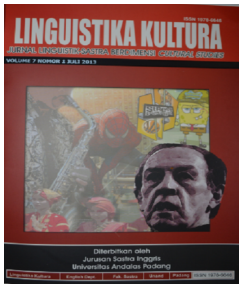
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An Analysis of Speech Act in The Road Movie (2009)

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini akan mengeksplorasi penggunaan tindak tutur dalam film, *The Road*. Tindak tutur adalah tindakan yang dilakukan oleh ujaran manusia yang mencakup hal-hal seperti meminta, meminta maaf, menjanjikan, dan ujaran lain yang dilakukan manusia yang menyerupai suatu tindakan. Tindak tutur terdiri dari lima kelas tindak tutur: asertif, direktif, ekspresif, komisif, dan deklarasi. Penelitian ini akan menganalisis tindak tutur dalam dialog film dan mengklasifikasikannya ke dalam teori tindak tutur Searle. Makalah ini menunjukkan sebagian besar kategori tindak tutur termasuk dalam dialog *The Road* kecuali deklarasi. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa film tersebut mencakup sebagian besar jenis ini: karakter membuat pernyataan dan memberi informasi (asertif), memberi perintah, peringatan, mengajukan pertanyaan (direktif), mengekspresikan emosi dan perasaan (ekspresif), dan membuat janji, ancaman, dan sumpah (komisif). Ketiadaan deklarasi dalam film ini terjadi karena latar film berada di dunia pasca-apokaliptik di mana tidak ada figur otoritas yang dapat mengubah dunia, sehingga tindak tutur deklarasi hampir mustahil dilakukan. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini mengungkap fungsi dan pentingnya tindak tutur dalam dialog film.

Keywords: *Dialog Film, Tindak Tutur, The Road*

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the use of speech acts in the movie, The Road. Speech acts are actions that are performed by human utterances. Speech acts include things like requesting, apologizing, promising, and other utterances that humans do that resemble an action. Based on Searle's classification of speech acts, there are five classes of speech acts: assertive, directive, expressive, commissive and declaration. The paper analyzed speech acts in the film's dialogue and classify them into Searle's speech acts theory. The paper shows most of the speech acts categories are included in The Road's dialogue except for declaration. The analysis shows that the movie includes most of these types: characters make statements and give information (assertive), give commands, warning, ask questions (Directive), express emotions and feelings (expressive), and make promises, threats and vow (commissive). The absence of declaration in the movie happens because the setting of the movie is in a post-apocalyptic world where there is no authority figure that can make change to the world, making the speech act of declaration is almost impossible. Overall, the study reveals the function and the importance of speech acts in movie dialogue.

Keywords: *Movie Dialogues, Speech Acts, The Road*

INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is a field of study that is inevitable in human life because humans use language every day and everywhere they live. One of linguistics fragments that people always use is the speech act. Speech Act is utterances that give purposes in a communication. Speech acts can be divided into five categories: assertive/representative, directive, commissive, expressive and declaration. These five categories are often used in human conversations including in movies. Movies are often filled with talk scenes. These scenes are filled with everyday conversations. Some of the movies have long text conversations, but there are others that have short conversations that only have a few words per scene. One of the movies with minimalistic conversation is The Road.

The Road is a 2009 movie directed by John Hillcoat and written by Joe Penhall. The movie is based on the novel with the same name by Cormac McCarthy. The road is a movie about a journey of a father and his son to find a better place to survive the post-apocalyptic world. The story takes place in the American grey wasteland where everything is burning and turning into dust. In the movie, the main protagonist, the man and the child, share a few conversations that only have a few words in it. Even the conversations were short-lived because the story is more focusing on survival rather than talking, these conversations contained many speech acts in almost every scene. This article will analyze and explain what speech acts that the movies have and what kind category speech acts are.

Speech Acts is a field of linguistics that analyzes how humans can use words as actions. It is considered a branch of pragmatics because, according to Pratiwi et al. (2025), “pragmatic analysis involves the function of language not only for conveying information but also for performing acts” (p. 33). This highlights the speech acts also contain meaning beyond the literal meaning. Pragmatic analysis depends heavily on context. As Levinson (1983) explains, pragmatic meaning often relies heavily on context, and speakers frequently use indirect expressions to perform speech acts without stating them explicitly. Many linguists have contributed to the development of speech acts, including Austin, Searle, and Yule. According to Searle (1969), “Speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior”(p.41). This means speaking is more than producing words or sending messages, but it is also actions. These actions are used in humans’ everyday life from asking questions, making statements, or even demanding something. Speech acts can be performed directly or indirectly, based on the situations and contexts. Austin(1955) in his book How to Do Things with Words, introduced three types of acts: Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary. Searle (1979) expanded the

concept of illocutionary acts in 1979 Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts by classifying them into 5 categories of illocutionary: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarations, which serve as the basis for the analysis in this study

METHODOLOGY

The method that is used in this paper is a qualitative method as explained by Creswell (2014), which focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning behind human communication within its context. The primary source of this paper is from the movie dialogues that the characters spoke throughout the film The Road (2009). The researcher watched the film multiple times and selected relevant dialogues that contain clear instances of speech acts. The selected utterances were then analyzed and categorized using Searle's (1979) classification of illocutionary acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, declaration. These categories are the base of the speech acts analysis of this paper. Each selected utterance from the movie dialogues was identified and categorized according to the communicative function, based on Searle's classification.

RESULTS &DISCUSSION

As stated before, humans frequently use speech acts in their daily life, making the speech acts is one of the fundamental components of human conversation. Not only in real life, speech acts also exists frequently in the movies, even movies with minimal dialogue such as The Road (2009). The movie is different from usual movies where there are a lot of long dramatic conversations. In contrast, the movie conversation is mostly minimalistic and short, there are only a few scenes with long dialogue. Despite this, speech acts still being the major part of the conversation of the movie in conveying meaning and emotion throughout the film. Below are some of speech acts that exist in The Road movie based on the 5 division of illocutionary:

Assertive

Assertive plays a big role in the movie because there are some scenes where the characters give statements or information either to the audience or the other characters. Here are some of the assertive speech acts that spoken in The Road:

1.*"All I know is the child is my warrant and If he not a word of God, and God never spoke"*

This line is spoken by the man during a monologue scene where the man and the child are searching for valuable items in the place where it looks like a ruined store. This utterance

can fall into Assertive type of illocution because the sentence's intention is to give a statement, the statement of the man's belief. The man has faith that his son is the embodiment of goodness and hope in the middle of the depravity of humanity in the wasteland. The man believed that if the child is not the embodiment of goodness and hope, he didn't believe in god because the child is the only proof that the man believes in the goodness that is left in him. Because this utterance is a monologue and the intention is to show the man's belief, perlocutionary in this scene is absent.

2. *"two left, one for you and one for me"*

This utterance is spoken by the man to the child in a scene after they saw bodies of a family that comited suicide. While holding a gun, inspecting the bullets that left in the revolver, near his child's face, the man say the line with intention to teach the child how to commit suicide when the hope is lost. This line can be considered as assertive because this speech's intention is to inform the child about how many bullets left for them to end it all. This line also had a little directive type because indirectly, the man told his son to kill himself when the time came. The perlocutionary of this speech act is the child becomes afraid because he cannot imagine himself or his father doing it.

3. *"They gonna rape me, and they gonna rape your son and they gonna kill us and eat us"*

This line is spoken by the woman in one of the flashback scenes. The context of this utterance, In the scene, the woman and the man argue about whether they should continue their lives or end it all before it gets worse. The woman already planned to do it, and she wants to take her child with her, but the man refuses to do it and argues back about the plan. The line has a major assertive type in it because the intention of the line is to make a prediction, or give an idea of what will happen to them, based on the woman's mind. The perlocution of this line is despite the horror that the woman gives in the utterance, the man still believes there is hope left. The line also has an expressive speech act tone where the woman expresses her hopelessness and fear with the line.

4.*"We looked skinny"*

In the scene where the man and the child are searching for a valuable item in a house, the child sees a mirror and calls his papa. The man in the middle of his tears because of the nostalgia that he felt by seeing a piano suddenly stand up and approach the child. The child said "we looked skinny" as he pointed in the mirror. This line is mainly to give a statement or report information about their condition. Even if there is an expressive tone of concern in the line, the line is mostly appropriate to fall into the category of the assertive type more. The perlocution of this line is the man looked concerned and took the boy away from the mirror to sooth the boy.

5.*"I can't do it anymore"*

In the scene, the man is injured, his condition is critical, and he realizes that he is no longer strong enough to continue. The man collapses into the ground when he drags a cart of their supplies. He knows his body is ruined and weak, he tells the child that he cannot continue dragging the cart as he weakly lays on the ground but keeps trying to get up. The intention of the line is to state his own condition to the child. At the same time, the line also gives the expressive function as he expresses his frustration, weakness or despair. The perlocution of this speech act is they stop dragging the cart and walk to the beach and rest.

Directive

Directive in The Road movie is one of the speech acts that are frequently used in the line. In a movie focusing on the journey of a father and a child in a wasteland making the line filled with orders, requests, asking questions, warnings, commands and other things where the speaker tries to get the listener to do something. Here are some of the analyses of directive speech acts in the movie:

1. *"Stop It!"*

The line is spoken by the woman in a flashback scene where they argue about killing themselves or keep surviving. The man keeps insisting that they will be okay and they should be alive together, while the woman keeps saying that they should kill themselves before it gets worse. As the man kept arguing, the woman said the line. The line is considered as a directive because the intention of this line is to make the man stop talking and arguing. The perlocution of this speech act is the man stops talking for a moment.

2. *"You mustn't say that. That is a bad thing to say"*

In the truck scene where the man and the child are resting inside a truck, the child said "I wish I was with my mom," expressing his yearning to his mom. The man asked the child if he wanted to die like his mom, the child said yes. The man responds with this line, commands or warns the child to not say things like that because it was a bad thing to say. This line has an assertive tone especially on the last part "that is a bad thing to say," stating his belief that yearning to die is a bad thing to say, especially in that situation where the man tries his best to make his child alive. The perlocution of this directive is the boy feels bad and gives the reason why he said that.

3. *"Take it!"*

This line is spoken by the man in the scene where they are trapped inside a bathroom of the cannibals' house. The man seems lost hope after seeing the cannibals' victim before they are trapped, so he gives the revolver to the child. While whispering, the man says "take it" as he shoves the gun onto his son's hand. This is a directive because the man orders the child to take the gun and shoot himself because the man cannot kill his own son. The perlocution of this speech act is the child becomes afraid and resisting to do what the man's order.

4. *"don't touch my stuff"*

In the underground shelter, the man rested as he dreamed about his wife. Suddenly the child wakes him up. The child says "don't touch my stuff" because before the man is sleeping, he opens the child's bag. The child's intention in this speech act is to warn his father to not touch his stuff again, that is why this fall into the directive category. The perlocution of this speech acts as the man never touching the child's stuff again throughout the story.

5. *"just keep, keep going south, like everything the way we did it"*

As the man lays weakly on the beach sand, the child sitting next to him. The man knew he would die soon, leaving his son alone in the road. The man gives his last instruction to the child with this line. This is one of the last directive speech acts that the man said to his child. The purpose of this speech is for the child to understand what he should do after the man is dead, keep alive and keep carrying the fire.

Commissive

In The Road, commissive plays a large part in the story. It is used for saying vow, promises, threats in important scenes. Here are some of the analyses of commissive speech acts in the road:

1. *"Now I'll kill anyone who touches you"*

The line was spoken when the man tries to sooth his son who has just experienced a traumatic event. The child was held against a knife by a cannibal, so the man shot the cannibal. The gun noise deafening the child and makes the child scared and freeze in horror that just happened near him. The man is holding his child, washing his ear with water and saying things to soothe his child. As the man soothing the child, he said the line. The line is categorized as commissive because in that line, the man indirectly makes a promise to the child that he will kill anyone who dares to touch his son like that again. Even though it sounds like a statement or expressing love , the intention of the line is to make a promise. The perlocution of the line is the child becomes calmer and steady.

2. *"Wait! Come on, I'm not gonna hurt you!"*

The line is spoken by the child in the scene where the child is chasing another boy. At the beginning of the scene, the child is waiting outside as the man is wandering in his old house, feeling nostalgic and sad. As the child waits, he sees another boy, desperate to have a friend that is the same age as him, the child chases the boy and shouts that he is not gonna hurt the boy. The intention of the child is not to hurt the boy, making this line type is commissive, even though there is a directive or expressive tone in the word "wait!" because the word intention can also give order to the boy to stop or expressing desperation of having a friend by the child. The perlocution of this speech act is the child doesn't trust the boy so he runs faster.

3. *"Do you want to have dinner with us?"*

When the man and the child found an old man walking alone weakly, the child insisted the man give the old man food. As the old man eats the food, the man offers the old man to have dinner with them tonight because he sees the old man not as a threat and knowing the child will demand to help the old man more. The line actually has the directive tone with it because the man encourages the old man to answer the question, but the main intention of the man is him offering the old man to have dinner with them. The man is the one who commits the act to his own words rather than the old man. The perlocution of this speech act is the old man hesitating before he trusts the man and the child.

4. *"if you die, I wanna die too, so I can be with you"*

They were near the beach; the child was sick. As he lay on the sand, the child asked the man, "What would you do if I died?" The man, without hesitation answered, "if you die, i wanna die too, so I can be with you." The line carries many layers of meaning behind it. It could be a statement of the man, and it could also be an expression of the man's love and care to his son beyond life and death. But the line is more than a simple statement or an expression, it is a vow. The man promises that he will never leave the child alone, even when he is dead. The man is very committed to his word because there is an implication where the man, without hesitation, will kill himself if his child dies first in the line "I wanna die too." The perlocution of this line is the child becomes more relaxed because he understands now that his father will never ever leave him alone, even in death.

5. *"I'll kill you"*

At one scene, the man went to find valuable items in a sinking boat and the child lay sick on the ground. As the man swam back to the shore where the child was waiting from him by sleeping on the ground, the man realized that their food and other important items in their cart were stolen. The man and the child follow the trail that led them to a man who drags their cart

alone. As they argue, the thief surrenders by throwing his knife to the cart. The man, who is still panicked and full of adrenaline, orders the thief to undress all of his clothes as a sort of punishment. As the man threatened the thief, he said the line "I'll kill you" with an adrenaline driven tone as he pointed the revolver on the thief. The line is commissive because the man is willing to do what he is going to say if the thief doesn't obey him. The perlocution of this speech act is the thief scared with the man's words, so he does what the man's order.

Expressive

Many lines where the characters express their emotion, feeling or other psychological state in The Road movie. From anger, sadness, happiness and others, there are many of them. Here are some of the expressive speech acts in the movie:

1. *"my heart was ripped out of me the night he was born"*

In one of the flashback scenes, at the end of the argument of should they kill themselves before they meet a worse situation, the woman gives this statement. Even though this is a statement, the real intention of this sentence is to express the feeling or emotion that the woman has. The woman doesn't believe in hope at that point, so she expresses her regret of giving birth to the child. It can be interpreted that her regret is not having a child, but giving birth to him in the world that equals hell itself. The perlocution of this sentence is the man speechless for a second, processing what is her feeling before back insisting that there is a hope left in the life and they should not kill themselves.

2. *"it's really good"*

There was a moment when the man found a Coca-Cola in a vending machine. He opens the coke and gives it to the child, creating a new experience for the child because the child doesn't know anything from the pre-apocalypse world, especially Coca-Cola. As the child sips the coke, he smiles and says, "it's really good, you should have some." In that line, there is an expressive speech act in the part where he said the coke is really good. He was amazed with the taste of Coca-Cola. The perlocution of this speech act is the man gives the child a smile of happiness because he is glad the child is like Coca-Cola.

3. *"Oh my God"*

When the man and the child found a house, they went inside and found a locked trapdoor into a basement. Curiosity and the need to find more food made the man grab a tool and destroy the trapdoor's lock. In the basement, they didn't see anything. When the man uses a lighter to see what is in front of him, he sees many naked people. The people looked so miserable and awful, one of them has one decapitated leg, they are food for the cannibals. Seeing this horror,

the man mutters "oh my God" as he inspected the cruelty more. The man said that line to express his shock, horror and fear. Because the man mutters those words under his breath, there is no interlocutor, so there is no perlocution in this speech.

4.*"thank you, people"*

As hunger claimed them, they found a vault door and the man decided to open that. To his surprise, the underground shelter was filled with food. The man and the child bust themselves to eat and fill their stomachs. As they rest, the child insists on giving appreciation to people who left this shelter. As the child expresses his gratitude, he orders the man to give gratitude too. The man simply said "thank you, people." This is clearly an expressive speech where the man expresses his gratitude to people, not God because it seems that he lost his belief in God anymore. Because the line is simply an act of expressing gratitude to someone who isn't there, there is no perlocution in this line.

5.*"ninety my ass!"*

There is one scene where the man, the child and Ely walking, the man asks Ely age. Ely simply says "ninety." The man who is not convinced, says "ninety my ass" in response to that statement. This short line is an expressive speech act because the man shows his disbelief of the statement in a mocking tone. There is no perlocution because after the man says this line, he asks again about the reason why Ely lie about his age.

Declarations

The Road's world setting is years after the unknown disaster that burned the world into ashes. This is supported by the fact that the woman was pregnant when the burning happened to the world and the child is around 10 years old. Because of this, there is no legal system or institution, making the speech acts of declaration is almost impossible. According to speech act theory, declarative speech acts like pronouncing someone married or guilty require institutional power and authority. So, because of the lack of authority and powerful people that can make a declaration that could change the world, there are no declaration speech acts in the movie.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, speech act is one of the linguistic studies that is inseparable with human daily lives. According to Yule, "Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts..." (1996, p. 47). According apologizing or informing with language. According to Searle's classification, there are five main type to the explanation, whenever people speak, they are often

performing actions, such as requesting, promising of speech acts: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarations.

These types of speech acts can be observed not only in daily life conversations but also in fiction such as films. In The Road, several speech acts exist throughout the movie's dialogue. Most of those Searle's speech acts classification exist in The Road. assertive exist in the form of statements or information. Directives include commands, warnings, and instructions. commissive, when characters make promises or commitments, while expressive express emotional feelings of the characters such as fear, sadness, or hope. Unfortunately, declarations did not exist in The Road's dialogue. This is because declarations require institutional or formal authority to make change in the external world. The thing that makes this movie cannot have a declaration because the setting is post-apocalyptic, where such authorities no longer exist.

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