



An Analysis of Speech Acts in the Movie Avengers: Endgame

Dian Windriani^{1*}, Siti Ainiyaya², Febriyantina Istiara², Hajjah Zulianti²

¹Politeknik Negeri Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia

²STKIP PGRI Bandar Lampung, Lampung, Indonesia

dianwindri@polinela.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the types of illocutionary speech acts and determine the most dominant type used in the movie Avengers: Endgame. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method using Searle's theory of speech acts as the analytical framework. The primary data consisted of dialogues spoken by selected characters, namely Tony Stark, Steve Rogers, Thanos, and Scott Lang. Data were collected through observation and note-taking techniques, followed by classification and analysis using content analysis procedures. The findings revealed that five types of illocutionary acts were present in the movie: declarative, assertive, expressive, directive, and commissive. A total of 64 utterances were identified, consisting of 4 declaratives (6%), 16 assertives (25%), 7 expressives (11%), 34 directives (53%), and 3 commissives (5%). Among these, directives were found to be the most dominant type. This dominance indicates that the characters frequently use language to give commands, make requests, and direct actions, reflecting power relations and strategic interactions within the storyline. The findings contribute to a better understanding of how speech acts function in cinematic discourse and highlight the importance of pragmatic competence in interpreting meaning in context.

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INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are actions performed through utterances, where saying something serves a social purpose beyond merely providing information. This fundamental concept was introduced by J.L. Austin (1962) and further expanded by John R. Searle (1969). As affirmed by Lestari and Hartati (2020), a speech act encompasses both the propositional statement and the entire set of utterances within a specific context. In daily interactions, individuals utilize language for a variety of purposes, such as

making statements, requesting assistance, or expressing emotions. Crucially, the study of speech acts heavily emphasizes the context of the conversation, as a sentence only gains its full meaning and communicative force when connected to its situational backdrop.

According to Searle (1969), speech acts occur when a speaker utters a sentence and a listener infers the speaker's intention. Although not all speech acts are formal, they universally rely on the speaker utilizing an utterance to indicate an intended action, and the hearer comprehending that intention. Based on Cutting (2002), speech acts are categorized into three distinct levels: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. A locutionary act is the fundamental production of a meaningful linguistic expression; an illocutionary act represents the intended action or purpose behind the utterance (what the speaker hopes to achieve); and a perlocutionary act is the subsequent effect or impact the utterance has on the listener.

Effective communication is achieved when the speaker's intended message (the illocutionary act) is accurately comprehended by the listener, prompting the desired response (the perlocutionary act). Simply grasping the literal meaning is insufficient; mutual contextual understanding is required. Miscommunication occurs when this mutual understanding fails, often due to ambiguous language or disparate interpretations. Such misunderstandings lead to illocutionary failure—when the intended message is not received as meant. Consequently, this results in perlocutionary failure, where the intended reaction or outcome is not achieved even if the literal words were heard.

Because speech acts are constantly employed in everyday communication, analyzing them provides deeper insights into how language is used to act, influence, and interact. This research focuses specifically on illocutionary acts, as they are the central component of linguistic communication, carrying the primary communicative force (Yule, 1996). An illocutionary act refers to the action carried out when saying something, such as making a statement, offering a promise, expressing gratitude, or asking a question, typically executed through spoken words or written symbols.

Searle (1979) categorized illocutionary acts into five fundamental types: declarations, assertives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Declarations intend to change reality by their very utterance; assertives provide a description of a situation or state a belief; expressives communicate the speaker's attitudes and feelings; directives attempt to get the listener to do something; and commissives bind the speaker to a future course of action.

The researcher explored the use of speech acts within the context of a movie. A movie not only reflects everyday life but also presents complex situations and interpersonal interactions. As Tutuarima, Nuraeningsih, and Rusiana (2018) explained, movies provide rich, illustrative examples of speech acts, showcasing what characters do through their utterances. Furthermore, films contextualize language

use in an engaging and comprehensible manner, aiding audiences in understanding how messages are conveyed in various situations (Sherman, 2003).

This study analyzes speech acts in the movie *Avengers: Endgame*. The narrative follows Marvel superheroes attempting to reverse the devastation caused by the antagonist, Thanos, who eliminated half of all life in the universe to balance natural resources. Throughout their mission to formulate strategies and assemble the Infinity Stones using time travel, the characters heavily utilize speech acts to direct, command, advise, and express determination.

Specifically, this study aims to identify the illocutionary acts implied in the utterances of Tony Stark, Steve Rogers, Thanos, and Scott Lang, and to determine the dominant type of illocutionary act used in the movie. Ultimately, this research is expected to provide readers with valuable information and enhance their understanding of speech acts and their practical application in communication.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the dialogues of selected characters in the movie *Avengers: Endgame*. Qualitative research aims to explore social phenomena, experiences, and perspectives to provide an in-depth interpretation of social reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study utilized two types of triangulation: theoretical triangulation and investigator triangulation. Theoretical triangulation was applied by anchoring the data analysis rigorously in Searle's established speech act theory. Concurrently, investigator triangulation was achieved through collaborative evaluation and assessment of the findings with the research supervisor, which served to minimize subjective bias during the interpretation process.

Data Collecting Technique

Data collection was conducted using the non-participatory observational method, wherein the researcher gathers data without actively participating in or influencing the subjects being observed (Sudaryanto, 2015). The data collection process involved a systematic, sequential approach. Initially, the researcher watched the movie comprehensively to grasp the overarching narrative and situational background. Subsequently, the dialogues spoken by the selected characters were closely observed and read. The researcher then employed a note-taking technique to extract specific utterances containing illocutionary acts, carefully considering the contextual nuances of each scene. Finally, the collected dialogues were systematically organized into a table and categorized based on the scene, time, utterance, context, and the corresponding type of speech act, encompassing declarations, assertives (representatives), expressives, directives, and commissives.

Data Analyzing Technique

The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method framed within Searle's speech act theory. Content analysis is a rigorous research technique utilized to make replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use (Krippendorff, 2018). The analytical procedure followed a structured narrative sequence. It commenced with organizing and preparing the raw data obtained through the prior note-taking process. Next, the researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcribed dialogues to gain a profound understanding of the textual meanings. The data were then systematically classified into Searle's respective speech act categories. Following this categorization, a descriptive analysis was provided for each identified illocutionary act, elucidating how it was employed by the characters within specific movie contexts. Concluding the analytical process, the researcher calculated the occurrences to determine the dominant type of illocutionary act utilized throughout the movie.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of the cinematic dialogue in *Avengers: Endgame* reveals five distinct categories of illocutionary acts employed by the selected characters (Tony Stark, Steve Rogers, Scott Lang, and Thanos): declarations, assertives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Out of the 64 identified utterances containing illocutionary force, directives constitute the absolute majority with 34 occurrences (53%). This is followed by assertives with 16 occurrences (25%), expressives with 7 occurrences (11%), declarations with 4 occurrences (6%), and commissives with 3 occurrences (5%). Consequently, the directive act emerges as the most dominant illocutionary type utilized within the narrative framework of the movie.

As delineated by Searle (1969), an illocutionary act represents the core action performed through an utterance, typically executed via spoken words or written symbols to accomplish specific social functions like promising, stating, or questioning. Furthermore, Huang (2007) posits that the illocutionary force relates directly to the speaker's intended communicative purpose and the specific action they aim to execute. In the context of this film, the characters strategically utilize illocutionary acts to articulate desires, assert convictions, reveal factual occurrences, commit to future trajectories, and express psychological states regarding the unfolding apocalyptic events.

Declarative Acts

Declarative statements intend to instantaneously alter reality simply through their articulation; the successful performance of this speech act generates the very situation described by its propositional content (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). This category encompasses actions such as declaring, blessing, approving,

and confirming. The analysis identified four declarative utterances—specifically categorized as "declare"—spoken by Thanos, Steve Rogers, and Tony Stark. A prime example occurs when Thanos states, "I found them all, I won." This utterance asserts that his future self has successfully acquired the Infinity Stones and emerged victorious. By declaring this triumph, he establishes himself as an invincible ruler, illustrating his inherent belief in his supreme authority. The perlocutionary effect of this declaration is immediately visible when Gamora bows before him, visually reinforcing his absolute leadership and rendering the opposing forces helpless.

Assertive Acts

Assertive statements aim to provide a comprehensive description of a situation, representing a proposition as a true state of affairs and reflecting the speaker's subjective perspective on the world (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). This study found 16 assertive data points, spanning categories such as reminding, claiming, assuring, informing, asserting, affirming, reporting, denying, criticizing, and admitting. For instance, when Steve Rogers attempts to recruit Tony Stark for the crucial time heist, he asserts, "Tony, I get it and I'm happy for you, I really am. But this is a second chance." Here, Steve uses the assertive act of assuring to convince Tony that their mission represents a genuine, fail-proof opportunity to resurrect the fallen. Another instance involves Tony Stark repairing the complex time travel mechanism and informing his wife, "I figured it out... by the way." This utterance functions as an assertive "inform," communicating his technical breakthrough. Furthermore, assertives are utilized to claim shared responsibility, as seen when Steve insists to Captain Marvel, "We realize up there is more your territory but this is our fight too," thereby claiming joint ownership of the impending intergalactic battle.

Expressive Acts

Expressive acts communicate the speaker's psychological attitudes and emotions—such as joy, sorrow, gratitude, loyalty, or displeasure—toward a specific situation (Yule, 1996). The analysis revealed seven expressive utterances, encompassing praising, complaining, boasting, complimenting, and thanking. A notable example is Steve Rogers's infiltration of a Hydra unit disguised as S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. To secure their trust and acquire Loki's scepter seamlessly, he states, "It's ok, trust me. Hail Hydra." The phrase "Hail Hydra" operates as an expressive "boast," feigning absolute loyalty and pride to manipulate the enemy agents into perceiving him as a fellow conspirator. Conversely, expressives are also used to voice immediate dissatisfaction. When Scott Lang's time travel tests malfunction, drastically altering his physical age, he complains, "Guys, this doesn't feel right." This

utterance explicitly expresses his intense physical discomfort and psychological distress, prompting his allies to urgently rectify the machine's parameters.

Directive Acts

Directives are strategically utilized to compel the listener to execute a specific course of action, manifesting as commands, requests, or authoritative suggestions (Levinson, 1983). This study identified 34 directive utterances, making it the most frequently employed act, comprising telling, requesting, commanding, warning, directing, permitting, asking, ordering, and requiring. The frequent use of directives highlights the urgent power dynamics within the film. For example, Thanos exerts his dictatorial dominance by commanding Nebula, "Go, find the stones. Bring them to me." This directive demands immediate, unquestioning obedience, reflecting his authoritarian position. Similarly, directives drive crucial interpersonal interactions during crises. When the Hulk is severely injured wielding the Infinity Gauntlet, a panicked Tony Stark urgently asks, "Talk to me, Banner!" This directive stems from intense concern, demanding an immediate status update on his ally's physical condition. Additionally, directives establish strict personal boundaries, as evidenced when Tony Stark records a potential final message for his wife, instructing her, "If you find this recording... Don't post it on social media." This directive ensures the preservation of his family's privacy during a vulnerable moment.

Commissive Acts

Commissive remarks bind the speaker to a specific future course of action, conveying unwavering intentions through promises, threats, or vows (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Three commissive utterances were identified, categorized as threatening, assuring, and swearing. A clear demonstration of a commissive "threaten" occurs when Thanos discusses Ronan's potential insubordination, stating, "His alternative is death, then." This explicitly commits Thanos to executing Ronan should he fail to comply with the established orders. In a different context, the film showcases the commissive "swear" when a frustrated Thanos confronts the relentless Avengers, declaring, "But I'll tell you now, what I'm about to do to your stubborn, annoying little planet. I'm gonna enjoy it very very much." This utterance signifies his absolute, malicious commitment to annihilating Earth without any remorse.

Discussion

The overwhelming predominance of directive acts in *Avengers: Endgame* profoundly underscores the film's narrative architecture, which relies heavily on hierarchical power structures, complex strategic planning, and highly volatile combat situations. Characters occupying leadership or authoritarian roles

frequently employ directives to mobilize forces, execute intricate temporal missions, and assert dominance over subordinates or adversaries. This aligns with the fundamental necessity of issuing clear commands in high-stakes scenarios. Furthermore, these directives serve as vital catalysts for major plot developments; for instance, Thanos's directive permitting an alternate-timeline Gamora to prove her loyalty inadvertently facilitates the catastrophic final battle at the Avengers compound.

Comparing these findings to prior sociolinguistic research highlights the genre-dependency of speech acts. While previous studies, such as Tutuarima, Nuraeningsih, and Rusiana (2018) on *London Has Fallen* and Sitanggang (2013) on *Avatar*, explored a broader spectrum of speech acts across entire ensembles, this focused examination reveals that a superhero action film heavily prioritizes directives due to its inherent mission-oriented plot. The frequent issuance of commands and instructions is intrinsic to narratives centered on warfare and crisis management, proving that the dominant illocutionary force is fundamentally intertwined with the specific genre and thematic demands of the cinematic media.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the use of illocutionary speech acts in the movie *Avengers: Endgame* by analyzing the utterances of selected characters, namely Tony Stark, Steve Rogers, Thanos, and Scott Lang. The findings revealed that all five types of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle—declaratives, assertives, expressives, directives, and commissives—were present in the movie. Among the 64 identified utterances, directive acts were found to be the most dominant, followed by assertives, expressives, declaratives, and commissives. The predominance of directives indicates that the characters frequently use language to give commands, make requests, and direct actions, which reflects the action-oriented nature of the movie as well as the hierarchical power relations among characters.

These findings imply that speech acts play a crucial role in shaping interactions, character dynamics, and narrative development in cinematic discourse. The dominance of directive acts highlights how language is strategically used to achieve goals, coordinate actions, and influence others in high-stakes situations. However, this study is limited to a small number of characters and focuses only on illocutionary acts, which may not fully represent the complexity of speech act use in the entire movie. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore broader datasets, include other types of speech acts such as perlocutionary effects, or analyze different genres and media contexts. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of pragmatics in language use across diverse communicative settings.

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