



Illocutionary Acts Found in “The Gorge” Movie

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 27 May 2026	This study aims to describe the types of illocutionary acts based on Searle’s (1979) theory and analyze their purposes through five components of illocutionary force proposed by Searle and Vanderveken (1985) in <i>The Gorge</i> movie. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, with data consisting of character utterances containing illocutionary acts in the film’s dialogues. The data were collected through repeated observation of the movie, transcription and classification of relevant utterances, and analysis according to speech-act types and illocutionary-force components. The findings reveal that all five types of illocutionary acts occur in the characters’ interactions, namely assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives are the most frequent, realized through claiming, informing, stating, affirming, and believing; directives include asking, ordering, commanding, and suggesting; commissives are less frequent and consist mainly of offering and promising; expressives involve apologizing, expressing anger or disgust, thanking, and showing liking; while declarations occur rarely, with only one clear instance. The analysis further shows that the purposes of these acts are shaped by illocutionary point, propositional content, preparatory conditions, sincerity conditions, and degree of strength. These components demonstrate how characters use language to establish facts, exercise control, express emotions, commit themselves to future actions, and alter operational situations. Speaker authority and contextual circumstances determine the force and legitimacy of utterances, particularly during military and medical situations. In the high-stakes context of the film, utterances function not merely as verbal exchanges but as deliberate actions that sustain existing realities, negotiate interpersonal power, and create consequential changes within the narrative.
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1. Introduction

Communication is rarely just about the words we exchange, it is about the actions we perform through those words. Since Austin (1975) introduced speech act theory, language has been understood as functioning on three distinct levels: locutionary (the actual utterance), illocutionary (the intended function), and perlocutionary (the effect on the listener). This research specifically focuses on illocutionary acts, which Searle (1979) later refined as actions performed through speech, such as requesting, ordering, or informing. Searle categorized these into five primary groups, assertives, commissives, expressives, declaratives, and directives. In the realm of cinema, these acts are particularly vital. As an audio-visual medium, a film does not merely serve as entertainment but also as a reflection of real-world communication, where every line of dialogue carries a strategic purpose that shapes character interactions and drives the narrative forward.

The study of illocutionary acts has gained significant attention across various media. For instance, Sitorus and Elfrida (2022) explored their use in podcasts, while Risma et al. (2021) identified all five types in formal speeches, noting the dominance of representative acts. Beyond spoken discourse, researchers have also examined social media platforms like TikTok, where Rastom et al. (2025) found that directive acts predominated in host-guest interviews. Similar analyses have been applied to play scripts and song lyrics (Mustakim & Weda, 2022; Nasim & Mariana, 2024), the latter showing a prevalence of representative acts used to convey facts and truths.

While research on films exists, such as the study by Sihombing et al. (2021) on the animated feature *The Incredibles 2*, there is a significant contextual gap when compared to high-stakes action films. In *The Incredibles 2*, communication is often centered on emotional connections and family commitments (expressives and commissives). In contrast, *The Gorge* presents a narrative rooted in physical conflict and survival, where dialogue shifts toward instructions, commands, and factual disclosures (directives and assertives). This research fills this gap by focusing on the intense, survival-driven interactions in *The Gorge*. Furthermore, unlike previous studies that often focus on the classification, however, this study deepens the analysis by integrating the seven components of illocutionary force (Searle and Vanderveken, 1985) to uncover the precise communicative purpose behind each utterance within the film's suspenseful narrative. Consequently, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What types of illocutionary acts are used in *The Gorge* movie?, (2) What are the purposes of each type of illocutionary act found in *The Gorge* movie?

2. Literature Review

Speech act theory has developed from a primarily philosophical account of language as action into a broad pragmatic framework for examining how speakers accomplish communicative purposes through utterances (Levinson, 2001; Yule, 1996). Contemporary pragmatic research increasingly emphasizes that speech acts cannot be understood solely from the grammatical form of an utterance because the same linguistic construction may realize different communicative actions depending on contextual and interactional factors (Oswald, 2023). Krifka (2024), for example, demonstrates that declarative forms may perform a range of speech acts, including assertions, declarations, exclamations, wishes, commands, observations, reminders, and questions. This perspective reinforces the distinction between linguistic form and illocutionary function and indicates that the interpretation of an utterance requires attention to the relationship between its propositional content and the communicative action performed by the speaker. Similarly, Trotzke (2024) argues that the

realization of speech acts is connected to socio-pragmatic considerations, particularly the ways speakers formulate requests, questions, and assertions to achieve their intended illocutionary goals. Thus, contemporary research treats illocutionary acts not simply as fixed linguistic categories but as context-sensitive communicative actions whose interpretation depends on form, intention, and interactional circumstances.

Within this development, research on illocutionary acts continues to examine the adequacy and internal structure of taxonomies traditionally associated with Searle (see Croddy, 2002; Ran, 2015; Witek, 2022). Recent work has questioned whether broad categories such as directives and expressives sufficiently capture the complexity of actual communicative practices. Schoppa (2025), for instance, examines the meta-illocutionary lexicon associated with directive and expressive acts and finds both similarities and differences within and across these categories, suggesting that speech-act classes have a more complex conceptual structure than a simple categorical classification may imply. In a related direction, van Elswyk (2023) demonstrates that the relationship between linguistic forms and illocutionary interpretation can be theoretically complex, particularly when speakers communicate beliefs and evidential commitments. These studies suggest that identifying whether an utterance is an assertive, directive, commissive, expressive, or declarative represents only the first analytical step. A more comprehensive pragmatic analysis should also consider how the linguistic form, propositional content, speaker intention, and contextual conditions interact to produce a particular illocutionary force. This theoretical development is particularly relevant to research that seeks to move beyond merely counting or classifying speech acts toward explaining the communicative purposes underlying them.

The importance of contextual interpretation becomes particularly evident in studies of speech acts in mediated and scripted discourse. Film dialogue provides a productive source of pragmatic data because characters perform communicative actions through language while simultaneously participating in an intentionally constructed narrative. Nevertheless, film dialogue should not automatically be treated as identical to naturally occurring conversation. The suitability of film as a model of pragmatic interaction has been examined by Čelhar and Kavalir (2025), who shows that cinematic dialogue may reproduce some patterns of ordinary speech acts while also diverging from spontaneous interaction because of narrative and dramatic conventions (see also Ryan & Granville, 2020). More recent research focusing specifically on cinematic dialogue similarly demonstrates that speech-act categories can reveal how characters communicate intentions, establish interpersonal relationships, and advance narrative events. For example, Nisa and Naomisa (2025) identified all five of Searle's categories in *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, with representative acts accounting for the largest proportion, followed by directives, expressives, commissives, and declaratives. Their findings indicate that speech acts in film dialogue contribute not only to the transmission of information but also to character development, action-oriented communication, emotional engagement, and narrative progression.

Recent studies further demonstrate that the distribution and function of illocutionary acts may vary substantially according to the genre and communicative environment of a film. Lutviana and Hendar (2024) for example, found all five categories of illocutionary acts in *Black Adam*, with assertives occurring most frequently, followed by directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. Likewise, Rahayu et al. (2024) identified all five categories in *Heidi*, but found directives to be dominant, reflecting the importance of commands, requests, and other attempts to influence hearers' actions within the characters' interactions. More

recently, Widiya and Simatupang, 2025) examined *Fast X* and found that expressive acts were the most frequent, while conflictive functions predominated, reflecting the emotional intensity and interpersonal conflict characteristic of the film. These contrasting findings are significant because they indicate that there is no universally dominant illocutionary category across cinematic discourse. Instead, the communicative profile of a film may be shaped by its genre, plot, interpersonal relationships, and situational demands. Consequently, an action-oriented narrative such as *The Gorge* warrants investigation because its survival, danger, cooperation, and conflict contexts may create distinctive pragmatic conditions for the use of directives, assertives, commissives, and other illocutionary acts.

Another important development in recent speech-act research is the increasing attention to illocutionary force, rather than merely the identification of illocutionary type. Illocutionary force concerns what an utterance is doing communicatively and how strongly that action is performed in a particular context. Contemporary research demonstrates that force may be influenced by linguistic and non-linguistic features. Trotzke (2024) emphasizes that speakers select linguistic forms in relation to their intended illocutionary goals and socio-pragmatic considerations, while Mehu and Sweeting (2025) demonstrate that facial behavior can be associated with the illocutionary point, valence, and strength of speech acts. Their findings are particularly relevant to cinematic discourse because film communication is inherently multimodal: an utterance is accompanied by facial expressions, gestures, vocal delivery, physical positioning, and other contextual cues. Although the present study concentrates on verbal illocutionary acts, examining their communicative purposes through the components of illocutionary force proposed by Searle and Vanderveken provides a more precise means of explaining why a particular utterance functions as an order, warning, assertion, promise, expression, or other communicative action. Such an approach therefore moves the analysis from a descriptive taxonomy toward an interpretation of the intended communicative function of each utterance.

Despite the growing body of research on illocutionary acts in cinematic discourse, several limitations remain. Existing studies have frequently concentrated on identifying Searle's five categories and determining their frequency in individual films, while comparatively less attention has been devoted to systematically explaining the communicative purpose and illocutionary force underlying each utterance, particularly in high-stakes action and survival narratives. Studies of *Black Adam*, *Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom*, *Heidi*, and *Fast X* demonstrate the usefulness of Searle's taxonomy, but their findings also show that illocutionary patterns are strongly influenced by narrative context and genre. This gap becomes particularly relevant to *The Gorge*, whose narrative is structured around danger, physical survival, cooperation, secrecy, conflict, and strategic decision-making. In such circumstances, utterances may perform communicative functions that cannot be adequately explained through categorical labels alone. Therefore, the present study extends previous research by examining both the types of illocutionary acts found in *The Gorge* and the purposes of those acts, using the components of illocutionary force proposed by Searle and Vanderveken (1985) to provide a more detailed account of how characters use language to accomplish specific communicative goals within the film's suspense-driven narrative.

3. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method focusing on utterances as the primary source of data (Cataldo et al., 2011). The data is sourced from the movie 'The Gorge,'

accessed via the Apple TV digital platform. This film was specifically selected for its abundance of dialogues that illustrate various illocutionary acts. To support the process, a laptop was used for viewing and a notebook for recording the relevant dialogues. The data collection process involves downloading the film and conducting an in depth observational analysis of the script and scenes to identify specific illocutionary acts. These utterances are then categorized into five types: *assertives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives*, and *declarations* (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985), while simultaneously explaining the underlying purpose of each. During the analysis phase, the data is classified according to these types and examined through the lens of relevant theories to uncover their specific purposes. Finally, the findings are presented in detail within this thesis, utilizing both formal and informal methods to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024).

4. Result and Discussion

Findings reveal all five Searle (1979) illocutionary act types operating within The Gorge's high-stakes military narrative, each serving distinct pragmatic functions amplified by the film's tense operational contexts.

Assertives dominate operational briefings and status updates, with Levi's inference about Mrs. Bartholomew as a "high-level spook" (00:04:53) committing him to a truth claim rooted in observable cues, her age, appearance, and the colonel's deference. This utterance's illocutionary point asserts belief in her covert authority, grounded in sincerity conditions of genuine perception and preparatory context of their recruitment exchange. Similarly, Levi's curt "Yes" confirming familial military service (00:05:22) and precise "3241 meters" record (00:54:08) exemplify assertive force through factual commitment, their moderate strength degrees reinforcing credibility without embellishment.

Directives propel mission coordination under time pressure, as Mrs. Bartholomew's "Colonel, give us the room, please" (00:04:41) instantly secures privacy, its polite imperative balancing authority with military decorum. The Airman's dual commands "Place your left hand on the pad" and "Put your watch... in the case" (00:12:03) enforce protocol with non-negotiable strength, their propositional content specifying exact physical actions within the no-fly zone's urgency. JD's pivotal "You need to stop what's in the gorge from coming out" (00:17:59) reframes Levi's mission understanding, its emphatic modal "need to" signaling heightened preparatory conditions of clandestine knowledge transfer.

Commissives bind characters to future actions amid isolation and mortality. Drasa's father's resolute "I'm going to do it myself" (00:09:59) at his wife's graveside commits to suicide on Valentine's Day, its unwavering strength degree reflecting terminal resolve and sincerity rooted in cancer's reality. JD's casual "We'll get a drink and I'll explain everything" (00:14:48) promises operational handoff, while Drasa's "I'll set out some fresh clothes" (00:52:26) and Levi's "I intend to" eat rabbit pie (00:51:37) forge interpersonal trust, their preparatory contexts tower isolation, physical exhaustion amplifying commitment weight.

Expressives humanize operatives under duress, with Drasa's father's furious "To hell with Rabinovich, and to hell with Moscow" (00:09:26) venting paternal protectiveness, its repeated curse structure maximizing emotional strength. Levi's apologetic "Listen, I'm sorry, man" (00:17:59) clears confusion during mission briefing, while the Airman's "Thank you for your service" (00:22:08) honors duty. Drasa's blunt "You smell. Terribly" (00:52:26) and Levi's emphatic "I fucking love the rabbit pie" (01:03:06) reveal raw authenticity, their sincerity conditions heightened by gorge-side vulnerability.

Declarations instantiate operational reality, as the Airman's "Rotation complete" (00:22:29) and radio operator's "Procedure is complete" (00:23:54) formally transition mission phases. These utterances' absolute strength degrees enabled by institutional authority alter status solely through pronunciation, bypassing negotiation.

Based on the discussion above, it confirms Searle and Vanderveken's (1985) framework illuminates cinematic illocutionary purposes beyond mere classification. Preparatory conditions consistently emerge as force potentiators, military hierarchies enable directives' compliance, shared gorge knowledge grounds assertives' propositional content, terminal illness authenticates commissives. Strength degrees vary strategically casual "please" softens commands, expletives intensify expressives while sincerity conditions unify all types through characters' genuine stakes. Unlike Sihombing et al.'s (2021) family-focused *Incredibles 2* expressives, *The Gorge* prioritizes survival directives and assertives, reflecting action cinema's operational pragmatics over emotional bonding.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of research results, the characters make use of all five main types, assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives show up frequently through actions like claiming, informing, stating, affirming, and believing. Directives include asking, ordering, commanding, and suggesting. Commissives appear less often, limited to just offering and promising. Expressives cover a range of emotions, such as apologizing, expressing anger or disgust, thanking, and showing liking. Finally, declarations are rare, with only one clear instance of declaring something.

While the purpose of each type of illocutionary act in "The Gorge" movie can be viewed through the five main components of illocutionary force that applied in this research. The overall analysis of illocutionary acts within the selected data reveals a highly structured communicative framework where language functions as both a mirror of reality and a tool for institutional change. The illocutionary point across these acts demonstrates a versatile range of goals: from validating objective facts in assertives and exercising interpersonal control in directives, to pledging personal commitment in commissives, venting emotional truths in expressives, and officially altering operational statuses in declaratives. This is consistently supported by propositional content that is precise and contextspecific, emphasizing technical details such as sniper records, mission protocols, or medical realities that underscore the gravity of the characters' world. These speech acts gain their legitimacy through preparatory conditions, where the speakers' specific authority, military rank, or personal history provides the necessary foundation for their words to hold weight. Furthermore, the sincerity conditions highlight a profound level of honesty; whether responding to a command or declaring a procedure's end, the characters speak from a place of genuine belief and adherence to facts. Finally, the degree of strength observed ranging from the subtle, polite guidance of a peer to the absolute, non negotiable finality of a formal declaration maps the intricate power dynamics and the constant state of urgency defining their environment. Ultimately, these five components coalesce to show that in high-stakes settings, every utterance is a deliberate act that either maintains the existing world or decisively creates a new one.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

Authors' Contribution

Sesilia Reko Djala: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Anak Agung Istri Manik Warmadewi:** Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology. **I Wayan Ana:** Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing – review & editing.

Statement of the Use of AI

The authors state that during the preparation of this manuscript, AI tools were used to assist with checking grammar and sentence clarity. However, all AI-generated suggestions were carefully verified and edited by the author.

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