



## ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS ANALYSYS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE *OPPENHEIMER* MOVIE

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### Abstract

Pragmatics explores how language is used in context, focusing on how people produce and interpret meanings, including their intentions, assumptions, goals, and actions. This study centers on pragmatics, specifically illocutionary acts, to analyze the communicative strategies of the main character in the *Oppenheimer* movie. This study was chosen to explore how the main character in *Oppenheimer* uses language to express intentions and influence others through illocutionary acts. Drawing on Searle's theory of speech acts—comprising assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives—the research aims to uncover how utterances reflect the main character's intentions and interactions. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, the study examines the film script, identifying and categorizing illocutionary acts based on contextual meaning. Findings reveal that the main character predominantly uses directive acts, emphasizing his authoritative role and frequent efforts to influence others through commands and suggestions. Other acts such as assertives, expressives, and commissives also appear, reflecting his beliefs, emotional expressions, and commitments. The analysis highlights the significance of speech acts in film dialogue, demonstrating how language constructs character identity and power dynamics, and affirms the value of pragmatic analysis in understanding narrative communication.

**Keywords:** *Illocutionary acts; Movie; Oppenheimer.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential tool for communication, enabling people to connect and share information (Ismani & Effendi, 2022; Laras et al., 2024; Sholikhah et al., 2025). Language is used to share information with one another, enabling interaction and the exchange of new knowledge (Revia et al., 2024). Communication involves two or more individuals acting as speaker and listener, exchanging messages through various utterances (Lestari & Hartati, 2020). Language allows people to share their thoughts, feelings, and problems through communication (Wahyuni et al., 2024). There are various languages people use for communication, one of which is pragmatics, the study of speaker meaning (Dwi Orizka et al., 2022). Pragmatics explores how language is used in context, focusing on how people produce and interpret meanings, including their intentions, assumptions, goals, and actions (Tutuarima et al., 2018). Topics commonly explored in the field of pragmatics include deixis, presupposition, implicature, politeness, entailment, speech acts, and others (Rakaj, 2023).

In this research, speech acts serve as the central focus of pragmatics. One of the elements analyzed in pragmatic research is the use of speech acts (Laras et al., 2024). Speech acts are classified into three types: the Locutionary Act, which refers to the literal meaning of an utterance; the Illocutionary Act, which represents the intention behind the utterance; and the Perlocutionary Act, which describes the effect of the utterance on the listener (Manalu et al., 2023). According to Searle, there are five fundamental types of illocutionary acts in speech: representative, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative (Gulo & Pasaribu, 2023).

These five types are examined in this study to understand the speaker's intention behind the utterances. The first type, representative, indicates that the speaker holds a belief about whether something is true or not (Sihombing et al., 2021). The second type is directives, that means speech acts used by speakers to influence others to take action. This act reflects the speaker's desires and include commands, orders, requests, and suggestions (Hutajulu & Herman, 2019). A commissive type is a type of speech act in which the speaker commits to doing something in the future (Sihombing et al., 2021). The fourth type, expressive, conveys the speaker's feelings about a situation, while the final type, declarative, brings about a change in the world through the act of speaking (Sihombing et al., 2021).

Pragmatics examines how language is used in real-life interactions to convey meaning beyond literal words. In essence, pragmatics explores how we express intentions, emotions, and social messages, it also examines how individuals interpret conversational cues, revealing the implicit rules of communication that extend beyond grammar and vocabulary. In other terms, pragmatics focuses on how meaning is conveyed by the speaker and understood by the listener (Fitriani et al., 2020).

According to Yule, as cited in (Agustina et al., 2022), Pragmatics involves examining the meaning conveyed by speakers and interpreted by listeners. Exploring pragmatics offers various benefits, such as enabling listeners to grasp the speaker's intentions. As elucidated, pragmatics entails investigating speaker meaning, which entails understanding the significance conveyed by the speaker and how the listener understands it

Levinson defines pragmatics as the study of the relationship between language

and context, which is embedded within linguistic structure. It emphasizes how vocabulary and language patterns contribute to deeper meanings, extending to sentence-level interpretation in communication. Human communication involves both sending and receiving messages, integrating semantic knowledge with real-world understanding while considering contextual factors.

In speech acts, the focus is more on the significance or meaning behind the actions conveyed through speech (Marbun & Handayani, 2020). According to Yule, speech acts can be categorized into three types: Locutionary acts, Illocutionary acts, and Perlocutionary acts (Niswati et al., 2024). Searle in (Fitria, 2019) states that speech consists of five fundamental actions, expressed through different types of utterances: representatives (which commit the speaker to the truth of a statement), directives (which prompt the listener to take action), commissives (where the speaker pledges to a future action), expressives (which convey the speaker's emotions), and declaratives (which bring about changes in the external world through speech).

This research focuses on analyzing illocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts assist readers in gaining a deeper understanding of the speaker's utterances in specific situations, as the speaker conveys messages with intended meaning that align with the context and actual conditions (Tarigan et al., 2022). According to Searle (1969), illocutionary acts are categorized into five types: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative (Sembiring & Ambalegin, 2019).

A movie is not merely a sequence of shots or scenes, but rather the characters that typically hold the key role in the narrative (Kulshreshtha & Guha, 2020; Wahyuni et al, 2024). One of the key aspects commonly found in movies is the dialogue (conversation) between the characters (Ramayanti & Marlina, 2018; Ahmad, 2024). It demonstrates that a movie serves as a representation of everyday activities, recorded to be presented to the public (Lestari & Hartati, 2020). Based on this phenomenon, the researcher will conduct a study entitled: "ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE OPPENHEIMER MOVIE", focusing on the classification and five types of speech acts.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative methodology to analyze the research data, focusing on examining the words extracted. The researcher used a qualitative descriptive approach to identify and categorize the types of utterances in the movie script, as well as to understand the role of speech acts performed by the main character.

In this research, the data are taken from the movie script of *Oppenheimer* written by Christopher Nolan based on the novel: *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*. The *Oppenheimer* movie provides a captivating portrayal of J. Robert Oppenheimer's central role in the development of the atomic bomb during World War II. The movie delves into Oppenheimer's struggles, relationships with colleagues, and the weight of his decisions, shedding light on the human cost of scientific progress. Through a blend of historical accuracy and dramatic storytelling, the "Oppenheimer" movie offers audiences a thought-provoking exploration of one of the most significant events of the 20th century and its enduring impact on humanity. This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative method to analyze

and interpret data, focusing on understanding phenomena through detailed descriptions and contextual insights. The main character's dialogue in the movie script was analyzed using Searle's theory to analyze the illocutionary aspect to understand the intent behind the main character's speech acts. Finally, the writer confirms the validity of their research by drawing conclusions based on the findings obtained from the collected data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, the writer presents the findings and discussion related to the types of speech acts found in the Oppenheimer movie script, based on Searle's illocutionary acts theory. The data collected were identified and categorized according to the types of Illocutionary acts used by the main character. In the Oppenheimer movie script, four types of illocutionary acts were identified: Assertives, Directives, Expressives, and Commisives. The researcher identifies these types using the following table:

**Table 1.** Types of Illocutionary Acts

No	Illocutionary Act	Frequency	Percentage
1	Assertives	42	47,7%
2	Directives	21	23,9%
3	Expressives	15	17%
4	Commisives	10	11,4%
Total		88	100%

Based on Table 1, four types of illocutionary acts were identified in the main character's utterances in the Oppenheimer movie script using Searle's theory. There are forty-two directive acts, twenty-one assertive acts, fifteen commissive acts, and ten expressive acts, with a total of eighty-eight data.

### 4.1 Assertives Act

Assertive acts are speech actions that convey a situation, including stating facts, expressing opinions, providing information, describing events, and similar functions. The following dialogue data illustrates examples of these assertive acts.

Datum 1:

Oppenheimer : "It's paradoxical, and yet, it works."

Oppenheimer's utterance "It's paradoxical, and yet, it works." is an example of an assertive illocutionary act. Assertive acts are used to express the speaker's beliefs, observations, or descriptions about a situation or concept. In this case, the speaker is making an evaluative observation about a phenomenon that seems contradictory on the surface ("paradoxical") but is nonetheless effective in practice ("it works"). By stating this, the speaker conveys a belief about the nature of the phenomenon that its apparent contradiction does not

prevent it from functioning. This utterance communicates the speaker's perspective as a factual observation, making it a clear example of an assertive speech act.

Datum 14:

Oppenheimer : "The country needs us."

Oppenheimer's utterance "The country needs us." is an example of an assertive illocutionary act. Assertive acts are used to express the speaker's beliefs, observations, or descriptions about a situation. In this case, the speaker is making a declarative statement about the current state of national affairs, suggesting that their skills or contributions are essential to the country. By stating this, the speaker presents a viewpoint rooted in their perception of duty or importance, treating it as a matter of fact. This utterance reflects the speaker's belief about a broader reality, making it a clear example of an assertive speech act.

Datum 27:

Oppenheimer : "Well, you are... you are persistent, but that is your job"

In this context, Oppenheimer's utterance "Well, you are... you are persistent, but that is your job" is an example of assertive illocutionary act. Assertive acts are used to express the speaker's beliefs, observations, or descriptions about a situation or person. In this case, the speaker is making an evaluative observation about the listener's character, specifically acknowledging their persistence. By adding "but that is your job," the speaker further reinforces their belief that persistence is not only a trait of the listener but also an expected aspect of their role. This utterance simply expresses a viewpoint about the listener, making it a clear example of an assertive speech act in which the speaker presents their perspective as a statement of fact.

Datum 41:

Oppenheimer : "Well, it was hardly... my invention"

Oppenheimer's utterance "Well, it was hardly... my invention" is an example of an assertive illocutionary act. Assertive acts are used to express the speaker's beliefs, observations, or statements about reality. In this case, the speaker is downplaying or clarifying their role in the creation of something, indicating that the invention in question was not solely their own. This utterance reflects the speaker's belief and intention to correct a possible misconception, making it a statement of fact from their perspective. As it communicates the speaker's view on the truth of a situation, it clearly functions as an assertive speech act.

## 4.2 Directives Act

Directive acts represent the speaker's attitude toward actions they expect the listener to do. These acts communicate the speaker's intentions and are often aimed at prompting the listener to respond or take a particular action. Common forms of directives include commands, and requests.

Datum 44:

Oppenheimer : "Then you're doing it wrong."

Oppenheimer's utterance "Then you're doing it wrong." is identified as a directive illocutionary act. Directive acts are used by the speaker to get the listener to do something, whether through commands, suggestions, advice, or criticism aimed at influencing behavior. In this case, the speaker is not only pointing out that the listener's current approach is incorrect but also implicitly urging them to change their method. Although it is phrased as a statement, the underlying function is to correct and guide the listener's actions. This intention to influence the listener's future behavior makes it a clear example of a directive speech act.

Datum 48:

Oppenheimer : "Can you explain quantum mechanics to me?"

In this context, Oppenheimer's utterance "Can you explain quantum mechanics to me?" serves as a clear example of a directive illocutionary act. Although it is phrased as a question, the speaker is not merely seeking information about the listener's ability; instead, the underlying intention is a polite request for the listener to perform an action, explaining quantum mechanics. Directive acts are used to prompt the hearer to do something, and in this case, the speaker subtly encourages the listener to provide an explanation. This type of indirect directive is commonly used in conversation to maintain politeness while still achieving the communicative goal, illustrating how speech acts can carry meaning beyond their literal form.

Datum 51:

Oppenheimer : "You want security, build a town."

Oppenheimer's utterance "You want security, build a town." is identified as a directive illocutionary act. Directive acts are used to influence the listener's actions, typically through commands, suggestions, or advice. In this case, the speaker is responding to a perceived desire for security by offering a direct solution—building a town. Although the structure resembles a conditional statement, the intention is clearly to guide or instruct the listener toward a specific course of action. The speaker is urging the listener to take concrete steps, which makes this utterance a clear example of a directive speech act.

## 4.3 Expressive Act

Expressive acts convey the speaker's emotions to the listener, whether as part of a social convention or as a genuine emotional response. These expressions are typically aligned with specific situations and may include utterances such as giving thanks, apologizing, or offering praise.

Datum 70:  
Oppenheimer : "I'm not formulating a plan, I'll just have to digest the whole thing."

Oppenheimer's utterance "I'm not formulating a plan, I'll just have to digest the whole thing." is identified as an expressive illocutionary act. Expressive acts are used to convey the speaker's psychological state or emotional response to a situation. In this case, the speaker is expressing a personal reaction perhaps feeling overwhelmed, surprised, or uncertain by stating that they are not ready to make a decision and instead need time to "digest" or process everything. This reveals an internal state of contemplation or emotional processing, rather than asserting a fact or directing action. Because the utterance communicates how the speaker feels in response to the situation, it is a clear example of an expressive speech act.

Datum 79 :  
Oppenheimer : "Damn it, I happen to love this country."

In this context, Oppenheimer utterance, "Damn it, I happen to love this country." is a strong example of an expressive illocutionary act, as it reveals the speaker's intense emotional attachment and patriotic sentiment. Expressive acts is to convey the speaker's inner feelings, such as joy, anger, regret, or love, often in reaction to a specific situation. In this case, the speaker is not merely stating a fact but is emotionally asserting their deep affection and loyalty toward their country. The phrase "Damn it" adds emphasis and reflects frustration or passion, further highlighting the sincerity of the emotion being expressed. This utterance, therefore, serves not to inform or request, but to express a heartfelt personal stance, fitting clearly within the category of expressive speech acts.

#### 4.5 Commissive Act

A commissive act involves making a promise, commitment, or obligation, either agreeing to do something, declining to do it, or expressing an intention. These acts may include statements of promising, guaranteeing, or refusing to act.

Datum 86:  
Oppenheimer : "I won't work with that man"

In this context, Oppenheimer utterance, "I won't work with that man." is an example of a commissive illocutionary act, as it reflects the speaker's commitment to a future course of action, or in this case, a refusal to take a specific action. Commissive acts are used when the speaker binds themselves to something they will or will not do, such as making promises, offers, threats, or refusals. Here, the speaker clearly expresses a refusal to collaborate with a particular individual, indicating a personal decision or stance that involves a future intention. This utterance is not merely a declaration of preference but a firm commitment to avoid working with someone, thus classifying it as a commissive speech act.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that speech acts, as a key aspect of pragmatics, play a central role in understanding the intentions and communicative strategies of characters in film dialogue. By applying Searle's theory of illocutionary acts to the Oppenheimer movie script, the researcher identified four types of illocutionary acts, Assertives, Directives, Expressives, and Commisives, used by the main character. The findings reveal that Directive acts were the most frequently used, indicating the character's strong tendency to influence others through commands, requests, and suggestions. The use of Assertives, Commisives, and Expressives further highlights the character's efforts to convey beliefs, make commitments, and express emotions throughout the narrative. This analysis confirms the effectiveness of a qualitative descriptive approach in uncovering the deeper meanings behind utterances and enhances our understanding of how language reflects power, emotion, and intention in cinematic storytelling.

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