

THE USE OF ILLOCUTIONARY SPEECH ACTS IN TO CATCH A KILLER MOVIE (2023)

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Article History

Received: 25-09-2025

Revision: 20-11-2025

Accepted: 24-11-2025

Published: 29-11-2025

Abstract. This study investigates the types and prevalence of illocutionary speech acts in the film *To Catch a Killer* (2023), a psychological crime thriller rich in pragmatic nuances. The research aims to identify the categories of illocutionary speech acts used by characters and determine which type dominates the film's dialogue. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the researcher analyzed spoken utterances throughout the movie using Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. Data were collected through systematic observation, transcription, and categorization of speech acts present in key scenes. The analysis reveals five types of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, with assertive acts being the most dominant (43%). These acts are crucial in conveying character intentions and advancing narrative tension. The findings contribute to pragmatic and linguistic studies by showcasing how illocutionary force is embedded within cinematic dialogue and how it reflects the psychological depth of storytelling. This study highlights the pedagogical value of film in teaching speech act theory and encourages further exploration of language in media contexts.

Keywords: Illocutionary Acts, Speech Acts, Pragmatics, *To Catch a Killer*, Qualitative Analysis

Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji berbagai tindak tutur ilokusi dan menentukan tindak tutur ilokusi mana yang paling dominan dalam film *To Catch a Killer*. Penelitian ini menjelaskan tentang jenis-jenis tindak tutur ilokusi dalam film *To Catch a Killer* serta data yang paling dominan ditemukan dalam film *To Catch a Killer*. Peneliti menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif sebagai metode penelitian. Sumber data adalah film berjudul *To Catch a Killer* dari Netflix. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan: (1) mengunduh film, (2) menonton film berulang kali, (3) membaca dialog dan membuat catatan pada kalimat-kalimat, (4) menggarisbawahi semua tindak tutur ilokusi yang ditemukan dalam film. Sementara itu, prosedur analisis data adalah: (1) menonton film di Netflix dan membuat catatan tentang berbagai jenis tindak tutur ilokusi yang digambarkan dalam film, (2) memilih dan meringkas item tertentu untuk mengurangi jumlah materi yang telah dikumpulkan, (3) isi semua data dijelaskan melalui presentasi, (4) validitas penelitian dikonfirmasi dengan menarik kesimpulan dari data. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa ada lima jenis tindak tutur ilokusi yang ditemukan dalam film *To Catch a Killer* (2023). Jenis-jenis tersebut dibagi menjadi asertif, direktif, komisif, ekspresif, dan deklaratif. Selain itu, data tindak tutur ilokusi yang paling dominan ditemukan dalam penelitian ini didominasi oleh jenis asertif sebesar 42%. Peneliti menemukan 15 tuturan yang menggunakan tindak tutur ilokusi dalam bentuk asertif.

Kata Kunci: Ilokusi, Tindak Tutur, Pragmatik, *To Catch a Killer*, Analisis Kualitatif

How to Cite: Cahyati, F. N., Kuswahono, D., & Setyowati, Y. (2025). The Use of Illocutionary Speech Acts in *To Catch a Killer* Movie (2023). *Indo-MathEdu Intellectuals Journal*, 6 (7), 11215-11220. <http://doi.org/10.54373/imeij.v6i7.4299>

INTRODUCTION

Language is more than words—it's action. There is literal meaning of words can be involved in the act of speaking (Laras et al., 2024). Speech act theory, particularly illocutionary acts, plays a vital role in understanding how speakers convey intentions through language. This study explores pragmatic features in cinematic discourse, specifically through the lens of illocutionary acts found in *To Catch a Killer* (2023), a psychological crime thriller directed by Damián Szifron.

Movies are rich communicative tools, blending narrative tension with nuanced dialogue (Alifah et al., 2023). As a reflection of real-world language use, film dialogue offers valuable opportunities to examine how utterances function contextually and intentionally. While speech act theory is widely applied across various domains, its analysis within thriller films—where tension, authority, and emotional expression converge—remains underexplored. Based on research conducted by Putri & Hendar (2022), it was stated that an illocutionary act refers to a speech act in which the speaker's words are intended to prompt the listener to respond or act in line with the speaker's intention. The meaning of such utterances lies not only in the literal statement but also in the context and purpose behind them. Essentially, an illocutionary act conveys the speaker's intention and anticipates a reaction or action from the hearer. Moreover, Pratama & Pratiwi (2023) who analysed illocutionary acts in the dialogues of *The Menu* movie, showed that all utterances in the film can be classified into five categories: Assertives, which commit the speaker to describing or acknowledging events; Directives, which aim to prompt the listener to take action; Commissive, which bind the speaker to future actions; Expressives, which convey emotions or attitudes without aligning words to reality; and Declaratives, which use language to directly bring about changes in the external world.

This study aims to identify the types of illocutionary acts present in the film and determine which type dominates. The research contributes to pragmatic linguistics by providing an applied example of how speech acts reinforce storytelling and shape character dynamics. By highlighting assertive acts as the most prevalent form, the study underscores the narrative reliance on statements, hypotheses, and informative cues (Ahmad et al., 2024). The gap this research addresses is the lack of comprehensive study on illocutionary force in thriller genre scripts. As such, it provides insight into how language is used not only to communicate but to drive plot development and psychological tension.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative descriptive method to analyse illocutionary speech acts in the film *To Catch a Killer* (2023). Dialogue from the movie served as the primary data source, with speech act theory by Searle (1979) guiding the categorization. Data collection involved repeated observation of the film, transcription of relevant utterances, and identification of speech acts. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model (1994), which included data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Five illocutionary types were identified: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative, with assertive acts emerging as the dominant category.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Results of the study

Type of Illocutionary	Quantity of Data	Percentage
Assertive	15	43%
Directive	11	31%
Commissive	6	17%
Expressive	2	6%
Declarative	1	3%
Total	35	100%

This study identified five types of illocutionary speech acts in *To Catch a Killer* (2023): assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. A total of 35 representative utterances were analysed using Searle's framework. Among these, assertive acts were the most dominant, comprising 43% of the data, followed by directive (31%), commissive (17%), expressive (6%), and declarative (3%). Assertive speech acts such as stating, assuring, claiming, and informing were frequently used in investigative and tense scenes, highlighting how the film relies on informative and reportive language to convey urgency and realism. This dominance reflects the genre's demand for clarity, deduction, and authority in dialogue—a finding aligned with previous studies on crime narratives (Nur & Simatupang, 2022).

Directive acts, including commands and requests, were also common, especially in moments of tactical planning and law enforcement interaction. Commissive acts, representing promises and guarantees, surfaced during emotionally loaded exchanges—particularly between Eleanor and Lammark—signaling shifts in personal commitment and moral tension. While expressive and declarative acts were less frequent, their presence enriched character relationships and institutional authority. The lone declarative utterance underscored the importance of hierarchy and protocol within the FBI context, demonstrating language's role in

defining formal power dynamics. The film's reliance on assertive acts suggests that dialogue functions not only to advance plot but also to reinforce the psychological complexity of its characters. Compared to prior studies—where expressive or directive types often dominate in drama or animated genres—this research shows a genre-specific shift toward statements and analyses, confirming the hypothesis that crime thrillers favor precision-driven discourse.

Moreover, as stated by Putri & Hendar (2022), an illocutionary act refers to a speech act in which the speaker's words are intended to prompt the listener to respond or act in line with the speaker's intention. The meaning of such utterances lies not only in the literal statement but also in the context and purpose behind them. Essentially, an illocutionary act conveys the speaker's intention and anticipates a reaction or action from the hearer. Pratama & Pratiwi (2023) who analysed illocutionary acts in the dialogues of *The Menu* movie, showed that all utterances in the film can be classified into five categories: Assertives, which commit the speaker to describing or acknowledging events; Directives, which aim to prompt the listener to take action; Commissive, which bind the speaker to future actions; Expressives, which convey emotions or attitudes without aligning words to reality; and Declaratives, which use language to directly bring about changes in the external world. The study by Nur & Simatupang (2022) analyzed illocutionary speech acts in Craig Gillespie's *Cruella* using Searle's and Leech's frameworks, applying a qualitative descriptive method to 30 dialogue samples. The findings revealed five types of illocutionary acts—assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative—with commissive acts being the most dominant (26.67%). In terms of function, competitive acts were most frequent (30%), followed by collaborative, conflictive, and convivial functions. The research highlights how film dialogue reflects varied pragmatic strategies shaped by speaker–listener roles, social context, and communicative goals, thereby demonstrating the relevance of illocutionary analysis in understanding character interaction and meaning construction in cinematic narratives.

Widyawanti, Aisyah, & Prasetyo (2024) conducted a pragmatic study on the short film *The Translator* using Searle's classification of illocutionary acts and Leech's framework of functions. Through qualitative content analysis, they identified 27 instances of illocutionary speech acts, consisting of 4 assertives, 9 directives, 13 expressives, and 1 declarative. In terms of functions, they found 5 competitive, 4 convivial, 1 collaborative, and 2 conflictive acts. The study demonstrates how varied illocutionary acts and their functions shape character interactions and narrative meaning, highlighting the role of pragmatic analysis in uncovering how language use in film conveys psychological attitudes, social goals, and communicative strategies. In addition, the research by Sihombing et al., (2021) examined illocutionary acts in

Incredibles 2 using Searle’s framework through qualitative content analysis of the film’s script and dialogues. The study identified all five types of illocutionary acts—directives, assertives, expressives, commissives, and declarations—with a total of 25 instances. Among these, directives were the most dominant (32%), followed by assertives and expressives (each 28%), while commissives (8%) and declarations (4%) appeared less frequently. The findings highlight how animated film dialogue reflects pragmatic functions such as requesting, asserting, expressing emotions, committing to future actions, and enacting changes, thereby reinforcing the relevance of speech act theory in analyzing character interaction and meaning construction in cinematic narratives.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed illocutionary speech acts in the film *To Catch a Killer* and identified five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The most dominant type was assertive, accounting for 43% of the data. These acts were central to delivering information and driving the narrative. The findings confirm that crime thrillers rely heavily on assertive language for clarity and tension, offering valuable insights for pragmatic studies and future genre comparison.

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