

## Beyond Words: An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts in *Beautiful Boy*

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### ABSTRACT

Verbal communication, often considered as a means of conveying information, is actually much more complex and full of meaning. This study aims to classify the types of illocutionary speech acts expressed by the speaker in the movie *Beautiful Boy*. In this research, a descriptive method with quantitative approach is used. The data were collected using listening and note-taking techniques. Based on the analysis, there are 310 utterances that show illocutionary acts, which are dominated by assertive speech acts with 112 occurrences, followed by other types, namely directive with 98 occurrences, commissive 57 occurrences, expressive 33 occurrences, and declarative 10 occurrences. The tendency of these speech acts is identified to be influenced by the context of the conversation in *Beautiful Boy*, and not due to the genre of the movie which is drama and biography. The speech acts in this movie describe deep feelings, frustrations, and also hopes that aim to achieve something can have the opposite effect or even the loaded message is not conveyed or in line with the reality faced.

**Keyword:** Speech, Act, Illocutionary, Context, Sheff

### ABSTRAK

Komunikasi verbal, sering dianggap hanya sebagai sarana menyampaikan informasi, sebenarnya jauh lebih kompleks dan sarat makna. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengklasifikasi jenis tindak tutur ilokusi yang diungkapkan pembicara dalam film *Beautiful Boy*. Dalam penelitian ini digunakan metode deskriptif dengan pendekatan kuantitatif. Data dikumpulkan dengan teknik simak dan catat. Berdasarkan analisis ditemukan 310 ujaran yang menunjukkan tindak ilokusi, yang didominasi oleh tindak tutur asertif dengan 112 kejadian, diikuti oleh jenis lainnya yaitu direktif dengan 98 kejadian, komisif 57 kejadian, ekspresif 33 kejadian, dan deklaratif 10 kejadian. Kecenderungan tindak tutur ini teridentifikasi dipengaruhi oleh konteks pembicaraan dalam film *Beautiful Boy*, dan tidak dikarenakan genre film yaitu drama dan biografi. Tindak tutur pada film ini mendeskripsikan perasaan yang mendalam, rasa frustrasi, dan juga harapan yang bertujuan untuk mencapai sesuatu dapat berdampak sebaliknya atau bahkan pesan yang dimuat tidak tersampaikan atau tidak sesuai dengan realita yang dihadapi.

**Keyword:** Tindak, Tutur, Ilokusi, Konteks, Sheff



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## 1. Introduction

Verbal communication, while often thought of as just a means of conveying information, is actually much more complex and fuller of meaning. In every utterance, humans do not just speak, but perform actions that can influence others. However, how can ordinary words turn into actions that have social power? This is a question that has attracted the attention of many researchers, especially in understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication (Searle, 1975). This concept is known as speech acts, which were first introduced by (Austin, 1975) in his work *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin revealed that through speech, one can perform actions such as requesting, promising, or stating something. In his book, Austin categorizes three types

of speech acts, namely locution, illocution, and perlocution. A locutionary speech act is the act of uttering a particular word or phrase with a clear, direct meaning. It refers to the basic form of speech act, such as the sentence “I will come,” which only conveys information directly without any other purpose. Illocutionary speech acts are forms of speech acts that focus on the intention expressed through the utterance, such as when someone says, “I promise to come,” which not only conveys information, but also implies a commitment to keep the promise. Meanwhile, perlocutionary speech acts refer to the effect or impact of the utterance on the listener, such as when the utterance “I promise to come” creates a feeling of calm or relief for the person who hears it.

In a cinematic context, dialog between characters is the main tool to convey emotions, motivations, and complex relationships between them. Movies are often a powerful medium to show the dynamics of human communication, as they can combine verbal speech with non-verbal expressions such as facial expressions and intonation. Some previous studies have highlighted the use of illocutionary speech acts in movies, although rarely has anyone discussed the influence of context on the illocutionary speech acts used (Hastuti et al., 2021; Ratri & Bram, 2022). The focus of these studies is more on the depiction of character emotions in general rather than in-depth analysis of illocutionary speech acts that can shape interpersonal relationships between characters.

Previous studies that highlight illocutionary speech acts in movies often focus on the communication function to illustrate the strength or weakness of characters in dealing with conflict (Hutajulu, 2023; Rozi et al., 2021). For example, research conducted by (Adawiyah, 2021) on the movie *Dead Poets Society* shows how illocutionary speech acts can show the power differences between teachers and students. The study revealed that verbal interactions in movies can be effectively used to illustrate changes in emotion and character power. However, there are still limited studies that discuss how illocutionary speech acts can be influenced by the context of dynamic relationships between characters who have background psychological or emotional problems, such as addiction.

In the film *Beautiful Boy*, the complex emotional conflict between a father and his son, David Sheff and Nic Sheff, becomes the main focus, where the dialog not only reflects their inner struggle, but also implies hidden intentions that affect the development of the characters and the storyline. With this background, this study tries to fill the void in cinematic linguistic studies regarding the role of illocutionary speech acts in describing the context of interpersonal relationship dynamics, especially in films with the theme of addiction. Referring to the theory of illocutionary speech acts from Austin (1975) and Searle (1975) which have been used by previous studies (Febriola et al., 2022; Tabiati & Aziz, 2023; Taylor, 2019). This research seeks to interpret how the hidden intentions behind characters' speech can create tension and conflict in movie narratives. Chaer & Agustina (2004) explain that responses to speech are not only verbal answers, but can also be physical actions or reactions, which reflect an understanding of the intentions contained in the speech. This approach can help understand how the audience receives and responds to the interaction between characters in the movie, which is an important aspect in the study of pragmatics.

A number of studies also examine speech acts in films, including “Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald” (Fitriani et al., 2020), “A Beautiful Mind” (Hidayatulloh et al., 2022). Searle's classification of illocutionary acts, which comprises declaratives, directions, representatives, expressives, and commissives, is frequently used in these investigations (Saputri et al., 2021). According to research, directing and representational acts are usually in charge in different situations (Fitriani et al., 2020). Beyond entertainment media, speech act theory is also used in motivational podcasts (Laras & Sulatra, 2024) and beauty product commercials (Saputri et al., 2021).

One of the main problems that this research tries to answer is how the illocutionary speech acts expressed by the characters in *Beautiful Boy* affect the dynamics of relationships between characters, such as between Nic Sheff and his father, as well as other characters such as his stepmother, his biological mother, and his girlfriend. In contrast to previous research that focuses more on analysing general linguistic or emotional aspects as a whole (Sukmawati, 2022), this study specifically focuses on illocutionary speech acts as a key element that shapes interactions between characters. Through this approach, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how hidden emotions and intentions that are not directly expressed through speech can affect the dynamics of the story.

In this study, there are a number of limitations that need to be considered. The analysis conducted only focuses on one movie, *Beautiful Boy*. This means that the results may not be generalizable to all films with similar themes. However, the in-depth analysis of this film is expected to provide new insights into the use of illocutionary speech acts in describing complex relationships between characters, especially in the context of psychological issues and addiction which is often a sensitive topic in society (Mustamar, 2024; Sharifah & Shofiyuddin, 2024).

The main purpose of this study is to identify, describe, and categorise illocutionary speech acts in the relationship between characters in *Beautiful Boy*. Through the analysis of scenes containing illocutionary speech acts, this study is expected to show how these speech acts not only convey hidden emotions, but also create deep tensions between the characters, which ultimately affect the narrative journey of the movie. This research seeks to contribute to linguistic studies by offering a new perspective on how illocutionary speech acts can be used to understand character interactions in film media, as well as how they can portray complex internal and interpersonal conflicts.

## 2. Research Methods

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative research design with a quantitative approach using a formula from (Arikunto, 2014). Qualitative research, as defined by Bogdan and Taylor in Margono (2010), produces descriptive data in the form of oral or written speech of individuals and observed behaviour. This method was chosen because the data collected is in the form of words or text, which will be analysed in depth to get a better understanding.

The subject of the research is illocutionary speech acts as proposed by (Austin, 1975), and which are then categorised using the theory (Searle, 1975). The object of this research is a fragment of the character's speech in the movie *Beautiful Boy* which contains illocutionary speech acts. The researcher used the data source from the movie *Beautiful Boy* which was watched through the internet. The researcher himself is the research instrument used in this study (human instrument), because of the role of the researcher as a planner, data collection implementer, data analysis implementer, interpreter, and presenter of the findings (Sugiyono, 2014). The listening technique is used to listen to the literary text that has been selected as research material. The note technique is used to record things that are considered appropriate and supportive in solving the problem formulation.

The data that has been collected is analysed using a descriptive method, in which the researcher describes, categorises, and interprets the utterances that contain illocutionary speech acts. The data were analysed by grouping the types of speech acts that have been found and described using the theory of illocutionary speech acts from Searle (1975), namely assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, then interpreted to obtain a deeper understanding of the use of illocutionary speech acts in the film. Quantitative approach with Arikunto's formula (2014) is used to calculate the frequency of occurrence of illocutionary speech act types.

## 3. Result and Discussion

The results of the study found a total of 310 data instances of illocutionary speech acts which showed as shown in Figure1, that in the analysed data set, assertive acts were the dominant illocutionary speech acts used with 112 instances (36.1%), followed by directive acts with 98 instances (31.6%), then commissive acts with 57 instances (18.4%), and expressive with 33 instances (10.6%), while declarative acts were recorded the least, with only 10 instances (3.3%). This distribution suggests that the dialog in *Beautiful Boy* focuses more on conveying the truth or personal experience, which is reflected in assertive actions, as well as significant use of commands, requests, commitments, promises, and emotional expressions. Although declarative actions are rare, they still provide an important dimension to the communication taking place.

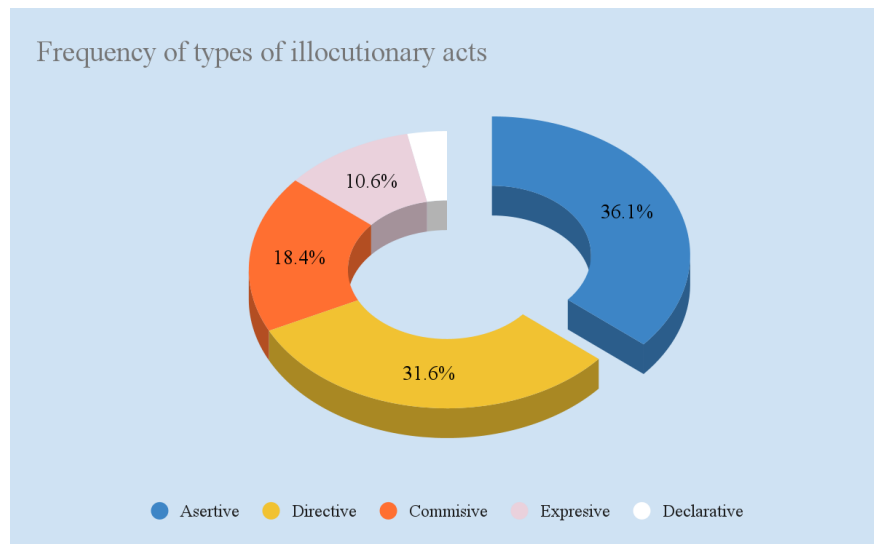


Figure1. Frequency of types of illocutionary acts.

Based on the theory of illocutionary speech acts according to Austin (1975) and Searle (1975), the film *Beautiful Boy* depicts different types of utterances used to achieve certain communication goals, be it to convey information, influence the behaviour of others, or express feelings. In this movie, assertive that show the speaker's thoughts and convey his/her thoughts to provide information, report, infer, state, illustrate, and express a point of view, are often seen, especially in the conversation between David and a hospital officer because Nic Sheff disappeared from his house at that time, where David tried to find him and called the hospital officer and described Nic Sheff's physical features in detail, for example, "*Nicolas Sheff. S-H-E-F-F. He's 18 years old, just over six feet tall. Maybe less, I'm not sure. He has shoulder length brown hair and green eyes*" said David Sheff, describing Nic Sheff's physical characteristics. Here, the speech used by David is included in the assertive speech act because David tries to convey Nic Sheff's physical characteristics to the hospital staff who are then answered with a statement that there is no patient named Nicolas Sheff in the hospital.

In addition, directives that aim to describe commands, requests, offers, giving advice, also appear, especially when David gives Nic advice or instructions about rehabilitation or making better decisions, although it often gets rejected by Nic, for example, "*Why don't... try to help us understand, all right?*" said David Sheff, is a request for explanation from David to Nic. The words used by David here are included in directive speech acts because David asks Nic for an explanation of the situation or condition he is experiencing which then makes Nic panic or crazy and aggressive, which is caused by the influence of continuous drug use.

On the other hand, commissive, which are used to express denials, threats, and promises, are evident in David's speech which promises to pick up Nic who has overdosed, despite the challenging situation, for example, "*Would you please let him know that I'm on my way?*" said David Sheff, is David's promise to meet Nic to the hospital doctor. David's speech here is a commissive speech act because David promised Nic through the hospital doctor to see him immediately but Nic had already left the hospital when David came to visit due to Nic's fear of meeting David and taking responsibility for his drug use.

The strong emotional expressions in the movie also reflect expressions used to describe hatred, fondness, pleasure, misery, blame, and praise, such as when David or Nic express their feelings about addiction and their feelings towards each other, for example, "*Sorry, Dad, that was stupid. It came out wrong, I'm sorry*" said Nic Sheff, which is Nic's apology to David. Here the speech used by Nic is included in expressive speech acts because Nic tries to express his guilt to David which is answered with a smile by David.

Although not as many as other types of actions, declaratives that impact and change the situation of certain events that take place at that time, appear in several moments, such as when David declares the state of Nic's missing or addiction, for example, "*He's been gone for two days,*" said David Sheff, is a declaration of status or facts that change reality and interaction. The speech acts used here belong to declarative speech acts and not assertive because, although both aim to convey information, declarative speech acts are used to declare

status or facts that change reality and interaction such as declaring the status of Nic's disappearance for two days.

The results obtained in this study have differences with previous studies where in previous studies directive speech acts are more dominant than assertive speech acts, although the object of research studied has the same genre (Hutajulu, 2023 & Mustamar, 2024). Overall, the use of different types of illocutionary acts in *Beautiful Boy* shows how the characters express their conflicts, expectations, and emotions, and illustrates the complex interactions in family relationships affected by addiction. Looking at the results that have been described, there are differences with previous studies which explain that speech acts are uttered to achieve a goal (Febriola et al., 2022; Tabiati & Aziz, 2023). In this study, it was found that words that aim to achieve something can have the opposite effect or even the loaded message is not conveyed. Thus, the researcher considers that the context of the dialog is also very important in shaping the type of illocutionary act that appears and the response of the recipient of the speech act. Most of the dialog seems to take place in highly emotional situations, such as the confrontation between family members about Nic Sheff's addiction. In such emotionally charged environments, the frequent use of assertive speech acts shows that the characters are trying to understand and express their emotions and circumstances they are facing, even though it may lead to misunderstandings, for example, *"It's hard to explain. Tastes like cocaine, but multiply better,"* says the character Girl, explaining the taste of drugs after David asks about it.

The prevalence of directive, commissive and expressive actions reflects the need for control and commitment involved. A directive action, for example, *"Guys, go downstairs,"* says David Sheff, is an order to go downstairs, highlighting a moment when a character tries to influence or organise the actions of others during a tense conversation. A commissive action, for example, *"Okay, I'm doing it for you,"* Nic Sheff, is Nic's promise to do something, reflecting a desire to promise and commit that often affects the listener's emotions. On the other hand, expressive acts, for example, *"I'm really sorry, Dad,"* Nic Sheff, is Nic's apology to David, expressing emotional intensity and personal feelings of regret, apology, or frustration that often accompany these interactions. Illocutionary speech acts in this emotional and tense context can elicit conflicting reactions. The low frequency of declaratives may occur because most conversations revolve around the expression of feelings, promises, and commitments, or the giving of orders rather than making official changes to the situation, for example, *"Meth changes the brain physically,"* the Doctor's character says, constituting a declaration of status or fact that changes reality and interaction.

This study found that in the movie *Beautiful Boy*, all types of illocutionary speech acts that have been proposed by Austin (1975) and Searle (1975) are used to reveal the complex dynamics between characters, especially in the context of addiction and family relationships. From a total of 310 event data, the dominant type of illocutionary speech act used is assertive speech act (36.1%), which plays an important role in conveying the truth or personal experience. Directive speech acts (31.6%) also appeared quite significantly, reflecting the characters' attempts to give instructions or requests, especially from David to Nic in a tension-filled situation.

These findings suggest that in intense emotional contexts, assertive and directive acts dominate, as characters are often in situations where they need to understand and influence each other to prevent misunderstandings. Commissive and expressive acts, although less dominant, play a role in conveying commitments, promises, and expressions of deep feelings. Meanwhile, the lower number of declarative acts still exerted significant influence in changing the reality of the situation, such as when Nic's addiction status was openly declared.

In contrast to previous studies that focused more on general linguistic analysis or overall emotional aspects, investigate how addiction is portrayed in movies, examining how films like *"Beautiful Boy"* depict substance use disorders and the effects it has on people and families (Rodriguez et al., 2023), this study reveals that the emotional and tense context of conversation in *Beautiful Boy* cause a more striking variation in the use of speech acts in expressing personal conflicts, expectations, and commitments as seen from the large use of assertive speech acts followed by directive and commissive speech acts (Mustamar, 2024; Rozi et al., 2021). It also highlights the importance of the dialog context, where verbal communication not only conveys intentions, but also forms relationships between characters in complex emotional situations and can produce reactions that go against the purpose of the utterance to the recipient of the speech act. This research is expected to enrich the study of pragmatics with a deeper understanding of the role of illocutionary speech acts in movies that raise intense psychological and interpersonal themes.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study identifies the types of illocutionary speech acts used in *Beautiful Boy* based on Austin's (1975) and Searle's (1975) theories, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative illocution types. This study found that the most dominant types of illocutionary speech acts used from the characters' utterances in *Beautiful Boy* are (36.1%) assertive illocutionary acts and (31.6%) directive illocutionary acts. The researchers identified these speech act tendencies as being influenced by the emotional and melancholic aspects of the movie genre, the researchers concluded that the tense and emotional context of the conversation influenced the types of speech acts used by the characters in *Beautiful Boy*. As a result, the characters show the use of pleading, suggesting, interpreting, and explaining styles that belong to assertive and directive speech acts. If in the future similar research will be conducted, the researcher recommends several research topics, such as (1) perlocutionary speech act research on the movie *Beautiful Boy* because there are many misunderstandings in the conversation between Nic Sheff and David Sheff, (2) similar research by investigating how illocutionary speech acts play a role in everyday life.

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