

Directive Illocutionary Acts in *The Pursuit of Happiness*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This study examined the grammatical sentence forms and directive illocutionary acts found in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It aimed to identify the grammatical forms used to realize directive utterances and classify the types of directive illocutionary acts found in the film's dialogues. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, using the film and its script as data sources. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques and analysed based on relevant theories of grammatical sentence forms and directive illocutionary acts. The findings revealed 21 directive utterances, consisting of 13 imperative, 6 interrogative, and 2 declarative forms. The analysis also identified eight types of directive illocutionary acts: ask, order, command, request, beg, invite, permit, and advise. Order occurred most frequently, with five utterances, followed by ask with four, while the other six types each occurred twice. The findings also showed that directive illocutionary acts were mostly realized through imperative forms, followed by interrogative and declarative forms. This study contributes to pragmatic research by demonstrating the relationship between grammatical sentence forms and directive illocutionary functions in film dialogue and provides a reference for analysing speech acts in audiovisual discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in human interaction, serving not only to convey information but also to perform actions. As Yule (1996) states, communication involves understanding both the literal meaning of words and the speaker's intended meaning. One field of study that focuses on this is pragmatics. Levinson (1983) defines pragmatics as the systematic study of meaning based on language use in context.

A central topic within pragmatics is speech act theory, which explains how speakers perform actions through language. Searle (1979) classifies speech acts into five categories, one of which is directive acts. Directive illocutionary acts are used by speakers to make the listener do something, such as asking, requesting, advising, or ordering. These acts are generally expressed through specific sentence structures known as locutionary acts. According to Austin

(1975), locutionary acts refer to the actual form and structure of utterances.

This research is concerned with directive illocutionary acts and their locutionary forms found in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, a biographical drama directed by Gabriele Muccino. The movie portray Chris Gardner's struggle as he manages to rise above difficult circumstances and a period of homelessness to achieve success. The conversations in the film provide rich examples of directive speech acts in real-life situations.

Previous studies have examined directive and other illocutionary acts in various contexts, particularly in movies and other forms of communication. However, these studies primarily focus on identifying, classifying, and interpreting illocutionary acts without specifically examining the locutionary forms through which those acts are expressed. Septiani (2017), for example, investigated directive illocutionary acts in *The Miracle Worker Movie* using Searle's theory of speech acts. The study identified seventeen types of directive illocutionary acts and examined whether they were expressed directly or indirectly. Although the study shares a similar focus on directive illocutionary acts in a movie, it did not analyze the linguistic forms of the utterances as locutionary acts.

Similarly, Ratnasari et al. (2019) analyzed illocutionary acts in *Coco Movie* by identifying five categories: assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative. The study examined the meanings and functions of these illocutionary acts, including commanding, requesting, advising, and ordering as directive functions. However, the study focused on the functions of illocutionary acts rather than the relationship between those functions and the forms of the utterances in which they occur. Thus, while Ratnasari et al. provide a broader classification of illocutionary acts in a cinematic context, the present study specifically focuses on directive illocutionary acts and the locutionary forms used to realize them.

A more recent study by Ediwarman et al. (2020) investigated directive illocutionary speech acts in the *Net 86* television program. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the researchers analyzed 85 directive speech acts and classified them into fifteen communicative functions. Their study demonstrates how directive acts can be used for purposes such as persuasion and instruction in a television context. However, similar to the previous studies, it focused on the communicative functions of directive illocutionary acts and did not examine the locutionary forms of the utterances as a separate analytical aspect.

The differences among these studies indicate a research gap. Septiani (2017) focused specifically on directive illocutionary acts in *The Miracle Worker*, Ratnasari et al. (2019) examined various categories of illocutionary acts in *Coco*, and Ediwarman et al. (2020) investigated directive acts in a television program. Although these studies demonstrate that illocutionary acts have been widely examined in different media and communicative contexts, they do not specifically investigate how the linguistic form of an utterance is related to its directive illocutionary function. This aspect is important because the same directive intention may be expressed through different forms of utterances. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by examining both the locutionary forms and the directive illocutionary acts in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. To achieve this, the study aims to explain the types of directive illocutionary acts expressed in *The Pursuit of Happiness* movie by identifying the locutionary forms as interrogative, imperative, and declarative, and then analyzing the directive illocutionary acts expressed through those forms using Searle's classification of ask, order, command, request, beg, invite, permit, and advise.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of related literature is important to support this study on locutionary acts and directive illocutionary acts. Several previous studies have examined speech acts in different contexts, especially in movies, media, and educational settings. These studies provide useful references for understanding how directive meanings are expressed through language.

Previous studies have examined speech acts in different contexts, particularly in movies, television programs, and educational settings. These studies provide useful insights into the classification and functions of directive speech acts; however, their findings also reveal limitations that remain relevant to the present study. Septiani (2017) examined directive illocutionary acts in *The Miracle Worker Movie* using Searle's theory and identified seventeen types of directive acts, including direct and indirect forms. The study demonstrates that directive acts can be realized in different ways, but its analysis mainly focuses on the types and directness of directive acts rather than the linguistic forms of the utterances. Consequently, it does not explain how particular locutionary forms contribute to the realization of directive functions.

Ratnasari et al. (2019) examined five categories of illocutionary acts in *Coco Movie*, namely assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, and declarative acts. The study identified directive functions such as commanding, requesting, advising, and ordering. Its broader classification provides useful information about the different functions of illocutionary acts in movie dialogue. However, because directive acts were examined as one category among five types of illocutionary acts, the study did not provide an in-depth analysis of how directive functions are expressed through specific linguistic forms. This leaves the relationship between the form of an utterance and its directive function insufficiently explored.

Ediwarman et al. (2020) analyzed 85 directive speech acts in the *Net 86* television program and classified them into fifteen communicative functions, including persuasion and instruction. The study provides a detailed account of the communicative purposes of directives and demonstrates the importance of context in interpreting them. However, its focus remains on the functions of directive acts rather than on the locutionary forms through which those functions are expressed. Similarly, Halil et al. (2023) examined directive speech acts among elementary school students in Kolaka and identified demanding, commanding, begging, and challenging as the main types. The study emphasizes the influence of cultural and situational factors on the use of directives, but locutionary forms were not examined as a separate aspect of the analysis.

These studies demonstrate that directive speech acts have been analyzed from different perspectives, including their types, communicative functions, directness, and contextual influences. However, a common limitation is that they primarily examine **what the speaker intends to achieve through an utterance**, while giving less attention to **the linguistic form used to express that intention**. Thus, the relationship between locutionary form and directive illocutionary function remains insufficiently explored. The present study addresses this gap by examining both the **locutionary forms** and **directive illocutionary acts** in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It identifies the locutionary forms as **interrogative, imperative, and declarative**, and analyzes the directive illocutionary acts conveyed through these forms. By examining both form and function, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how directive meanings are realized through language in cinematic dialogue.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive method was applied in this study because it allows the researcher to systematically describe and interpret linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur in the film dialogue without manipulating the data. This design is appropriate for the present study because the research focuses on identifying and describing the forms of locutionary acts and the types of directive illocutionary acts expressed by the characters in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. A qualitative descriptive method was employed because it allows the researcher to systematically describe linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur without manipulating the data. This method is appropriate for identifying the locutionary forms and directive illocutionary acts in the characters' utterances. The data source was *The Pursuit of Happiness* (2006), directed by Gabriele Muccino. The movie was watched several times, and the script was used as a supporting reference to verify the utterances. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. The analysis focused on 21 utterances, which were classified according to Austin's (1962) locutionary forms and Searle's (1979) directive illocutionary acts. To ensure the accuracy of the utterances, the movie script was used as a supporting reference. The film presents the real-life struggles of Chris Gardner, portraying his experiences with poverty, homelessness, and single fatherhood. Due to its rich emotional content and realistic conversations, the film is considered a suitable source for analyzing how directive speech acts are used in natural communication settings. The dialogues reflect various speech intentions and provide a meaningful foundation for pragmatic analysis.

The data were collected using the documentation method, supported by a note-taking technique. The researcher began by downloading and watching the film several times to understand the context and flow of the dialogues. The script was read alongside the movie to verify the transcription of each utterance. Utterances were selected and examined to identify their locutionary forms based on Austin's theory, which categorizes sentences into imperative, interrogative, and declarative structures. After identifying the sentence structures, the utterances were further analyzed to determine the presence of directive illocutionary acts. The classification of these acts followed Searle's theory, which includes eight types: asking, ordering, commanding, requesting, begging, inviting, permitting, and advising.

In data analysis, the researcher first identified the locutionary form of each utterance based on Austin's (1962) theory. Each identified utterance was then classified as imperative, interrogative, or declarative and further classified according to Searle's (1979) eight types of directive illocutionary acts: asking, ordering, commanding, requesting, begging, inviting, permitting, and advising. Next, the researcher interpreted how each directive functioned within its conversational context by considering the speaker's intention and the interaction between the characters. Finally, the analysis was synthesized to identify recurring patterns in the use of locutionary forms and directive illocutionary acts. The results were presented descriptively and supported by selected examples from the movie.

RESULTS

This section reports the research results, which are derived from the identification and classification of the forms of locutionary acts and the variations of directive illocutionary acts in *The Pursuit of Happiness* movie. The total of 21 utterances were analyzed in detail. The results are displayed in two tables: one showing the distribution of locutionary act forms and the other showing the frequency of directive illocutionary act types.

Table 1. Distribution of Grammatical Sentence Types Used in Locutionary Acts

No.	Grammatical Sentence Type	Frequency
1	Imperative	13
2	Interrogative	6
3	Declarative	2
	Total	21

Table 1 shows that the imperative form was the most frequently used grammatical sentence type in the data, occurring in 13 utterances, followed by 6 interrogative forms and 2 declarative forms.

Table 2. Classification of Directive Illocutionary Acts found in the Data

No.	Type of Directive Illocutionary Act	Frequency
1	Ask	4
2	Order	5
3	Command	2
4	Request	2
5	Beg	2
6	Invite	2
7	Permit	2
8	Advise	2
	Total	21

Table 2 shows that **order** was the most frequently occurring directive illocutionary act, with 5 utterances, followed by **ask** with 4 utterances. **Command, request, beg, invite, permit, and advise** each occurred in 2 utterances.

Ask

Data [3-1]

Christopher asked his father, “Can we go to the park today? After?” The utterance is classified as an **Ask** because Christopher attempts to obtain his father’s permission or confirmation about going to the park. According to Searle (1979), an asking act is a directive in which the speaker seeks information, confirmation, or consent from the hearer. The interrogative form indicates that Christopher is seeking a response rather than directly forcing his father to agree. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Ask** because Christopher intends to obtain his father’s approval before carrying out the proposed action.

Data [3-2]

Linda asked Chris, “What are you gonna do about that?” The utterance is classified as an **Ask** because Linda seeks specific information about Chris’s intended action concerning their tax bill. According to Searle (1979), an asking act is used to obtain information or clarification from the hearer. The interrogative form beginning with “What” supports this function because Linda expects Chris to provide an explanation or answer. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Ask** because Linda intends to obtain information about Chris’s plan.

Data [3-6]

Chris asked Roy, “Can you beat your little rug when nobody’s out here?” The utterance is classified as an **Ask** because Chris uses a question to influence Roy’s behavior concerning the rug. According to Searle (1979), an asking act is a directive through which the speaker attempts to obtain a response from the hearer. Although the utterance also expresses dissatisfaction, Chris uses an interrogative form to indirectly encourage Roy to change his behavior. Therefore, it functions as an **Ask** because Chris seeks a response and more considerate behavior from Roy.

Data [3-15]

Mr. Frohm asked Chris, “Would you like that, Chris?” The utterance is classified as an **Ask** because Mr. Frohm seeks confirmation of Chris’s interest in the job opportunity. According to Searle (1979), asking involves attempting to obtain information or confirmation from the hearer. The interrogative form allows Mr. Frohm to elicit Chris’s response regarding the offer. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Ask** because its intended purpose is to obtain Chris’s confirmation.

Order

Data [3-4]

Chris said, “Don’t talk to me like that, Linda.” The utterance is classified as an **Order** because Chris directly attempts to make Linda stop speaking to him in that manner. According to Searle (1979), an order is a directive in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to perform or stop performing an action. The imperative form “Don’t talk” makes the utterance direct and forceful. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Order** because Chris intends to control Linda’s behavior during their conflict.

Data [3-5]

Chris said, “Don’t use that one, okay?” The utterance is classified as an **Order** because Chris directly instructs Linda not to use a particular item. According to Searle (1979), an order is a directive intended to make the hearer perform or refrain from performing a specific action. The negative imperative form “Don’t use” clearly expresses Chris’s intention to stop Linda from using the item. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Order** because Chris directly attempts to influence Linda’s action.

Data [3-7]

Chris said, “Don’t you ever take my son away from me again.” The utterance is classified as an **Order** because Chris strongly directs Linda not to take their son away from him again. According to Searle

(1979), an order is a directive through which the speaker attempts to influence the hearer's behavior. The negative imperative form and the expression "don't you ever" emphasize the force of Chris's intention. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Order** because Chris firmly demands that Linda not repeat the action.

Data [3-12]

Ralph said, "Don't jerk me around, okay, Chris?" The utterance is classified as an **Order** because Ralph directly attempts to make Chris stop delaying or avoiding the payment. According to Searle (1979), an order is a directive that attempts to get the hearer to perform or stop performing an action. Although the utterance is expressed as a question because of the tag "okay, Chris?", its main purpose is to stop Chris from continuing the behavior. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Order** because Ralph uses a direct and forceful expression to influence Chris's behavior.

Data [3-13]

Chris said, "Wayne, go get my money." The utterance is classified as an **Order** because Chris directly instructs Wayne to retrieve the money. According to Searle (1979), an order is a directive intended to get the hearer to perform a particular action. The imperative form "go get" expresses a direct and forceful instruction, while the urgent context strengthens its directive force. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Order** because Chris attempts to make Wayne immediately take action.

Command

Data [3-16]

The prison officer told Chris, "You verify at 9:30 tomorrow morning." The utterance is classified as a **Command** because the officer directly instructs Chris to verify his appointment at a specific time. According to Searle (1979), a command is a directive in which the speaker attempts to make the hearer perform an action, particularly when the speaker has authority over the hearer. The institutional context gives the officer authority, making the utterance a direct and authoritative instruction. Therefore, it functions as a **Command**.

Data [3-21]

The shelter staff said, "Get out of the line, both of you." The utterance is classified as a **Command** because the shelter staff directly instructs Chris and the other man to leave the line. According to Searle (1979), a command attempts to make the hearer perform a specific action. The imperative form "Get out" and the institutional position of the speaker reinforce the authoritative force of the utterance. Therefore, it functions as a **Command**.

Request

Data [3-3]

Chris said, "Why don't you let me do this?" The utterance is classified as a **Request** because Chris attempts to persuade Linda to allow him to handle the situation. According to Searle (1979), a request is a directive in which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to allow or perform something without

using the force of a command. Although the utterance is grammatically interrogative, its purpose is not to obtain information but to seek Linda's cooperation. Therefore, it functions as a **Request** because Chris indirectly asks Linda to let him take action.

Data [3-8]

Chris said, "Let me ask you something." The utterance is classified as a **Request** because Chris indirectly asks for permission to continue the conversation and ask a question. According to Searle (1979), a request is an attempt to get the hearer to allow something to happen. The expression is less forceful than a command and functions as a polite way of gaining the hearer's cooperation. Therefore, the utterance functions as a **Request**.

Beg

Data [3-17]

Chris said, "Just... bring... Bring me my son back. Okay?" The utterance is classified as a **Beg** because Chris makes an emotional and desperate appeal to Linda to return their son. According to Searle (1979), begging is a directive characterized by strong emotional involvement, urgency, or desperation. The repetition, hesitation, and emotional situation strengthen the pleading force of the utterance. Therefore, it functions as a **Beg**.

Data [3-20]

Chris said, "Come on, don't do this to me. Don't..." The utterance is classified as a **Beg** because Chris emotionally appeals to the other man to let him keep his place in line. According to Searle (1979), begging involves strong emotional need or urgency. Although the utterance uses an imperative form, the emotional tone and desperate situation indicate that Chris is pleading rather than commanding. Therefore, it functions as a **Beg**.

Invite

Data [3-11]

Mr. Ribbon said, "You guys wanna come with us?" The utterance is classified as an **Invite** because Mr. Ribbon encourages Chris and Christopher to join him. According to Searle (1979), an invitation is a directive intended to encourage the hearer to participate in an activity. Although the utterance is grammatically interrogative, its purpose is to offer participation rather than simply request information. Therefore, it functions as an **Invite**.

Data [3-19]

Chris asked his son, "You wanna go play some basketball?" The utterance is classified as an **Invite** because Chris encourages Christopher to participate in playing basketball with him. According to Searle (1979), an invitation attempts to get the hearer to take part in an activity. The informal interrogative form makes the invitation friendly and non-authoritative. Therefore, the utterance functions as an **Invite**.

Permit

Data [3-9]

Mr. Twistle said, “Now you can call me Jay.” The utterance is classified as a **Permit** because Mr. Twistle gives Chris permission to address him by his first name. According to Searle (1979), permitting involves allowing the hearer to perform an action. The expression “you can” explicitly indicates that the action is allowed. Therefore, the utterance functions as a **Permit**.

Data [3-18]

Chris said, “You can have one.” The utterance is classified as a **Permit** because Chris allows his son to have one of the available items. According to Searle (1979), a permit gives the hearer authorization or allowance to perform an action. The expression “you can” directly communicates that the action is permitted. Therefore, the utterance functions as a **Permit**.

Advise

Data [3-10]

Chris said, “You got a dream... you gotta protect it.” The utterance is classified as **Advise** because Chris encourages the hearer to protect and pursue their dream. According to Searle (1979), advising is a directive in which the speaker suggests an action that is considered beneficial to the hearer. Chris does not force the hearer to act but provides guidance based on his perspective. Therefore, the utterance functions as **Advise**.

Data [3-14]

Mr. Jay said, “Take care of yourself.” The utterance is classified as **Advise** because Mr. Jay encourages Chris to take care of himself. According to Searle (1979), advising involves suggesting an action for the hearer’s benefit. Although the utterance is grammatically imperative, its purpose is to provide guidance and concern rather than to exercise authority. Therefore, it functions as **Advise**.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that all eight types of directive illocutionary acts proposed by Searle (1979) were identified in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. **Order** was the most frequently occurring type, with 5 utterances, followed by **ask** with 4 utterances, while **command**, **request**, **beg**, **invite**, **permit**, and **advise** each occurred in 2 utterances. In terms of grammatical sentence types, imperative forms were the most frequently used, followed by interrogative and declarative forms.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that identified various directive illocutionary acts in movie and television dialogues. Septiani (2017) identified various directive acts in *The Miracle Worker Movie*, while Ratnasari et al. (2019) identified directive functions such as commanding, requesting, advising, and ordering in *Coco Movie*. Ediwarman et al. (2020) also identified various directive functions in the *Net 86* television program. However, the present study differs by examining directive illocutionary acts together with the grammatical sentence types used to express them.

The dominance of **order** and imperative forms may be related to the situations portrayed in *The Pursuit of Happiness*. The movie contains family conflict, financial difficulties, personal struggles, and emotionally intense interactions, which often require the characters to give direct instructions or influence the behavior of others. Meanwhile, **ask** and interrogative forms are frequently used when characters seek information, confirmation, or responses. Therefore, the differences in the distribution of directive types may be influenced by the different contexts, relationships, and communicative situations represented in the studies.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed directive illocutionary acts in *The Pursuit of Happiness* movie by identifying the locutionary forms and classifying the types of directive speech acts based on Searle's (1979) theory. A total of 21 utterances were examined, showing that imperative sentences were the most frequently used locutionary form. This highlights how directive intentions are often conveyed through direct grammatical structures.

The analysis revealed that the most dominant types of directive illocutionary acts were "Order" and "Ask," followed by "Command," "Request," "Beg," "Invite," "Permit," and "Advise," each appearing twice. These findings reflect the diverse ways characters express intentions, negotiate relationships, and respond to emotional or situational pressures in the film. The results also show that grammatical form alone is not always sufficient to determine the speaker's intention; the context plays a crucial role in identifying directive meaning.

One limitation of this study is its focus on only 21 representative utterances, which may not capture the full range of directive acts present in the film. Additionally, the analysis relied on interpretation of context, which can be subjective.

Future research is recommended to explore a larger dataset across different movie genres or compare directive acts in films from different cultural backgrounds. Such studies could further illuminate the relationship between linguistic structure, social context, and speaker intention in real or fictional discourse.

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