Unveiling Movie Dialogue through Speech Acts: A Pragmatic Analysis of *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*

Baiatun Nisa[1], Rahmi Naomisa[2]
Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika, Indonesia[1,2]
Baiatun_nisa@bsi.ac.id[1], rahminaomisa@gmail.com[2]

Abstract. This study investigates the use of speech acts in cinematic dialogue, focusing on the 2023 film *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research categorized 137 speech acts based on Searle's taxonomy: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. The findings revealed that representative acts were dominant in the dialogue (60.58%), followed by directives (24.82%), expressives (8.03%), commissives (4.38%), and declaratives (2.19%). These results indicate that cinematic narratives heavily rely on exposition, action-driven communication, emotional engagement, relational commitments, and performative declarations to construct character development and advance the storyline. The analysis highlights the strategic use of speech acts to reflect character intentions and social dynamics within the film. By extending speech act theory into cinematic discourse, this study contributes to the growing field of media pragmatics. It suggests the pedagogical potential of film dialogues as authentic material for teaching pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. While the study was limited to a single film and excluded multimodal elements, it provided a foundation for further research integrating verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication across diverse media genres. Overall, the findings affirm the importance of pragmatic analysis in understanding contemporary narrative media and open new pathways for interdisciplinary exploration between linguistics, media studies, and language education.

Keywords: *Speech acts, cinematic discourse, pragmatics, media linguistics, EFL teaching.*

http://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a medium for conveying information and a powerful tool for social interaction. As part of the broader study of linguistics, pragmatics focuses on how context influences the interpretation of meaning (Munir & Yavuz, 2024; Ridwan et al., 2023). Pragmatics investigates aspects of meaning beyond truth conditions, focusing on how utterances function in specific discourse situations (Mcnally, 2013). It is closely related to fields such as semantics and syntax but is distinguished by its emphasis on implied meanings and context-driven communication. According to Leech & Thomas (2002) and Yule (1996), pragmatics studies the intended meanings conveyed by speakers and interpreted by listeners, taking into account social, temporal, cultural, and situational contexts.

Within the scope of pragmatics, several key areas are explored, including deixis, implicature, presupposition, conversational maxims, and notably, speech acts (Dey, 2023). Speech acts are particularly significant because they illustrate how utterances can function as actions—statements, commands, promises, apologies—rather than merely conveying propositions (Searle, 1969; Yule, 1996). Speech acts allow individuals to perform functions that maintain social relationships and achieve communication goals in everyday life (Hidayat, 2016; Husna et al., 2022).

Speech act theory, initially introduced by Austin and further developed by Searle, provides a framework for understanding how language is used to perform actions (Searle, 1969). Speech acts are categorized into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts refer to the act of saying something meaningful (Wijana, 1996); illocutionary acts concern the speaker's intention behind the utterance (Widyasari et al., 2024); and perlocutionary acts involve the effect of the utterance on the listener (Rahim, 2022). Further classification includes five types of illocutionary acts: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives (Searle, 1969).

Recent studies have increasingly applied speech act theory to diverse communicative contexts. Chen (2023) examined speech acts in livestream shopping, revealing their strategic role in engaging buyers. Ren (2024) investigated translanguaging and self-praise on social media, while Seok (2022) analyzed indirect speech acts in human-robot interaction. Tomasello (2023) explored the neuropragmatics of speech acts, highlighting their cognitive dimensions. Despite these advances, cinematic discourse, particularly within action and fantasy genres, remains underexplored. This research gap is notable given the widespread influence of film dialogue in shaping pragmatic awareness and communicative norms. While Rahardi (2023) and Abdel-Raheem (2023) examined performative media, their work did not provide a systematic analysis of speech acts in high-profile cinematic productions such as those in the DC Extended Universe.

Films serve as a vital medium of contemporary storytelling, blending linguistic and multimodal elements to craft compelling narratives. Movie dialogues provide a rich context for analyzing how speech acts drive the plot, shape character identities, and reflect social dynamics (Chepinchikj & Thompson, 2016). As Jegede (2025) noted, applying the speech act theory to performative media opens new avenues for understanding pragmatic competence in scripted interactions.

Given the central role of speech acts in daily communication and their representation in film, this study analyzed speech acts in the cinematic discourse of

Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom (2023). As a sequel to *Aquaman* (2018) and the final installment in the DC Extended Universe, the film offers a wide range of speech acts embedded in action-driven, emotionally resonant dialogue.

The study aimed to categorize and interpret these speech acts using Searle's framework, exploring how different types contribute to narrative development, character interaction, and emotional expression. In doing so, it connected linguistic theory with media analysis and highlighted the pedagogical potential of film dialogue for teaching pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

This study provided a novel contribution by applying Searle's speech act framework to *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (2023), a high-profile superhero film that has not yet been analyzed from a pragmatic perspective. It extended classical speech act theory into the realm of contemporary cinematic storytelling, demonstrating how speech acts shaped narrative progression, character dynamics, and emotional tone. Moreover, the study emphasized the pedagogical value of film dialogue as an authentic resource for enhancing pragmatic competence in English language education.

This research was limited to the analysis of verbal utterances within the film. It identified the types and functions of speech acts without addressing non-verbal or multimodal cues. Although focused on a single cinematic text, the study contributed to a broader understanding of speech act realization in narrative media and lays a foundation for future research integrating multimodal and cross-genre perspectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the use of speech acts in the film *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate, as it facilitates an in-depth and interpretive analysis of language within its natural context, prioritizing the exploration of speaker intentions and pragmatic functions over numerical generalizations. As Creswell (2014) emphasized, qualitative methods are particularly suited to investigating complex linguistic phenomena in real-world communication.

The primary data source consisted of the film script from *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* (2023). Spoken utterances were manually extracted from the film's dialogue. To ensure accuracy, each excerpt was cross-referenced with official subtitles and available closed-caption scripts. This triangulation method enhanced the reliability of the transcription process and minimized transcription errors.

Data collection involved purposive sampling, focusing on utterances that clearly exhibited illocutionary force, as defined by Searle's (1979) taxonomy. The study concentrated on five types of speech acts: representatives (asserting, informing, describing), directives (ordering, requesting, advising), expressives (apologizing, congratulating, expressing emotions), commissives (promising, offering, committing), and declaratives (announcing, appointing, institutional actions). Each utterance was classified based on linguistic indicators, contextual factors, and inferred speaker intentions.

For the analysis, a content analysis approach was employed. Following the procedures outlined by Syathroh et al. (2023), each speech act was coded into one

of the five categories. The process involved iterative reading, thematic labeling, and comparative analysis to detect patterns of use, dominant types, and their functional significance within the film's narrative structure. Quantitative tabulation of frequencies complemented the qualitative interpretation, allowing identification of pragmatic trends.

It is important to note that the study focused exclusively on verbal utterances. Paralinguistic features—such as intonation, gesture, and facial expressions—were not systematically analyzed, although their potential influence on pragmatic interpretation was acknowledged. The exclusion of these multimodal elements may limit the accuracy of categorizing speech acts, particularly in a cinematic medium where meaning is often co-constructed through audiovisual cues. In films, gestures, tone of voice, camera angles, and facial expressions frequently reinforce, modify, or even contradict the literal content of speech, which can alter the perceived illocutionary force or perlocutionary effect of an utterance. Consequently, some subtleties of communicative intent might be overlooked when relying solely on verbal analysis. Furthermore, the study was limited to a single film, constraining generalizability across cinematic genres or broader cultural contexts.

Despite these limitations, this research provided a foundational analysis of speech act usage in cinematic discourse. It laid the groundwork for future studies that could incorporate multimodal analysis or comparative cross-genre examinations, thus expanding the understanding of how language operates in scripted audiovisual narratives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Overview of Speech Act Distribution

The results of the analysis showed that the film *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* had 137 instances of speech acts, which could be categorized into the following Searle's (1979) taxonomy: representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. Table 1 presents their frequency distribution.

Table 1. Distribution of Speech Acts in Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom

Type of Speech Act	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Representative	83	60.58%
Directive	34	24.82%
Expressive	11	8.03%
Commissive	6	4.38%
Declarative	3	2.19%
Total	**137**	**100%**

The predominance of representative acts reflects the film's reliance on narrative exposition. This aligns with prior observations that representative speech acts are essential for building coherence in structured discourses. It also supports the premise that cinematic dialogue functions both as a storytelling mechanism and as a tool of character development and ideological framing (Chepinchikj & Thompson, 2016).

Detailed Analysis of Speech Acts

Building on the overview of speech act distribution, this section offers an in-depth analysis of each category identified in the film. By exploring how representative, directive, expressive, commissive, and declarative acts function within the cinematic narrative, this study revealed how language serves not only as dialogue but also as a narrative driver, a relational tool, and a performative force in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*.

1. Representative Speech Acts

Representative speech acts, as categorized by Searle (1979), commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. In *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, this category was the most frequently employed, with a total of 83 instances comprising six subtypes: nine utterances function as explanations, 28 as expressions of opinion, 28 as informative statements, four as factual assertions, two as confirmations, and 12 as beliefs. These subcategories represent a wide range of communicative intents, each serving to articulate character perspectives, reveal narrative backstory, or establish emotional and ethical dimensions within the film. The use of factual assertions, though less frequent, plays a crucial role in validating key elements within the narrative world. These utterances often deliver indisputable information grounded in the fictional reality of the film, such as scientific facts, battle outcomes, or historical events known to the characters. For instance, when a character stated, *"The Black Trident was forged in the deepest trenches during the first age of Atlantis"*, the utterance functioned not merely to inform but to assert a shared truth within the diegesis. Pragmatically, such factual assertions fulfil Austin's (1962) felicity conditions for assertives and serve to stabilize the world-building logic, lending credibility to the plot's mythological or historical foundations. They often carry a tone of certainty and authority, which helps ground the more fantastical elements of the superhero genre in internally consistent logic, enhancing narrative believability and immersion for the audience.

This prevalence underscores the essential role of representative speech acts in structuring cinematic dialogue, fostering coherence, and enhancing audience engagement. The following discussion elaborates on each subcategory with in-depth linguistic and contextual analysis.

Example:

1) Arthur: *"Papa kicking their butts. Those chum lickers didn't stand a chance. Papa kicked their asses and took their names."* (Explanation)

This utterance functioned as an expressive explanation by Arthur, highlighting his father's heroism and fighting capability. Linguistically, the use of slang (e.g., *'chum lickers' and 'kicked their asses'*) and past-tense declaratives emphasized the certainty and vividness of the narrated event. The illocutionary force was to affirm and elevated his father's image, while the perlocutionary effect on the hearer (likely his child or close kin) was to instil admiration and pride. According to Austin (1962), this exemplifies a locution with both assertive and emotive force, enhancing character development through storytelling.

2) Arthur: *"They say everybody's good at something. Me? I talk to fish. That's how I met my friend, Storm."* (Opinion)

Here, Arthur provided a self-reflective opinion, couched in humor and humility. The pragmatic force lied in normalizing an extraordinary ability. Its illocutionary act expressed a self-assessment, while its perlocutionary effect was likely to evoke empathy or amusement in the listeners. Yule (1996) categorized this as a subjective evaluation that forms part of the speaker's identity construction. In cinematic discourse, such statements humanize the protagonist and enhance relatability.

3) Arthur: *"Four years ago, everything changed. I met a woman, fell in love, and the next thing I know, we're getting married and having a kid."* (Information)

This utterance served a narrative-expository function, informing both characters and audience about Arthur's backstory. Linguistically, the temporal marker (*'four years ago'*) and past-tense verbs built a coherent timeline. Its illocutionary act was to inform, and the perlocutionary effect was to establish a personal stake in the events to come. As per Searle (1979), this representative act aligns the audience with the character's motivations, a common strategy in cinematic narration to create emotional investment.

4) Arthur: *"You seriously expect me to play footsie with someone with that kind of blood on their hands?"* (Confirmation)

Though framed as a rhetorical question, this utterance functioned to confirm Arthur's refusal to align with a morally dubious character. The pragmatic force lied in its confirmation of ethical boundaries. According to the pragmatic theory, especially Austin's (1962) felicity conditions, this utterance asserted a judgment based on prior knowledge, reinforcing Arthur's moral compass. Cinematically, such lines articulate internal conflict and define character alignments.

5) Arthur: *"Believe me, he's the last person I wanna go begging for help, but he's dealt with Manta in the past, and he's the only one who might know how to find him in time."* (Belief)

This belief-laden utterance combined personal reluctance with strategic necessity. The illocutionary force was a persuasive assertion, appealing to the hearer's understanding of a difficult decision. The modal verb *'might'* underscores uncertainty, aligning with Yule's (1996) view of beliefs as probabilistic and context-sensitive. In the film discourse, belief statements often justified morally complex actions and advanced plot tension.

Representative speech acts in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* illustrated how language functioned as a vehicle for character development, exposition, and moral positioning. Through explanation, opinion, information, confirmation, and belief, the characters articulated their perspectives and motives. The heavy presence of representatives affirm Searle's (1979) assertion that assertive utterances are foundational to discourse coherence. Cinematically, these speech acts immersed the audience in the narrative by demonstrating how pragmatic choices enhanced storytelling effectiveness and character believability.

2. Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts, according to Searle (1979), are utterances intended to get the hearer to do something. They express the speaker's desire or command and include subcategories such as commands, instructions, warnings, persuasion, and advice. In *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, a total of 34 directive speech acts were identified, consisting of 24 commands, five instructions, one warning, one persuasive utterance, and three instances of advice. This distribution highlights the dominance of commands in action-driven scenes while also showcasing the range of directive functions used across various narrative contexts. These directives not only drive interpersonal interaction but also influence the unfolding of the narrative through speech-based action. Below, we analyze one example from each subcategory in light of linguistic form, pragmatic function, and cinematic relevance.

Examples:

1) Pirates: *"Stay down! Don't move!"* (Command)

This utterance, spoken by one of the pirates during a combat sequence, is a clear example of a directive command. The imperative form and abrupt tone reflect a high degree of illocutionary force, asserting dominance and immediate compliance. In Austin's (1962) framework, this is a clear instance of an illocutionary act with a strong perlocutionary intent—intimidation and control. The speech was contextually urgent, coinciding with an attack scene, which aligns with Yule's (1996) description of context-bound directives. Cinematically, it constructed tension and shaped the power dynamics between the aggressor and the victim.

2) Dr. Shin: *"Stay Vigilant. We have no idea what kind of security measures they have down there."* (Instruction)

Dr. Shin's utterance was didactic and context-specific, providing procedural guidance to teammates. This directive was softer in force compared to a command but still aimed at eliciting action. The modal verb '*have*' and declarative support clause reduced the coerciveness of the imperative '*stay vigilant*'. The speaker assumed epistemic authority while appealing to shared uncertainty. Pragmatically, this matched Searle's directive subcategory that emphasized intended future action under advisement. Within the cinematic discourse, it reinforced Dr. Shin's role as an intellectual guide and strategic planner.

3) Dr. Shin: *"Be careful. It's highly volatile."* (Warning)

Warnings serve a protective function and are typically uttered in high-risk contexts. In the film, this directive featured a blend of imperative structure ("*be careful*") and declarative explanation ("I*t's highly volatile*"), forming a hybrid that enhanced the illocutionary force by invoking potential danger. As Austin (1962) emphasized, the felicity condition here involved the speaker's belief in a genuine threat. The perlocutionary effect intended was to prevent harm, showing an alignment with real-world pragmatics. Thematically, this line built suspense and highlighted the scientific hazards in the film's narrative.

4) Aquaman: *"It's not true. Come on, little brother. I know you're in there."* (Persuade)

This directive showcased emotional persuasion, aiming to elicit a cognitive and emotional shift rather than immediate physical action. Aquaman's speech combined declaratives and vocatives ("*little brother*") to appeal to Orm's identity and shared history. Pragmatically, the directive was softened through emotional appeal and relational framing. According to contemporary pragmatics, persuasion involves layered intentions, assertive and directive, which Yule (1996) noted may overlap. The illocutionary act intended to persuade Orm to cooperate, with the perlocutionary aiming at rekindling familial alliance. This moment contributed to the film's theme of reconciliation and internal transformation.

5) Orm: *"We should wait for Atlantis to receive your message. We can conduct reconnaissance in the meantime.*" (Advice)

Orm's advice demonstrates a low-imposition directive, expressed via modal '*should'* and a collaborative tone, marked by the inclusive use of '*we'* which signaled shared agency and mutual involvement. This utterance reflected strategic caution, aligning with Yule's (1996) view that advice often balances speaker authority and recipient autonomy. It was inferentially rich, suggesting a preferred course of action without commanding it. Illocutionarily, it aimed to influence planning. Perlocutionarily, it sought consensus. Its function within cinematic discourse was to showcase Orm's evolving diplomatic role, contrasting with his formerly aggressive persona and highlighting character development.

Each subtype of directive speech act in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* demonstrated the pragmatic depth and narrative utility of linguistic choices. From authoritative commands to emotionally nuanced persuasion, these utterances fulfilled the illocutionary goals aligned with the character roles and cinematic tension. Linguistically, they ranged from imperatives to modals and declaratives, illustrating varied syntactic strategies for achieving the speaker's intentions. Pragmatically, they instantiated a continuum of directive force, from coercive to cooperative, framing not only individual speaker-hearer relationships but also broader interpersonal dynamics. In terms of cinematic relevance, each speech act contributed to genre-specific discourse patterns such as building suspense, motivating plot progression, and constructing character arcs. Drawing on foundational theories by Searle (1979), Austin (1962), and Yule (1996), and supported by contemporary pragmatic insights, this analysis underscored how directive speech acts serve as essential tools in both shaping and expressing the evolving power structures, emotional undercurrents, and thematic concerns embedded in the film's narrative fabric.

3. Expressive Speech Act

Expressive speech acts, as defined by Searle (1979), are utterances that express the speaker's psychological state or attitude toward a specific situation. These acts are not aimed at changing the world but at revealing the speaker's inner stance. Austin (1962) considered such acts part of the illocutionary domain in which the speaker's sincerity condition plays a crucial role. In *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, 11 expressive speech acts were identified, encompassing a range of emotions such

as apology, regret, surprise, sarcasm, frustration, and admiration. These utterances fulfilled both interpersonal and narrative functions, enriching character development and reinforcing thematic undercurrents. Below is the analysis of the selected examples representing various expressive subcategories, grounded in linguistic, pragmatic, and cinematic perspectives.

Examples:

1) Dr. Shin: *"I'm sorry. I did not mean that"* (Apology)

   This utterance illustrated a prototypical expressive act of apology. The lexical marker *"I'm sorry"* conveyed remorse and was reinforced by the explanatory clause *"I did not mean that."* Linguistically, the declarative form paired with the past tense signaled reflection on a previous utterance or action. Pragmatically, the illocutionary force of this utterance was to acknowledge fault, while its perlocutionary effect was to seek forgiveness or restore rapport. According to Yule (1996), apologies presuppose a social breach and attempt to repair relational harmony. Within the film, this moment humanized Dr. Shin, depicting him as emotionally aware and accountable, which contributed to the ethical dimension of the scientific discourse in the narrative.

2) Tom: *"I saw how lonely it was for you growing up. An only child. I always regretted I couldn't give you that."* (Regret)

   This utterance, likely from a parental figure, expressed deep-seated regret over an irreversible past. The phrase *"I always regretted"* explicitly marked the expressive function. The compound structure and past perfect tense conveyed reflective emotional complexity, enhancing the illocutionary weight. In Austin's terms, this act fulfiled the sincerity condition as it revealed the speaker's authentic remorse. Perlocutionarily, the aim might be to invite understanding or forgiveness. Cinematically, this utterance deepened familial dynamics, reinforcing themes of loss and reconciliation that threaded through the film.

3) Arthur: *"Oh, man. Pops, this is blowing my mind."* (Surprise)

   Arthur's expression of surprise exemplifies a spontaneous emotional reaction. The interjection *"Oh, man"* and hyperbolic phrase *"blowing my mind"* marked the utterance as informal and emphatic. Linguistically, it blended direct address (*"Pops"*) with affective exclamation, creating an expressive-intimate tone. Illocutionarily, it served to externalize internal amazement, while perlocutionarily, it invited shared astonishment. Searle (1979) noted that expressive acts often foster interpersonal resonance. In cinematic terms, such expressions helped anchor the character's personality. In this case, Arthur was portrayed as impulsive, humoros, and emotionally transparent, enhancing audience alignment and engagement.

4) Arthur: *"Wow, it's an impressive shithole."* (Admiration)

   This utterance blended admiration with sarcasm, a stylistic hallmark of Arthur's character. The interjection '*Wow*' signaled initial awe, but the oxymoronic phrase '*impressive shithole*' shifted the tone to ironic evaluation. The pragmatic ambiguity reflected layered attitudes—mocking, yet begrudgingly respectful.

According to contemporary pragmatics, irony functions through shared contextual inference, relying on the hearer's recognition of incongruity. The illocutionary force here was expressive, yet its perlocutionary effect might provoke amusement or social bonding. Cinematically, this line underscored Arthur's irreverent worldview while critiquing the environment, blending humor with social commentary.

5) Arthur: "*Are you kidding me? I hate this job. Only reason I'm doing this is to keep Atlantis from destroying the surface, and I might even be screwing that up.*" (Disbelief and Frustration)

This monologic utterance showcased expressive acts of disbelief and frustration. The rhetorical question "*Are you kidding me*?" opened the scene with incredulity, followed by emotive self-disclosure. Linguistically, the informal diction and repetition of personal pronouns heightened the emotive tone. Pragmatically, the illocutionary force here was to vent dissatisfaction and doubt. Yule (1996) emphasized the cathartic function of expressive speech, allowing characters to reveal vulnerability. Perlocutionarily, this might elicit sympathy or solidarity. In the cinematic discourse, this utterance dramatized internal conflict and the burden of heroism, contributing to Arthur's multidimensional character arc.

Expressive speech acts in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* illuminate the emotional terrain of characters and deepen the relational texture of the film. Through apologies, regret, surprise, frustration, and admiration, the language used extended beyond mere dialogue to function as a narrative device that captured psychological realism. Drawing from Searle's (1979), Austin's (1962), Yule's (1996), and the current pragmatic perspectives, these acts underscore the significance of sincerity, contextual inference, and affective resonance in cinematic storytelling. Ultimately, expressive utterances offer viewers an entry point into the characters' inner worlds, fostering empathy and advancing thematic cohesion throughout the film.

4. *Commissive Speech Acts*

Commissive speech acts, as theorized by Searle (1979), commit the speaker to a certain course of future action. Unlike directives, which aim to get the hearer to do something, commissives emphasize the speaker's volition and obligation. In *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, six commissive speech acts were identified, reflecting varying degrees of personal commitment, emotional investment, and narrative development. This section analyzed two representative examples to explore their linguistic form, pragmatic function, and cinematic significance. Examples:

1) Tom: "*I can't wait to introduce you to all the majestic creatures on our planet, and show you how awesome this world can be.*"

This utterance by Tom reflected a positively charged commissive, projecting a future act of guidance and emotional sharing. Linguistically, the phrase "*I can't wait to…*" here functioned as an informal but strong commitment marker, often expressing anticipation rather than obligation. The infinitival clauses following

the main verb structure outlined specific promised actions, making the commissive function explicit.

From a pragmatic perspective, the illocutionary force lies in the act of promising to accompany and enlighten. The perlocutionary effect in this utterance might be to inspire curiosity, foster trust, and affirm relational bonds, particularly between Tom and his interlocutor (likely Arthur or a younger character). Based on Austin's (1962) performative theory, this could be categorized as a felicitous commissive given the appropriate emotional and relational context. It exemplified what Yule (1996) described as "*expressed intention*", combining affective stance with planned behavior. Cinematically, this line added emotional depth and future-oriented optimism, contributing to world-building and relational development within the narrative.

2) Arthur: *"Listen, if the information checks out good, I promise you that I won't immediately come back here and tear this place apart."*

Arthur's utterance represented a conditional commissive, framed within an adversarial interaction. The clause "*I promise you…*" explicitly marked it as a commissive, while the conditional "*if…*" constructed a prerequisite context for the fulfillment of the act. The verb phrase "*won't immediately come back here, and tear this place apart*" indicated the speaker's restraint contingent upon the listener's cooperation.

Linguistically, the utterance blended performative commitment with potential threat—a strategic mix of cooperation and coercion. Pragmatically, the illocutionary force was dual-layered: a promise not to act destructively if certain conditions were met, and an implicit warning if they were not. This aligns with Searle's view that commissives may vary in strength, conditionality, and embedded intentions. From a cinematic standpoint, the line illustrated Arthur's complex moral positioning, balancing power with diplomacy, and reinforced thematic tensions between force and negotiation. A contemporary pragmatic theory would interpret this as a hybrid act with persuasive undertones, enhancing character complexity.

The commissive speech acts in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* highlighted the characters' intentions, emotional investments, and evolving relationships. Whether expressed with affection or veiled aggression, these utterances contributed to the narrative progression by anchoring future actions in dialogic promises. Grounded in the theories of Searle (1979), Austin (1962), and Yule (1996), the analysis demonstrates that commissives serve not only as pragmatic commitments but also as cinematic strategies to reveal character motivation and shape plot direction.

5. Declarative Speech Acts

Declarative speech acts, in Austin's (1962) framework, are utterances that bring about a change in the external world simply by being spoken under appropriate conditions. These acts are performative and depend on the speaker's authority or contextual urgency. In *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, three notable declarative speech acts were identified. Although relatively infrequent compared to the other categories, they played crucial narrative and pragmatic roles by asserting control, declaring intention, and initiating pivotal action sequences.

Examples:

1) Captain: *"Mayday! Mayday! This is the Sawyer Two. We're under attack by pirates. Requesting immediate aid."*

This utterance functioned as an institutionalized declarative here, typically used in maritime emergencies. The repeated use of "*Mayday*" invoked an internationally recognized performative signal, creating both illocutionary force and real-world consequence. According to Austin (1962), such utterances are felicitous only when issued by a legitimate authority in the right context—in this case, a ship captain in distress. The speech act typically enacts an official request for intervention, making it perlocutionarily effective in summoning help and alerting others. In the cinematic discourse, it heightened urgency and situational stakes, prompting narrative escalation.

2) Aquaman: *"I'm done fighting with your puppets, Kordax. I'm coming for you."*

This declaration marked'; a critical narrative turning point. The use of *"I'm done"* signaled a performative decision, terminating a previous mode of action and initiating a new confrontational stance. Though lacking institutional formality, the utterance performed a declarative function by realigning Aquaman's agency and establishing a shift in strategy. Illocutionarily, it committed the speaker to a course of direct action; perlocutionarily, it intimidated and asserted dominance over Kordax. Thematically, it reinforced Aquaman's transformation from reactive defender to proactive leader. Pragmatically, such personal declarations embodied performativity in informal yet narratively charged contexts.

Declarative speech acts, though rare, carried weighty pragmatic and cinematic implications in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*. Whether through formal emergency codes, performative decisions, or symbolic power shifts, these utterances enacted change within the fictional world. They fulfiled Austin's criteria of performative power and contributed to narrative transitions, aligning character speech with dramatic function and thematic progression.

Theoretical Integration and Literature Comparison

Speech acts are central to pragmatic studies as they illustrate the interplay between language and action (Searle, 1969; Yule, 1996). The distinctions between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary provide a comprehensive framework for understanding both the speaker's intention and listener's interpretation (Stevani et al., 2023; Wijana, 1996). Locutionary acts focus on the literal meaning of utterances, while illocutionary acts emphasize the intended function behind those utterances, such as making a promise or issuing a command. Perlocutionary acts, on the other hand, concern the effects that utterances have on listeners, such as persuading or frightening them. Understanding these layers is crucial in film discourse, where characters often rely on indirect strategies to influence others without overtly stating their intentions. The findings in this study affirm the established theoretical understanding that pragmatic competence involves not only the accurate production but also the nuanced interpretation of varied speech acts in dynamic and context-dependent interactions.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of relying solely on Searle's speech act taxonomy, particularly when analyzing a multimodal and fantastical cinematic context. While Searle's framework offers a systematic and foundational approach for classifying illocutionary acts, it has been critiqued for its limited accommodation of contextual and non-verbal dimensions of communication (Acheoah, 2017). In fantastical and visually immersive films such as *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, communicative intent was conveyed not only through verbal utterances but also through visual cues, body language, prosody, and symbolic imagery. Recognizing this, the present study retained Searle's taxonomy as a core analytical tool but complemented it with contextual sensitivity to cinematic features. Drawing from the multimodal discourse theory (Kress & Theo, 2020) and performative pragmatics, the study acknowledged that speech acts in film operated within a layered semiotic environment. Thus, while this research foregrounded the linguistic dimension, it remained critically aware of the broader multimodal framework in which these acts were situated. This integrative stance allowed for a more comprehensive interpretation of communicative intent in narrative media, without abandoning the analytical clarity offered by classical speech act theory.

Moreover, this study corroborated earlier research in applied contexts. Chen (2023) emphasized the strategic use of directives in commercial discourse, a pattern similarly evident in the action sequences of the film, where urgency and goal-driven communication are prominent. Tomasello (2023) highlighted the neurocognitive significance of emotional expressions, reflected in the expressive acts identified here, showing how emotional authenticity enhanced the viewers' empathetic engagement with the characters. Additionally, Rahardi (2023) and Abdel-Raheem (2023) stressed the relevance of speech acts in performative and multimodal contexts, supporting the need for cinematic analyses like the present study. The multimodal nature of films—combining verbal utterances, visual elements, and prosodic features—requires a nuanced understanding of speech acts that transcends purely verbal communication, thereby opening new avenues for pragmatic inquiry within narrative media. A complementary finding can be drawn from studies of bilingual fables, where mismatches in speech act types between the source and target language frequently result in reduced translation accuracy. This reinforces the importance of maintaining pragmatic equivalence in meaning across communicative contexts, whether in written or spoken form, and underscores the interpretive weight speech acts carry in shaping meaning beyond linguistic structure (Muttaqin et al., 2020).

Taken together, these findings demonstrate how speech acts serve as both structural and expressive tools across various communicative platforms. Whether embedded in commercial dialogue, literary translation, or cinematic storytelling, the use of speech acts reflects a deeper cognitive and cultural logic that governs interaction. Understanding these patterns not only enriches pragmatic theory but also sharpens our critical lens for interpreting language in contextually rich environments like films.

Contribution and Practical Implications

This research extended the speech act theory into the cinematic domain, demonstrating that film dialogue systematically deployed speech acts to fulfil

narrative, relational, and performative functions. The results affirm that scripted interactions can effectively mirror authentic communication patterns, making them suitable for pragmatic analysis. Pragmatically rich dialogues are not merely a reflection of character intentions but also function as mechanisms to establish social hierarchies, negotiate relationships, and drive narrative progression. Thus, cinematic discourse provides a fertile ground for observing complex pragmatic strategies in action.

In language pedagogy, these findings suggest that authentic media, such as films, can serve as dynamic resources for teaching pragmatic competence. Incorporating film dialogues into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction can expose learners to varied speech act types and contextual nuances, thereby enhancing their sociolinguistic awareness and communicative effectiveness. Films offer situated examples of how speech acts operate within specific social, cultural, and emotional contexts, allowing learners to engage more deeply with language in use. Moreover, utilizing multimodal features in film, such as prosody, gesture, and visual cues, can further support learners' comprehension of pragmatic subtleties, fostering a holistic understanding of communication beyond mere linguistic forms.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study offers important insights, its focus on a single film and exclusive attention to verbal utterances limit the generalizability of its findings. Nonverbal elements such as prosody, gestures, and visual symbolism, which significantly contribute to pragmatic meaning, were not analyzed. Future studies should adopt multimodal approaches and expand across different genres, cultural backgrounds, and discourse types to deepen the exploration of pragmatic strategies in cinematic storytelling.

Overall, the findings highlight the vital role of speech acts in constructing narrative coherence, character development, and emotional resonance within film discourse, reaffirming the utility of pragmatic analysis in media linguistics.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of speech acts in the film *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, utilizing Searle's classification of representatives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. A total of 137 utterances were identified and analyzed, with representative acts emerging as the most dominant (60.58%). This notable prevalence indicates that superhero films often adopt an exposition-driven narrative style, where characters engage in reflective, informative, and assertive language to explain complex worlds, convey personal motivations, and build emotional resonance. Such a pattern suggests that character development in this genre frequently relies on statements of belief, identity, or moral positioning to guide viewer understanding and empathy.

The findings also underscore the potential of cinematic dialogue as a resource for developing pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Despite the fictional and often exaggerated nature of superhero discourse, film dialogue still provides learners with varied and context-rich examples of illocutionary force, speech strategies, and interpersonal dynamics. However, educators should be mindful of the stylized features of this genre and use guided analysis to help students critically interpret pragmatic functions beyond surface-

level language. Integrating film-based learning with reflective activities can make students more aware of how meaning is constructed across both verbal and non-verbal modes.

Future research would benefit from a comparative analysis of speech acts across multiple film genres, such as drama, comedy, or documentary, to determine whether the trends found in this study are genre-specific or reflective of broader cinematic conventions. Incorporating multimodal analysis, including gesture, facial expression, and prosody, would also enrich understanding of how communicative intent is fully realized in audiovisual narratives. Such expansions would deepen the intersection of media pragmatics and language education, offering more robust frameworks for both theoretical exploration and pedagogical practice.

REFERENCES

Abdel-Raheem, A. (2023). Do political cartoons and illustrations have their own specialized forms for warnings, threats, and the like? Speech acts in the nonverbal mode. *Social Semiotics*, *33*(1), 64–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1777641

Acheoah, J. E. (2017). Searle's Speech Act Theory: An Integrative Appraisal. *American Research Journal of English and Literature (ARJEL)*, *1*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.21694/2378-9026.17002

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839429693-021

Chen, A. (2023). Be a good speaker in livestream shopping: A speech act theory perspective. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, *61*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.elerap.2023.101301

Chepinchikj, N., & Thompson, C. (2016). Analysing cinematic discourse using conversation analysis. *Discourse, Context & Media*, *14*, 40–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.DCM.2016.09.001

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design; Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications Ltd. http://fe.unj.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Research-Design_Qualitative-Quantitative-and-Mixed-Methods-Approaches.pdf

Dey, M. D. (2023). Four Main Characteristics of English Pragmatics. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, *26*(2), 510–519. https://doi.org/10.24071/LLT.V26I2.6202

Hidayat, A. (2016). Speech Acts: Force Behind Words. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, *9*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.24042/ee-jtbi.v9i1.415

Husna, A., Rahman, A., & Abduh, A. (2022). Analysis of Speech Acts Used by EFL Teachers in Class Interaction: A Case Study at High School Bosowa Makassar. *PINISI: Journal of Art, Humanity and Social Studies*, *2*(5).

Jegede, O. O. (2025). Speech Acts in the Digital Sphere: A Corpus-Based Exploration of Interactional Dynamics on Social Media Platforms. *Corpus-Based Studies across Humanities*, *2*(2), 359–383. https://doi.org/10.1515/CSH-2024-0023

Kress, G., & Theo, V. L. (2020). *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (3rd editio). Routledge. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857

Leech, G., & Thomas, J. (2002). Language, Meaning and Context: Pragmatics. In *An Encyclopedia of Language*. Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203403617-7

Mcnally, L. (2013). Semantics and pragmatics. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science*, *4*(3), 285–297. https://doi.org/10.1002/WCS.1227,

Munir, E., & Yavuz, M. A. (2024). Study of pragmatic analysis of literature on the development of ELT students' receptive and productive skills: A case of North Cyprus. *Heliyon*, *10*(21), e39558. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.HELIYON.2024.E39558

Muttaqin, U., Yulianita, N. G., & Yulianti, U. hares. (2020). Speech Acts and Its Translation Accuracy in Bilingual Fables. *J-Lalite: Journal of English Studies*, *1*(2), 161–171. https://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes/article/view/3621/2002

Rahardi, R. K. (2023). Pseudo-directive speech act in the javanese language: Culture-specific pragmatic perspective. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, *66*(12), 5036–5047. https://doi.org/10.1044/2023_JSLHR-23-00223

Rahim, A. (2022). Analysis of the Use of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Speech Acts in Indonesian Language Learning at Senior High Schools. *INFOKUM*, *10*(02), 1370–1375. https://infor.seaninstitute.org/index.php/infokum/article/view/1277

Ren, W. (2024). Translanguaging in self-praise on Chinese social media. *Applied Linguistics Review*, *15*(1), 355–376. https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2021-0169

Ridwan, A., Tajuddin, S., & Leiliyanti, E. (2023). A Discourse-Pragmatic Study of Lecturer and Student Conversations in English Literature Course. *International Journal of Social Science, Education, Communication and Economics*, *2*(3), 729–738. https://doi.org/10.54443/SJ.V2I3.176

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1979). *A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts*. University of California.

Seok, S. (2022). Cultural Differences in Indirect Speech Act Use and Politeness in Human-Robot Interaction. *ACM/IEEE International Conference on Human-Robot Interaction*, *2022*, 470–477. https://doi.org/10.1109/HRI53351.2022.9889576

Stevani, M., Karisma, ✉, Tarigan, E., Sawalmeh, H., Yun, F., & Ginting, A. (2023). A Case Study of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Speech Acts in English Learning Interactions in Junior High School. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, *5*(1), 47–56. https://doi.org/10.32996/JWEEP.2022.5.1.5

Syathroh, I. L., Fayza Aulia, M., & Syathroh, L. (2023). Analysis of Speech Acts in Conversations Between Characters in the Film "Good Will Hunting (1997)." *TLEMC (Teaching and Learning English in Multicultural Contexts)*, *7*(2), 132–140. https://doi.org/10.37058/TLEMC.V7I2.9413

Tomasello, R. (2023). Linguistic signs in action: The neuropragmatics of speech acts. *Brain and Language*, *236*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bandl.2022.105203

Widyasari, K. M., Sukarini, N. W., & Maharani, S. A. I. (2024). Illocutionary Acts Performed by Meilin in "Turning Red" the Movie. *Apollo Project: Jurnal Ilmiah*

Program   Studi   Sastra   Inggris,   *13*(1),   1–10.
    https://doi.org/10.34010/APOLLO.V13I1.9675
Wijana, I. D. P. (1996). *Dasar-Dasar Pragmatik*. Andi Offset.
Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.