randa tells her journey to become an author and her writing process in five turns. Randa also tells her story of moving to Sydney and experiencing the class division in one turn. In two turns, Randa tells the background story of 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' cover. In three turns, Randa tells her way of note-taking. In three turns, Randa tells the humor in her writing that she absorbed from her family to show a Muslim girl's funny and joyous side. Randa also tells the audience about her sister, who starred in her book cover in two turns. In turn one, Randa tells about the play performance of her books. After that, Randa tells her past life that inspired her to become a writer and gave the idea of her books.

I : "...how did you become a writer?"

R : "...I wanted to write a book that really looked at my life as a teenager growing up Muslim in Australia at that particular time I was facing a lot of racism. I had worn the *hijab*, the headscarf. I was attending an Islamic school..."

This conversation between Randa and the interviewer falls in the telling/informing act category because Randa, as the speaker, wants to tell the audience her story of being a Muslim that inspired her to become a writer. In turn 9 (T9), the interviewer asks Randa how she became a writer. Randa responds to the question by telling the audience her reason for writing a book related to her identity as a Muslim. She talks about her personal experiences in the past. As a teenager who wears a headscarf that shows his identity as a Muslim, she is often confronted by racism. When Randa enrolls in an Islamic school, she faces a lot of racism as a Muslim teenager living in Australia. Thus, Randa writes her first draft of 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' because she wants to show what she had experienced as a Muslim.

Another act of telling is also found in turn 16 (T16) when Randa tells about her experience that gave the idea of her book.

I : "Well, maybe if we talk about 'When Michael Met Mina' because it's such a fresh story, it's contemporary, these are issues that are happening right now ... How does it work? And how did this story come about?"

R : "I started a Ph.D. looking at racism and Islamophobia in Australia and I interviewed people who were against Muslims, against multiculturalism ... And it was while I was there and I saw these people you know really promoting such hateful policies and ideas that, the idea for 'When Michael Met Mina' came to me."

In the conversation above, Randa tells another experience that inspired her to write a book entitled 'When Michael Met Mina.' Randa attends an anti-refuge rally in Australia and sees the people promoting hateful ideas against Muslims. This issue then became her idea in writing 'When Michael Met Mina,' which shows how Michael's family promoted racism and impacted on Mina's life as an Afghanistan refugee. Therefore, Randa mainly tells the audience about her experiences as an author and a Muslim facing racism that inspired the story of her books.

Reporting

Report is a "spoken or written account/statement of something heard, seen, done" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). Randa utters the assertive act of reporting to provide information about a specific event that happened in the past. The speaker attempts to reach out to the audience to understand an actual event in the speaker's life that has occurred.

I : "...how did you become a writer?"

R : "...This was just after the first Gulf War so my particular school, Islamic school had been vandalized many times with 'Go back home you *wogs*', 'Terrorists' spray-painted on the walls."

In this conversation, Randa gives information about what happened to the Islamic school she attended after the first Gulf War. The first Gulf War occurred in 1991, where the conflict was an armed battle between Iraq and the affiliation of thirty-nine nations, including Australia. After the war broke out, Islamic schools were subjected to repeated vandalism on their walls by spray-painted insulting writings. The vandalism used terms that have negative connotations to Muslims, such as *terrorists* and *wogs*. The term *wogs* is a racist term referring to people with Middle Eastern, Southern European, and Southeast European ethnicity or appearance who reside in Australia. Randa's answer is still related to how she became a writer. She adds the first Gulf War report as one of her experiences as a Muslim facing racism.

The racism that Randa faced for wearing a veil and attending an Islamic school during the past-Gulf War motivated the writing of 'Does My Head Look Big in This?'. Randa also reports about the stage play performances of this particular book.

R: "Yeah, so 'Does My Head Look Big In This?' was performed as a play in the US."

In the conversation above, Randa gives information about an event when her book 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' got a stage play adaptation. The play was performed in some schools in the United States. In general, Randa reports the actual event of the Gulf War related to the writing process of 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' that covers the issue of racism and the play performance of the book

Showing Something

To show is to "make something clear; let somebody see something" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). The speaker indicates something by pointing to the related object to clarify the information.

I : "...how did you become a writer?"

R : "Wearing the veil I had you know dealt with people's questions ... I felt that there was a real ignorance about my faith and identity. So I thought well, books have changed my life so maybe if I write a book people can walk in my shoes and so I wrote the first draft of 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' (touching and showing the printed book to the camera) and that's how I started writing..."

In this conversation, Randa shows and points to the cover of her printed book, 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' to the audience to clarify her conveyed information. Randa said she wanted to write a book that might make other people understand her experience and challenge growing up as a Muslim. Randa shows her first book 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' which she wrote hoping that other people could walk in her shoes. Therefore, Randa points to 'Does My Head Look Big in This?' to show the first book she wrote, motivated by her wish for people to understand the challenge a Muslim faced so that people will try to consider others' perspectives before judging them.

Describing

To describe is "to say what somebody or something is like" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). There are four turns of describing acts in total uttered by Randa. In two turns, Randa describes her sister, who appeared on the 'Ten Things I Hate about Me' cover. In one turn, Randa describes how sometimes the characters lead her in writing. The speaker also utters the assertive act of describing to illustrate the appearance, characteristics, and naming of her friends in words in one turn.

I : "Well, we might jump over to one of my favorite characters which is Jamie from 'Ten Things I Hate about Me.' ...I think if you could explain to everyone a little bit about that book..."

R : “Well, growing up I had so many friends who Anglicized their names to fit in. I had a friend called Mohammad who called himself Sam whenever he was out. I had a Turkish friend called Filiz who called herself Sarah and you know Bilal who called himself Bill ... And I had some friends who dyed their hair blonde and wear blue contact lenses because they both look more Bondi, you know look more quintessential you know Aussie babes sort of, the ideal of what we consider an Australian female looks like in the media, in popular culture that they would somehow fit in more...”

Randa's utterances fall into the assertive act category of describing. In turn 57 (T57), the interviewer discussed a book written by Randa entitled 'Ten Things I Hate about Me.' In that book, there is a character whose name is Jamie, but actually, her name is Jamilah, and she seems to live as two different people. The interviewer then questioned Randa about how this could happen. To answer this question, Randa gives verbal pictures of her friends as she grew up.

First, Randa describes her Arab-Muslim friends' identities who Anglicized their names to fit in outside. So Randa has a friend named Mohammad but is called Sam instead, and Bilal also changed his nickname to Bill. There is also a Turkish friend named Fills, who is called Sarah. Randa then describes the appearance of his Greek and Italian friends, who believed that the only way to fit in was to disguise their ethnicity in some way. One of the ways they do this is to change their appearance to match the image of Australian women in the media or pop culture. Randa detailed that her friends dyed their hair blonde and wore blue contact lenses.

By describing her friends who change their real identities or appearances to match the Australian image better, Randa tries to underline such issues that she feels are

important. Therefore, the book entitled 'Ten Things I Hate about Me' is created. In this book, Jamilah is described as much like Randa's friends, has the nickname Jamie and wears contact lenses when she goes to school. In general, Randa describes people's different appearances and characteristics behind the depiction of the characters in her books.

Explaining

Explain means “to make something clear or give reasons for something” (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). In the interview, the speaker utters explaining acts in eleven turns. In one turn, Randa explains books give the power to change one's life from embracing others' stories. She also explains the humor usage in her writing to show the funny part of growing up, the meaning of 'Where the Streets Had a Name' cover image related to the book's story, and her contribution to the cover-choosing in one turn each. Moreover, Randa explains the different processes of writing and adapting a book into a play. Randa also explains her reason in writing, which is to give a voice to people who experienced racism through her stories' characters and how some books motivated her writing process in one turn each. In the interview, Randa also utters assertive acts of explaining mainly to provide more detailed information of the story in her books in four turns. The explanation given by Randa is meant to make the audience clearly understand the big picture of what the story is about before they talked further about the book.

I : “...Perhaps if you could tell us a little bit about what the story's about to start off with.”

R : “Sure, so 'When Michael Met Mina' is about two characters. So, each story is told in their own voice, so alternate narration. And Michael is growing up in Sydney's Lane Cove in quite an affluent, middle class, white unit environment and his family are against multiculturalism, against Muslims ... Mina is a girl

from the Western Suburbs of Sydney who gets a scholarship to Michael's school, she's a refugee from Afghanistan. She came to Australia ten years ago by boat and she's smart, she's confident and she arrives at Michael's school and she is a fish out of water, not just in terms of her race and background but class as well ... And I really wanted to show how racism has a real impact on people's lives and how that the things that Michael's family are promoting has actual real world effects on Mina's life in particular."

The conversation above is an example of explaining acts uttered by Randa when she gives more detailed information about her books to the audience. In (T16), Randa explains the big picture of her book entitled 'When Michael Met Mina.' She points out the story narration and also the characters in the story. Randa explains how one character is illustrated in contrast with another character regarding their social classes, characteristics, races, and religious beliefs. This explanation is intended to show the racism problem raised in the book and supported by Randa by revealing relevant facts related to the issue. Furthermore, Randa tells some issues that she encountered when she interviewed people who were against Muslims and multiculturalism, as she explained in her utterances below:

R: "I started a Ph.D. looking at racism and Islamophobia in Australia and I interviewed people who were against Muslims, against multiculturalism. So, I attended an anti-refugee rally ... I met people and spoke to them. And it was while I was there and I saw these people you know really promoting such hateful policies and ideas that, the idea for 'When Michael Met Mina' came to me." ...

R: "...And I really wanted to raise that issue in my book and that's why Mina's from Auburn which has the largest refugee population settlement in Sydney is in Auburn and it has its associated stereotypes in the media... And it's trying to show how these sort of class tensions exist even if we don't realize it ..."

The assertive act of explaining uttered by Randa is aimed to make the audience understand that the idea of racism raised in the book is derived from actual events in life, and she witnessed it. In (T16), Randa relates the racism issue in 'When Michael Met Mina' with the anti-refugee rally event. She provides the reason for writing the book: the hateful policies promotion towards the refugee. Randa then brings this problem to the story through the character of Mina, who is also a refugee from Afghanistan transferred to Australia and faced prejudice. In (T28), Randa's explanation continues as she wants to raise the issues of class differences, but sometimes people do not realize it. She brings up such an issue through the character of Mina as a refugee living in the largest refugee population settlement in Sydney. Overall, Randa mainly explains the detailed information in the story's introduction, so the audience knows the outline of the issues raised, her reason for writing such issues, and details about her books.

Agreeing

Agreeing means "having the same opinion as somebody" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). The speaker expresses her agreement with the interviewer's statement by uttering an assertive act of agreeing. There are seven turns of agreeing uttered by the interviewee. In each turn, Randa agrees when the interviewer addressed her as a busy person with a diverse background, which is Egyptian-Palestinian-Australian, and her stories have a solid familial thread running through them. In another turn, when they are talking about the story of

Jamilah, who lives a double life, Randa agrees that there is a lot of effort to make one's self look completely different and fit into society. In a matter of becoming an author, Randa agrees that a lot of practice in writing is involved in one turn. In three turns, Randa agrees that books have the power to change lives as a medium to raise issues like racism.

I : "...Do you believe books have power to change lives or the world?
I'm guessing that you do."

R : "Yes, yeah"

In (T22), the words 'yes' and 'yeah' shows Randa's agreement with the statement that books have the power to change lives or the world. Randa's agreement refers to the previous explanation of her book 'When Michael Met Mina' in (T18):

R : "...I just thought the power of fiction and the power of adolescence and that's really where the real work begins and you know racism. It's all very well for me to be writing articles about it to academics but how is it actually impacting on young people? For me it was really important to try and address that struggle among young people with this book."

In line with her words that Randa agrees with the power of books that could change lives or the world, Randa believes in the power of fiction. She tries to write about racism and address the struggle among young people or adolescents through the book 'When Michael Met Mina'. Thus, this book is written based on Randa's thought to raise racism awareness in the media that could impact the youth. Moreover, she says:

R : "... And that's important because change doesn't come just like that ... you have to take in and embrace somebody's story ... And books give you that power ... I think books are incredibly important and incredibly powerful."

In (T24) above, Randa emphasizes her agreement that people could change their life by absorbing somebody's story through the books. Therefore, Randa agrees with the interviewer's statements regarding her mixed origin, books-related, and writing matters. Randa agrees that diverse background runs in her Egyptian-Palestinian-Australian blood. In matters of books, Randa agrees books or fiction have the power to change one's life and impact young people by reflecting on racism issues. Furthermore, she agrees family is one of the important threads running through her books, and in her story, one could get through many efforts to look more fitting in society. Randa also agrees many writing practices are involved in becoming an author.

Suggesting

To suggest is to "put forward an idea or plan for consideration; put an idea into somebody's mind" (Oxford Dictionary, 2008). There are five turns of giving suggestions uttered by the interviewee. In this interview, the speaker gives suggestions for young people who are starting to write and dealing with some writing struggles.

I : "Okay. So, if you had to recommend one goal to set for a young person that's starting to write... Where would you start with setting up a story?"

R : "Yeah, I'm going to give some really practical tips. If you're struggling with dialogue, go and find a book where you enjoy the dialogue and copy that dialogue out – word for word ... Write as often as possible ... you just have to continue, you have to keep going, you have to put one step forward, don't give up on your work or yourself because we all get plagued by self-doubt and always go with your own stories, they're quite powerful."

The sentences above are Randa's suggestions to the audience during the

interview session. She gives several tips to overcome difficulties in composing dialogues by completely copying the conversations they like, writing as often as possible, and always going with their own stories. The words “have to” are uttered to express necessity, such as continuing writing, going, and putting a step forward. Meanwhile, the word “don’t” is also spoken to tell things that are suggested not to be done—for example, giving up on their works or themselves. Overall, Randa suggests some practical tips for young people dreaming of becoming writers, such as embracing reading and writing to overcome some struggles in writing and not giving up easily.

DISCUSSION

The current study finds seven types of assertive speech act spoken by Randa Abdel-Fattah, namely telling, reporting, showing something, describing, explaining, agreeing, and suggesting. As a Muslim representative, Randa predominantly uses the assertive act of telling to voice the stories she has experienced so far and to share her knowledge of the world. Telling has emerged as one of the most efficient teaching methods and practical tools for preaching Islam or *da'wah*. The speaker has raised awareness and promoted excellent values in Islam by telling valuable stories from her own experiences. By displaying one of her books, Randa implies that the racism she received as a Muslim prompts her to write a book so that others could change their views and understanding of Muslims better.

The findings also show that the assertive act of telling is the most dominant act spoken by the interviewee in the interview. Randa, as the interviewee, tends to utter the acts of telling to recount her past experiences and writing journeys as an author. To inform the audience about the background of writing her books, Randa recounts the racism she experienced as a Muslim. Randa then raises these issues in the Islamic fiction she wrote. This result is in line with the findings in a previous study by Izar, Nasution, and Ratnasari (2020) entitled “Assertive Speech

Acts in Mata Najwa Program of Episodes Gara-Gara Corona.” The interviewees consisted of government people who know of covid-19 cases in Indonesia. The study found that the assertive act of telling was used mainly by the interviewees because the speakers needed to present information about something to people with different opinions (Izar et al., 2020). The government representatives told the audience the case examples and the importance of tracing covid-19 patients. In both interviews, the two speakers have different backgrounds; a Muslim writer (in the interview with Randa) and government representatives (in the interview in Mata Najwa). However, they both mainly perform telling acts to talk about the issues discussed by giving examples from experience and true stories. Furthermore, both of the speakers wish the audience to learn and understand what to do or avoid doing something by telling such matters.

Moreover, the finding of the current study is also similar to a study on illocutionary acts in Tom Cruise’s interview (Haucsa et al., 2020). This research also reported that assertive acts were the most widely performed to show the truth of the speaker’s utterances. The speaker’s words tended to be factual or descriptive of what he felt to be true. This is in line with the current research in which the use of assertive acts in the interview is to show the truth of the speaker’s statement and the act of describing topics related to the interviewee’s books.

Hence, telling something, especially true experiences, becomes the type of assertive act that is apparent most frequently in the interview with Randa. The illocutionary force of engaging people in what she feels as a Muslim woman living in a world that often puts prejudices on her and her Muslim colleagues is evident in most of her stories as parts of her responses to the interview. As in Kreidler’s (1998) classification of assertive utterances that introduce information, narrate or recount a complete sequence of events puts the focus on the nature of the message (Kreidler, 1998, p. 185), in the interview,

Randa focuses on delivering the message regarding Muslims' concerns by telling her actual experiences.

CONCLUSION

The assertive acts uttered by Randa Abdel-Fattah, an Australian Muslim writer, who was invited as a guest speaker in "PRC Live in Conversation" with the interviewer from the NSW Department of Education consist of seven types of assertive acts, namely, telling, reporting, showing something, describing, explaining, agreeing, and suggesting. The most dominant assertive act performed by Randa is telling. The act of telling is expressed to make the audience know about something and feel the situations experienced by the character. Randa tends to recount her experiences as a Muslim living in Australia and facing a lot of racism, which later inspires her to write fictional Islamic books regarding such issues. The second most dominant assertive act spoken by Randa after telling is explaining. Randa inclines to explain or gives detailed information about the story of her books. The least performed assertive act is showing something which implies that she does not want to be seen as showing her intelligence or knowledge. Through her stories, she mainly wants the world to embrace her and her Muslim colleagues.

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