

## Narrative Nuances: Analyzing Speech Acts in Soman Chainani's 'The School for Good and Evil' Movie

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### Abstract

This research analyzes the different types of speech acts in the movie "The School for Good and Evil" by Soman Chainani, as performed by seventeen distinct characters. While the film offers a captivating narrative, it also delves into instances where characters wrestle with understanding the deeper meanings of others' utterances. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study meticulously examines the dialogues. Data collection techniques encompass a thorough examination of the movie script and an analysis of the characters' gestures. Findings highlight a diverse range of speech acts pivotal to the movie's storytelling. All forms of speech acts are evident, with a marked prominence of illocutionary acts such as 'asking questions' and 'giving commands. Other examples include 'giving directions' and 'representing information'. Notably, the identified perlocutionary acts are largely non-literal. The classification further underscores the consistent use of 'directives' and 'representatives. The illocutionary acts in the movie cover a breadth of communicative functions, from querying, summoning, and instructing to expressing sentiments and stating positions.

**Keywords:** speech acts, function, movie, literal meaning

### INTRODUCTION

Numerous individuals engage in the consumption of fantasy films, yet not all possess a comprehensive grasp of the linguistic structure or utilitarian aspects of the language employed within such cinematic productions. Frequently, audiences encounter challenges in deciphering the import of articulated expressions. Instances arise wherein the intended meanings of dialogues remain obfuscated, resulting in a passive viewing experience devoid of cognizance toward the nuanced significations conveyed through distinct verbal exchanges.

A comprehension of these underlying conversational intents is paramount. A deeper grasp of linguistic nuances can counteract potential interpretational discrepancies, a domain closely aligned with pragmatics. As Yule (1996) posited, pragmatics delves into speaker meaning, contextual meaning, implicature, and a broad array of conveyed

intentions. It helps illuminate the myriad of meanings, assumptions, and intentions behind various linguistic acts, such as requests, refusals, and expressions of gratitude. Central to this discourse is the concept of speech acts, a pivotal area of exploration within pragmatics.

Speech acts, as originally conceptualized by [J. L. Austin \(1962\)](#) in "How to Do Things with Words" further advanced by [John R. Searle \(1969\)](#), are actions realized through language that convey the speaker's intent. They encapsulate the essence of an action executed via verbal expression. Both Austin's tripartite classification and Searle's subsequent taxonomy provided categorizations that highlight the multifaceted nature of these acts. [Austin \(1962\)](#), [Hutajulu \(2016\)](#), and [Sihombing \(2021\)](#) described the illocutionary act as an utterance endowed with specific intent. To him, the act of uttering wasn't a mere exercise; it inherently carried an underlying action. Building on this, [Searle \(1976\)](#) expanded Austin's framework to delve deeper into the diverse kinds of illocutionary speech acts: Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declaratives. Each type offers insights into different facets of human communication, from expressing beliefs and influencing actions to revealing emotional states.

This research focuses on examining speech acts in the movie "The School for Good and Evil" by Soman Chainani. Beyond its gripping narrative, the film showcases instances where characters grapple with interpreting the deeper implications of their dialogues. In studying these interactions, we uncover the intricate relationship between language, emotion, and narrative progression, offering a unique perspective on storytelling. The exploration not only deepens our understanding of cinematic narratives but also broadens the discourse on the nuanced interplay of language and storytelling in visual media.

## **METHOD**

The current study employs a descriptive qualitative research methodology, emphasizing the detailed portrayal of the attributes inherent in the research subjects. As highlighted by [Aprilia \(2021\)](#), descriptive research primarily leans on qualitative means of data analysis due to the inherently non-numerical nature of the data. [Bhandari \(2020\)](#) further emphasized that qualitative research encapsulates the collection and analysis of non-numeric data types, such as text, video, or audio, aiming to comprehend concepts, perspectives, or experiences. Qualitative methods engage with a variety of data sources, from words and language to images, photographs, and observational data. This approach seeks to understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to certain social or human issues, as delineated by [Neisya et al. \(2023\)](#). Summarily, a descriptive qualitative method offers a comprehensive portrayal and analysis of phenomena in their contextual environments, typically conveyed through textual or narrative descriptions.

Moreover, data for this study was amassed using the documentary technique. As defined by [Firmansyah \(2020\)](#), documentation is a robust research method focused on accumulating data from documented evidentiary sources. In this context, the method primarily relied on the movie script and scene analyses, emphasizing character gestures and dialogues. Data was meticulously sourced from repeated viewings of "The School for Good and Evil" movie. The script was subsequently transcribed to underscore the instances of speech acts and the relevant gestures demonstrated by the seventeen characters.

The ensuing data analysis was structured in a phased manner. Initially, the collected data was categorized based on the types of speech acts exhibited, drawing from the

theoretical constructs postulated by Searle (1969) for illocutionary acts and Austin (1962) for locutionary and perlocutionary acts. Subsequent categorization aimed to identify the underlying functions of the displayed speech acts. The interpretations of the speech acts articulated by the characters in "The School for Good and Evil" were extrapolated based on this systematic classification, aligning closely with seminal theories on speech acts. The research progression culminated in formulating conclusions anchored in the empirical findings of the study.

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

In the vast realm of cinematic adaptations, the transition from literary text to screen often necessitates a nuanced reworking of dialogues and character interactions. Our exploration of "The School for Good and Evil" movie, based on Soman Chainani's lauded novel, affords a prime example. Through rigorous analysis, this research deciphers the underlying speech acts embedded within the film, shining a light on the myriad ways characters communicate, persuade, and convey intentions. The interplay of locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts offers a rich tapestry of conversational constructs, revealing not just the overt messages but the covert intentions and outcomes they precipitate. As we delve deeper into the findings, it becomes evident how these speech acts intricately mold the narrative and character dynamics, bridging the chasm between the written word and on-screen portraiture (Hidayat, 2016).

Table 1. Locutionary Act

Utterances	Literal Meaning
<i>"We live by the graveyard, yeah."</i>	They live near a graveyard.
<i>"Okay, I'm awake. Don't break the door down."</i>	The speaker is awake; advising against damaging the door.
<i>"I take you to the Evers Ball."</i>	The speaker will accompany someone to an event.
<i>"Dot, please tell me you can do better. Watch me."</i>	The speaker asks Dot for improvement and tells her to observe.
<i>"I am Professor Dovey, here to help however I can"</i>	Introduction of Professor Dovey, who offers help.
<i>"Quiet, Reader!"</i>	The speaker wants the "Reader" to be silent.
<i>"There are no mistakes in the School for Good and Evil..."</i>	No errors are allowed in the school; wishes for a good semester.
<i>"The Good do not room with Evil."</i>	"Good" people don't room with "Evil" people.
<i>"Hey! Hey, where are you going?"</i>	The speaker asks about someone's destination.
<i>"That hag is my mother."</i>	The speaker's mother is being referred to as a "hag".
<i>"Sparring with you is the only part of the day I enjoy anymore."</i>	The speaker enjoys sparring with the listener.
<i>"No, we will not do that! We don't have time."</i>	The speaker is in a hurry and refuses a proposition.
<i>"And you do not want to fail. Three fails, and you're expelled."</i>	After three failures, one gets expelled.
<i>"Come quick."</i>	The speaker wants someone to hurry.
<i>"Do you mind if I sit with you?"</i>	The speaker asks to sit with the listener.
<i>'Go in there!'</i>	The speaker instructs someone to go inside.

*"Fall in line, newbie. Get over there. "*

Instructions for a newcomer to align and move.

Upon careful analysis of selected sentences from the designated text, we recognized the intrinsic nature of locutionary acts, which fundamentally pertain to the act of uttering a statement, encompassing the sounds produced, the specific words chosen, and their underlying reference. Several observations surfaced from the studied sentences. For instance, some, like "We live by the graveyard, yeah," offer direct spatial insights, delineating the physical whereabouts of the speaker or those associated with them. In contrast, utterances such as "I am Professor Dovey, here to help however I can" shed light on the identity and inherent role or intent of the speaker within a given context.

Commanding and directive nuances are palpably evident in sentences such as "Quiet, Reader!" and "Go in there!", underscoring the speaker's intent to guide or instruct the listener. Furthermore, interpersonal dynamics and emotional underpinnings are unveiled in statements like "Sparring with you is the only part of the day I enjoy anymore," providing glimpses into the speaker's sentiments and relational preferences.

The institutional backdrop is also brought to the fore in expressions like "There are no mistakes in the School for Good and Evil, so have a nice semester," revealing not only the norms and standards of the institution but also the overarching societal and institutional expectations. Inquisitiveness and the seeking of clarity or permission are embodied in sentences like "Do you mind if I sit with you?", while assertive clarifications are showcased in utterances such as "That hag is my mother." Collectively, the locutionary acts extracted from this data set elucidate the speaker's immediate intentions, their dynamics with the listener, and the broader context. Such findings serve as pivotal cornerstones for a subsequent, deeper exploration into the implied and resultant actions inherent in these sentences.

Table 2. Illocutionary Act

<b>Utterances</b>	<b>Literal Meaning</b>
<i>I'm bored.</i>	The speaker feels bored.
<i>No, we don't have time.</i>	They're short on time.
<i>We live by the graveyard, yeah.</i>	Their residence is near a graveyard.
<i>No! You're supposed to drop me...</i>	The speaker complains about the wrong school placement.
<i>Fall in line, newbie. Get over there.</i>	An order to join the line.
<i>Go in there!</i>	An order to enter a place.
<i>Are you coming to the party?</i>	Question about attending a party.
<i>I've never been to Spain.</i>	Statement about not visiting Spain.
<i>Could you pass the salt?</i>	A request for the salt.
<i>This isn't what I ordered.</i>	Dissatisfaction with received item.
<i>We should visit the museum.</i>	A suggestion for a museum visit.
<i>Wow! This is amazing!</i>	Expression of admiration or surprise.

Furthermore, this research has unveiled the nuanced intricacies of illocutionary acts, revealing a layered tapestry of human intent beneath verbal expressions. Preliminary analysis indicates that seemingly straightforward statements, such as "I'm bored" or "I've never been to Spain," are not merely descriptive or factual; they may conceal an implicit desire for interaction or shared experiences. On the other hand, directives like "Go in

there!" or "We should visit the museum" unmistakably steer the listener toward a particular action, whether as a command or a gentle nudge. Another category, expressive, exemplified by reactions like "Wow! This is amazing!", primarily convey the speaker's emotional state. Meanwhile, interrogatives, typified by questions such as "Are you coming to the party?", serve a fact-finding purpose. Notably absent from our dataset were commissive and declarations, yet their significance cannot be understated: the former pertains to commitments, while the latter brings about change merely by its proclamation. This intricate web of illocutionary acts demonstrates not only the profundity of individual utterances but also the complex, multi-layered nature of human communication. Continued exploration in varied cultural and contextual settings is warranted to further delineate these findings.

Table 3. Perlocutionary Act

Utterances	Literal Meaning
<i>Sophie, grab Excalibur...</i>	Requesting Sophie's assistance using a sword.
<i>Look, back in Gavaldon...</i>	Sharing a past experience and valuing family.
<i>Hey, let's drop by Deauville's...</i>	Suggestion to visit Deauville's.
<i>I know she did one hell...</i>	Comment on another's erratic behavior due to someone's influence.
<i>Sophie! Toss my sword, now!</i>	Urgent request for a sword.
<i>Sophie, we can do this...</i>	Expressing collective strength and confidence.
<i>Sophie! Call your squirrel friends!</i>	Asking Sophie to summon squirrels.
<i>Don't you dare talk about...</i>	Warning against discussing the speaker's mother.
<i>Let me guess. It's Belle...</i>	Trying to predict something.
<i>Sophie, you're not allowed...</i>	Informing a rule and requesting intervention.
<i>What you just did in...</i>	Praising Sophie and emphasizing actions.
<i>Run! Run! Agatha, get out...</i>	Urging someone to flee danger.
<i>Once upon a time...</i>	Starting a past narrative.
<i>Show me your smile...</i>	Setting a condition to avoid failure.
<i>Stay away from Sophie...</i>	Warning to maintain distance from Sophie.
<i>No! Stop!!!</i>	Urgent directive to stop.
<i>Well, I guess somebody...</i>	Suggesting seeking romantic connection.
<i>And you do not want...</i>	Warning about failing consequences.
<i>Go in there!</i>	Directive to enter somewhere.
<i>Fall in line, newbie...</i>	Instructing a newcomer to take a position.
<i>Let go of me!</i>	Requesting release.
<i>Let me try. Move, Kiko...</i>	Asking for a chance and for Kiko to move.
<i>I knew from its smell...</i>	Identifying something by its scent.
<i>Tedros. Come quick.</i>	Urgent call for Tedros.

Upon examining the dataset of utterances, our analysis reveals patterns pertinent to communication strategies employed within a specific fictional context. Predominantly, these utterances showcase an urgency in communication, emphasizing the necessity for immediate actions or responses. Terms like "Sophie, grab Excalibur" and "Run! Run! Agatha, get out of there!" underline the immediacy and importance of the tasks at hand. Additionally, the dataset brings to light the recurrent reference to interpersonal relationships and the emotional undertones they carry. Phrases such as "Sophie, we can do this. We're good enough and strong enough to protect each other" emphasize mutual trust,

reliance, and the bond shared among characters. There's also an evident element of caution or warning in multiple expressions, like "Don't you dare talk about my mother" and "Stay away from Sophie, little witch," which possibly indicates conflicts or threats present in the narrative setting. Notably, references to specific cultural or contextual elements, such as "Excalibur," "squirrel friends," or "Never," allude to a rich and intricate world-building within the story. These findings suggest that the provided perlocutionary acts, while providing literal directives or statements, carry a depth of emotional, relational, and cultural undertones that contribute significantly to the narrative's texture and dynamics.

## DISCUSSION

Drawing from the analysis of the perlocutionary utterances and the illocutionary acts within the cinematic narrative of "The School for Good and Evil," it becomes evident that communication is used as an active tool, primarily geared towards instigating action among the characters. The prevalence of utterances within the interactions of the seventeen characters strongly indicates a predominant use of directives, emphasizing the illocutionary acts (Fitriani, 2020). This trend underscores the importance of directive speech acts in the movie's discourse, characterized mainly by ordering, commanding, demanding, and advising. As Budiasih et.al. (2018) illuminate, a directive is a speech act that aims to produce an effect on a listener in the form of an action or has the intention to prompt the listener to undertake a specific action.

Movies, such as "The School for Good and Evil," serve as a rich tapestry of various speech acts, reflecting the myriad forms and functions of language in diverse scenarios (Putri et al., 2020). The cinematic portrayal suggests a significant tilt towards soliciting actions over mere declarations. Our preliminary findings, when combined with this observation, indicate that characters in the narrative prioritize dynamic interplay over static information sharing. This dynamic nature of their interactions highlights the essential role of effective communication in shaping relationships, societal norms, and, more broadly, the film's thematic depth. The characters' predominant employment of directives, which solicit specific actions, resonates with the broader discourse on communication efficacy. Effective communication is paramount in conveying intentions clearly and precisely. Such communication strategies, evident from the characters' interactions, offer insights into the intricate dynamics present in interpersonal relationships. Directives, in particular, reflect intentions to influence behaviors, mirroring real-life situations where language becomes a tool to persuade, influence, and collaborate. The strategies individuals choose are often influenced by sociocultural factors, distance rating, power rating, and rank rating (Wijana, 2021), which determine the dynamics between the speaker and the listener.

Beyond the narrative confines, this analysis emphasizes pragmatic competence. The movie showcases that recognizing when to utilize varied speech acts grounded in context is vital (Budiasih, 2018; Della, 2018; Juvrianto, 2018; Crishtianto, 2020 ). Moreover, the evident power dynamics stemming from the use of directives delve into societal norms and emphasize the role of authority, control, and dominance in social interactions. Language, as depicted in the movie, goes beyond a mere tool for communication; it's a catalyst for action, decision-making, and yielding specific outcomes. Wijana (2021) articulates that participants in any communicative activity should be aware of conventions that dictate

language usage and interpretation. This mutual recognition emphasizes that both the speaker and the listener have roles and responsibilities in ensuring the effective exchange of information and intentions. In sum, the film "The School for Good and Evil," through its rich portrayal of speech acts, underscores the inextricable link between language, communication, and broader societal dynamics. It champions the view that communication isn't just a passive transaction but an active force shaping human interactions. This analysis provides an invaluable lens, not only in understanding the cinematic narrative but also in appreciating the broader implications of language and its pivotal role in society.

## CONCLUSION

Within the cinematic narrative of *The School for Good and Evil*, a diverse tapestry of speech acts unfolds, shedding light on the intricate nature of language and communication. Central to this research is the prominence of illocutionary acts, particularly those of "telling" and "commanding", which are clearly exemplified in the film's discourse. This dominance is underpinned by a wealth of examples presented earlier in the research. While the perlocutionary acts observed tend to lean toward non-literal interpretations, their prevalence emphasizes the multifaceted nature of verbal communication. The comprehensive categorization of speech acts (Tsui, 1994) throughout the film, from directives to representatives, unveils a deeper layer of the narrative strategy employed by the movie's creators. Spanning a wide range of communicative functions, the illocutionary acts in *The School for Good and Evil* touch upon elements from simple queries to heartfelt expressions of sentiment, encapsulating the rich emotional and informational tapestry of the narrative (Fitriani, 2020). These acts, both subtle and overt, serve as foundational pillars, molding dialogues and steering the narrative arc of the movie.

Furthermore, an intriguing aspect of the research is the varying effectiveness of perlocutionary acts. While certain statements in the movie evoke pronounced responses, others seem to float into the ether, not evoking the intended or expected reactions. This discrepancy underscores the delicate balance between intention and perception in verbal communication. As a prospective avenue for exploration, delving into speech acts in other film genres or literary forms promises a rich academic yield. Whether it is a drama, comedy, a TV series, or even a novel, understanding the nuances of speech acts (Violeta, 2019) across diverse media forms could provide holistic insights into the universality and variations of human communication.

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