

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ILLOCUTIONARY ACT TYPES AND FUNCTIONS IN THE MOVIE SCRIPT OF A MAN CALLED OTTO

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Abstract

This study investigates the types and functions of illocutionary acts in the movie script A Man Called Otto (2022), directed by Marc Forster. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the research analyzes all utterances produced by the main character, Otto Anderson, based on Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts. The objectives are to identify the types of illocutionary acts and explain their functions within the conversational context of the movie. The findings reveal 371 illocutionary acts classified into five categories: representative (35.58%), directive (28.84%), expressive (24.53%), commissive (9.43%), and declarative (1.62%). Among the 29 identified functions, asking (10.24%), expressing anger (9.97%), and explaining (7.82%) are the most frequent. The results indicate that Otto primarily uses language to express beliefs, convey information, and communicate emotional states. The predominance of representative and expressive acts reflects his direct yet emotionally complex personality and illustrates his gradual character development throughout the story. This study demonstrates the applicability of Searle's speech act theory in analyzing movie scripts and contributes to pragmatic studies of cinematic discourse.

Keywords: illocutionary acts, pragmatics, speech act theory, movie script, A Man Called Otto, Searle's classification

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tipe dan fungsi tindak tutur ilokusi dalam naskah film A Man Called Otto (2022) yang disutradarai oleh Marc Forster. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan menerapkan klasifikasi tindak tutur yang dikemukakan oleh Searle (1979). Data penelitian berupa seluruh ujaran yang diucapkan oleh tokoh utama, Otto Anderson. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengidentifikasi tipe-tipe tindak tutur ilokusi serta menjelaskan fungsinya dalam konteks percakapan yang terdapat dalam film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 371 tindak tutur ilokusi yang diklasifikasikan ke dalam lima kategori, yaitu representatif (35,58%), direktif (28,84%), ekspresif (24,53%), komisif (9,43%), dan deklaratif (1,62%). Dari 29 fungsi yang ditemukan, fungsi yang paling dominan adalah bertanya (10,24%), mengungkapkan kemarahan (9,97%), dan menjelaskan (7,82%). Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Otto lebih sering menggunakan bahasa untuk menyampaikan keyakinan, memberikan informasi, dan mengungkapkan keadaan emosionalnya. Dominasi tindak tutur representatif dan ekspresif mencerminkan kepribadian Otto yang tegas sekaligus kompleks secara emosional serta menggambarkan perkembangan karakternya sepanjang alur cerita. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa teori tindak tutur Searle dapat diterapkan secara efektif dalam analisis naskah film dan memberikan kontribusi terhadap kajian pragmatik pada wacana sinematik.

Kata kunci: tindak tutur ilokusi, pragmatik, teori tindak tutur, naskah film, A Man Called Otto, klasifikasi Searle.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language occupies a central role in human social life, serving not only as a medium for exchanging information but also as a vehicle for performing social actions, constructing identities, and building interpersonal relationships. In modern linguistics, the focus has progressively shifted from purely structural analyses toward understanding how language is used in real communicative contexts. This development has positioned pragmatics the study of meaning in context as an indispensable branch of linguistics (Haugh, 2013). Pragmatics investigates how speakers produce and interpret utterances beyond their literal grammatical meaning, taking into account social relationships, shared knowledge, and communicative intentions (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). Central to pragmatic inquiry is speech act theory, originally formulated by Austin (1962) and systematically developed by Searle (1979). According to this theory, every utterance simultaneously performs an action. Searle classifies speech acts into three levels: locutionary acts (the literal act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the intended communicative function), and perlocutionary acts (the effect produced on the hearer). Among these, illocutionary acts are of particular theoretical importance because they directly encode the speaker's intention whether to assert, request, promise, express, or declare making them the primary unit of analysis in pragmatic research (Alsamhori et al., 2025). Film scripts have increasingly been recognized as valuable and methodologically sound data sources for pragmatic analysis. Although fictional, cinematic dialogue is carefully constructed to simulate the complexity of natural conversation, encoding speaker intentions, social dynamics, and emotional nuances within structured narrative frames (Bednarek, 2019). The written screenplay offers analytic advantages of precision and reproducibility, allowing for systematic identification and classification of illocutionary acts (Kusuma, 2025). As Quaglio (2008) demonstrates, movie scripts provide complete and accurate representations of dialogue amenable to deeper communicative analysis. The film *A Man Called Otto* (2022) is selected as the primary data source for this study because of its intense reliance on dialogue as the primary vehicle for character development and relational change. The narrative centers on Otto Anderson, a rigid and emotionally withdrawn widower who gradually opens up to his new neighbors. Otto's communicative patterns ranging from blunt directives and critical assertions to eventual expressions of warmth and commitment offer a rich and dynamic corpus for pragmatic analysis. Previous studies of speech acts in film, such as those by Albalawi (2022) and Sari and Fithriani (2022), have successfully demonstrated the applicability of Searle's classification to cinematic dialogue. Oki, Alademomi, and Oki (2025) found that speech acts in film dialogues can function not only as a means of

communication but also as a way to influence characters, develop interactions, and advance the narrative. Their study identified directives, commissives, expressives, declaratives, and performatives in *Àbèjoyè* Season 5, showing how these acts contribute to conflict, persuasion, and moral instruction. Similarly, Fauzi and Putri (2025) examined illocutionary speech acts in the animated film *Luck* and found that different illocutionary acts contribute to character construction and interpersonal strategies. Their study identified expressive, directive, and assertive acts as important ways through which characters communicate their intentions, emotions, information, and opinions. However, scholars including Susanto and Wijayanto (2023) and Pratiwi and Setiawan (2022) have noted that most existing research remains at the level of categorical classification, failing to interrogate how speech acts function dynamically within the evolving relational contexts of a narrative. This study addresses that gap. Accordingly, it is guided by two research questions: (1) What types of illocutionary acts are found in the movie script of *A Man Called Otto*? (2) How does each type of illocutionary act function within the conversational context of the movie script?

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design, which is appropriate for exploring and interpreting patterns of language use within a specific communicative context (Creswell, 2017). The qualitative approach allows for in-depth examination of how illocutionary acts function within the screenplay's narrative without the constraints of hypothesis testing or quantitative inference. The primary data source is the written screenplay of *A Man Called Otto* (2022). The data comprises all verbal utterances produced by the main character, Otto Anderson, in the script. An utterance is operationally defined as a unit of speech delivered in a single conversational turn that constitutes a complete illocutionary act. The film itself was viewed as a secondary source to support contextual interpretation of the written data, particularly with regard to situational context, paralinguistic cues, and narrative progression. Data collection involved the following stages: systematic reading and re-reading of the full screenplay; identification of all utterances spoken by Otto Anderson; compilation of identified utterances into a structured corpus; and supplementary film viewing to contextualize each utterance within its situational and conversational setting. Data analysis was conducted in accordance with Searle's (1979) taxonomy of illocutionary acts, which classifies utterances into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Each utterance was examined to identify its illocutionary force and categorized accordingly. Specific sub-functions were subsequently identified within each category. Frequency data

were calculated to support qualitative description rather than as a basis for statistical inference.

3. FINDINGS AND DISSCUSSIONS

The analysis of 371 utterances produced by Otto Anderson in the screenplay of *A Man Called Otto* revealed the presence of all five types of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle (1979). Representative acts were most frequent with 132 occurrences (35.58%), followed by directive acts with 107 occurrences (28.84%), expressive acts with 91 occurrences (24.53%), commissive acts with 35 occurrences (9.43%), and declarative acts with only 6 occurrences (1.62%). A total of 29 distinct illocutionary sub-functions were identified across these five categories. The predominance of representative acts reflects Otto's characterization as a direct, factual, and opinionated communicator who habitually uses language to articulate what he believes to be true about the world around him. The substantial proportion of directive and expressive acts further indicates that his communication is strongly oriented toward influencing others' behavior and conveying his emotional states.

a. Representative Acts

Representative acts, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition, were the most dominant category. The analysis revealed that representative acts occurred 132 times (35.58%) and were realized through several functions, including asserting (22 occurrences), explaining (29 occurrences), informing (28 occurrences), stating (24 occurrences), describing (17 occurrences), and complaining (15 occurrences). The high frequency of representative acts indicates that Otto primarily uses language to convey information, express personal beliefs, describe situations, and evaluate events around him. This finding suggests that Otto tends to communicate through factual statements and personal judgments rather than through commitments or institutional declarations.

Some examples of representative acts found in the movie script are as follows:

- 1) "I am not invalid!" (Asserting)
- 2) "99 cents a yard is 33 cents a foot – times five, that's \$1.65." (Explaining)
- 3) "I found the flowers you like. Pink." (Informing)
- 4) "That's a load of crap. They don't own this house. You do." (Asserting)
- 5) "All anyone wants to do anymore is go to lunch." (Complaining)

The examples above demonstrate how Otto frequently employs representative acts to communicate his views and interpretations of reality. Through asserting functions, Otto strongly defends his beliefs and rejects assumptions made by others. For instance, the utterance "I am not invalid!" reflects his insistence on maintaining independence despite

being perceived as physically vulnerable. Similarly, “That’s a load of crap. They don’t own this house. You do.” illustrates how Otto uses assertion to defend his neighbors and express his moral stance regarding fairness and ownership rights. The explaining function also appears frequently in Otto’s speech. The utterance “99 cents a yard is 33 cents a foot – times five, that’s \$1.65” shows his tendency to rely on logic and factual reasoning when communicating. Meanwhile, informing functions allow Otto to provide information about events, situations, or personal experiences, as seen in “I found the flowers you like. Pink.” In addition, complaining functions reveal his dissatisfaction with modern technology, social behavior, and changes occurring within his neighborhood. Therefore, the dominance of representative acts serves not only to establish Otto as a principled and rational character but also to reveal the rigidity and critical attitude that initially distance him from the people around him (Bohn & Frank, 2025).

b. Directive Acts

Directive acts, which are intended to prompt the hearer to perform a particular action, constituted the second most frequent category with 107 occurrences (28.84%). The analysis showed that directive acts were realized through several functions, namely asking (38 occurrences), commanding (25 occurrences), ordering (19 occurrences), requesting (12 occurrences), and suggesting (10 occurrences). The high frequency of directive acts indicates that Otto frequently uses language to influence the behavior of others, obtain information, and maintain control over situations around him. The predominance of asking, which is also the most frequent function overall, suggests that Otto actively seeks clarification and information despite his tendency to appear socially distant. Some examples of directive acts found in the movie script are as follows:

- 1) “What are you doing?” (Asking)
- 2) “STOP!” (Commanding)
- 3) “Get out of the car!” (Ordering)
- 4) “Give me the keys.” (Commanding)
- 5) “Could you move your car?” (Requesting)
- 6) “You should be careful with that.” (Suggesting)

The examples above demonstrate how Otto employs directive acts to regulate actions and interactions within his environment. Asking functions are frequently used to obtain information and clarify situations, reflecting his attentiveness to details and his desire to understand what is happening around him. Meanwhile, commanding and ordering functions reveal Otto’s authoritative personality and his tendency to take charge during problematic situations. For example, the utterances “STOP!”, “Get out of the car!”, and

“Give me the keys.” occur during Tommy’s parking accident and illustrate Otto’s immediate attempt to restore order and prevent further mistakes. In contrast, requesting and suggesting functions reveal a softer and more cooperative aspect of Otto’s communication. These functions often emerge in interactions with neighbors and family members, where he shows concern and consideration for others. Through requests, Otto seeks assistance or cooperation without imposing direct authority, while suggestions reflect his willingness to provide guidance based on his experience. Therefore, the use of directive acts not only portrays Otto as a disciplined and controlling individual but also highlights his gradual transformation into a more socially engaged and supportive member of the community. As his relationships develop throughout the narrative, directive acts become an important means through which he builds connections and expresses concern for others (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015).

c. Expressive Acts

Expressive acts, which convey the speaker’s psychological and emotional state, occurred 91 times (24.53%), making them the third most frequent category in the data. The analysis revealed several expressive functions, including expressing anger (37 occurrences), showing disappointment (27 occurrences), mocking (15 occurrences), thanking (3 occurrences), apologizing (3 occurrences), and a number of less frequent functions such as showing surprise, anxiety, interest, shock, and affection. The substantial number of expressive acts indicates that Otto frequently uses language to communicate his emotional responses toward people, situations, and events around him. The predominance of anger and disappointment reflects the emotional struggles, grief, and loneliness that characterize much of his life throughout the film.

Some examples of expressive acts found in the movie script are as follows:

- 1) “What the hell kind of computer can’t do simple math?” (Expressing Anger)
- 2) “This neighborhood has gone completely downhill.” (Showing Disappointment)
- 3) “Shouldn’t you be in gym class?” (Mocking)
- 4) “Thank you.” (Thanking)
- 5) “It isn’t easy to say after all this time, but I’m sorry.” (Apologizing)
- 6) “Well, aren’t you something special?” (Showing Affection)

The examples above illustrate the wide range of emotions expressed by Otto throughout the narrative. Expressing anger is the most dominant function and is often directed toward modern technology, inefficient systems, or behaviors that conflict with his personal values. For instance, the utterance “What the hell kind of computer can’t do simple math?” demonstrates Otto’s frustration and irritation when confronted with what he

perceives as incompetence or unnecessary complexity. Similarly, expressions of disappointment reflect his dissatisfaction with changes in society and the gradual loss of the values he once respected. Mocking functions also occur frequently and serve as a means for Otto to distance himself from others emotionally. The utterance “Shouldn’t you be in gym class?” exemplifies his sarcastic communication style and highlights how humor and ridicule function as defensive mechanisms in social interactions. Through such utterances, Otto often masks vulnerability behind criticism and sarcasm. However, the distribution of expressive acts throughout the film also reveals significant character development. While early interactions are dominated by anger, disappointment, and mockery, later scenes include more positive emotional expressions such as gratitude, apology, and affection. The utterance “It isn’t easy to say after all this time, but I’m sorry.” represents an important moment of reconciliation, demonstrating Otto’s willingness to acknowledge past mistakes and repair damaged relationships. Likewise, expressions of affection toward Marisol’s family indicate that he gradually becomes more emotionally open and connected to those around him. Therefore, expressive acts play a crucial role in portraying Otto’s emotional journey. They not only reveal his psychological state at different stages of the narrative but also illustrate his transformation from a bitter and isolated individual into someone capable of empathy, affection, and meaningful social connection. These findings support the view that emotional expressions in film dialogue contribute significantly to character development and narrative progression (Hipson & Mohammad, 2021).

d. Commissive Acts

Commissive acts, which commit the speaker to a future course of action, occurred 35 times (9.43%) and were the fourth most frequent category identified in the study. The analysis revealed four commissive functions, namely promising (12 occurrences), refusing (9 occurrences), offering (9 occurrences), and threatening (5 occurrences). Although commissive acts appeared less frequently than representative, directive, and expressive acts, they play a significant role in revealing Otto’s personal values and interpersonal commitments. These acts demonstrate how Otto uses language not only to express thoughts and emotions but also to commit himself to future actions and responsibilities.

Some examples of commissive acts found in the movie script are as follows:

- 1) “Then I’ll build you another bookcase.” (Promising)
- 2) “No, I’ll drive you!” (Offering)
- 3) “I don’t want to go to the goddam Home Depot!” (Refusing)
- 4) “If you do that again, you’ll regret it.” (Threatening)
- 5) “I’ll take care of it.” (Promising)

6) “Let me help you with that.” (Offering)

The examples above illustrate how commissive acts reflect Otto’s sense of responsibility, loyalty, and personal integrity. Promising is the most dominant commissive function and often occurs when Otto commits himself to helping or supporting others. For example, the utterance “Then I’ll build you another bookcase.”, addressed to Sonya, reflects his willingness to solve problems through concrete actions rather than emotional expressions. Similarly, the utterance “I’ll take care of it.” demonstrates his readiness to assume responsibility when confronted with a problem or obligation.

Offering functions also contribute significantly to Otto’s characterization. The utterance “No, I’ll drive you!” spoken when Marisol is about to give birth, illustrates his growing concern for others and his willingness to provide assistance. Although Otto often appears distant and unfriendly, such offers reveal a compassionate side that gradually becomes more visible as the story progresses. Through these utterances, Otto demonstrates care through action rather than words. Refusing functions frequently emerge when Otto seeks to maintain his independence and remain faithful to his principles. The utterance “I don’t want to go to the goddam Home Depot!” reflects not merely stubbornness but also his resistance to situations that conflict with his personal preferences and values. In this sense, refusals serve as expressions of self-determination and autonomy. Meanwhile, threatening functions occur less frequently but are important in situations where Otto feels that his boundaries, values, or sense of order are being challenged. These utterances function as warnings intended to prevent undesirable actions and reinforce his expectations of appropriate behavior. Therefore, commissive acts provide important insights into Otto’s character development throughout the narrative. While his representative and expressive acts reveal what he thinks and feels, commissive acts reveal what he is willing to do. The promises, offers, refusals, and threats found in the movie script collectively portray Otto as a person who highly values loyalty, responsibility, reliability, and commitment. These findings suggest that, despite his often harsh exterior, Otto consistently demonstrates concern for others through actions that fulfill his personal obligations and commitments (Alsamhori et al., 2025).

e. Declarative Acts

Declarative acts, which bring about changes in social or institutional reality through the utterance itself, were the least frequent category with only 6 occurrences (1.62%). The analysis identified two declarative functions, namely naming (4 occurrences) and declaring (2 occurrences). Although declarative acts appeared only occasionally throughout the movie script, they hold important symbolic significance in the narrative. Unlike other types

of illocutionary acts, declarative acts do not merely describe reality but actively create or modify social relationships and identities through language. Their limited frequency reflects the fact that such acts typically require specific social circumstances or authority to be successfully performed.

Some examples of declarative acts found in the movie script are as follows:

- 1) “Otto. O-t-t-o.” (Naming)
- 2) “You can call him that.” (Naming)
- 3) “From now on, he’s Little Captain.” (Naming)
- 4) “My name is Otto Anderson.” (Declaring Identity)
- 5) “That’s what we’ll call him.” (Declaring)
- 6) “His name is Little Captain.” (Naming)

The examples above demonstrate how declarative acts function primarily in moments involving identity construction and social recognition. The utterance “Otto. O-t-t-o.” serves not only as a simple introduction but also as an act of self-identification that establishes Otto’s presence within the social environment of Marisol’s family. Through this act, Otto allows himself to become more personally connected to those around him, marking a departure from his previous tendency to remain emotionally distant. Similarly, naming functions play an important role in symbolizing social acceptance and belonging. The affectionate nickname given to Marisol’s newborn child reflects more than a casual label; it represents Otto’s emotional involvement and growing attachment to the family. By assigning a name, Otto participates in the creation of a shared social identity, reinforcing interpersonal bonds and demonstrating his increasing willingness to become part of a community. Although declarative acts occur less frequently than other categories, their narrative significance is substantial. These acts often appear at crucial moments of relational transformation, where language functions as a tool for establishing identity, recognition, and social connection. The rarity of declarative acts is consistent with Searle’s (1979) argument that declarations generally require specific institutional or social conditions to be effective. Since most interactions in *A Man Called Otto* take place within domestic and community settings rather than formal institutions, opportunities for declarative acts are naturally limited. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that the distribution of illocutionary act types in the movie script serves not only communicative purposes but also important narrative functions. The identification of 29 sub-functions across the five categories reveals the complexity of Otto’s communicative behavior throughout the film. A more detailed examination of functions such as asserting, explaining, informing, complaining, asking, expressing anger, promising, and naming

provides a richer understanding of character development than broad categorical classifications alone. Through these pragmatic choices, Otto's language reflects his beliefs, emotions, commitments, and evolving relationships with others. Furthermore, the findings indicate that illocutionary acts contribute significantly to the construction of character identity and the progression of the narrative. The gradual shift from dominant negative expressive functions toward more positive and relational functions mirrors Otto's transformation from a socially isolated individual into a caring and engaged member of his community. Therefore, speech acts function not merely as communicative tools but also as mechanisms through which character growth and interpersonal dynamics are represented within cinematic discourse. Overall, this study confirms that Searle's (1979) classification remains a relevant and comprehensive framework for analyzing illocutionary acts in movie scripts. All five categories were identified in the data and provided meaningful insights into both the communicative intentions of the speaker and the broader narrative structure of the film. The findings highlight the value of pragmatic analysis in revealing how language is strategically employed to construct character, shape relationships, and support storytelling within cinematic texts.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has examined the types and functions of illocutionary acts in the utterances of Otto Anderson in the movie script *A Man Called Otto* (2022) through the lens of Searle's (1979) speech act theory. The analysis of 371 utterances identified all five illocutionary act types, with representative acts being most dominant (35.58%), followed by directive (28.84%), expressive (24.53%), commissive (9.43%), and declarative (1.62%) acts. A total of 29 distinct communicative sub-functions were identified. The dominance of representative acts reflects Otto's characterization as a direct, principled, and opinionated individual who relies primarily on language to articulate facts, express judgments, and explain his worldview. Directive acts reveal his tendency to manage situations and assert authority, while expressive acts provide the most immediate window into his emotional world — beginning with pervasive anger and disappointment, and gradually evolving toward gratitude, apology, and affection. Commissive acts establish his sense of personal responsibility and loyalty, and declarative acts mark key moments of identity construction and relational transformation. These findings demonstrate that the distribution of illocutionary acts in cinematic dialogue functions as a narrative device that charts a character's psychological and social development. This study contributes empirically to pragmatic research on cinematic discourse and provides a methodological model for future research combining speech act theory with textual analysis of film scripts. Future

researchers may extend this work by examining speech acts of additional characters, applying comparative frameworks, or incorporating multimodal analysis to complement the text-based approach adopted here.

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