

## Illocutionary Speech Acts in the Oscar-Winning Short Film *The Neighbors' Window*: A Pragmatic Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This research presents a pragmatic analysis of illocutionary speech acts in the dialogue of *The Neighbors' Window* (2019), an Academy Award-winning short film directed by Marshall Curry. Drawing on Searle's (1976) taxonomy, this study identifies and classifies 28 illocutionary acts across five categories: expressives (28.6%), directives (25.0%), assertives (25.0%), commissives (17.9%), and declarations (3.6%). Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the film's transcript was systematically analyzed to examine how illocutionary acts function in conveying character intentions, emotional states, and relational dynamics. Expressives are the most frequent, reflecting the film's emotional intensity, while declarations are rare. The distribution correlates with the film's narrative structure, with expressives dominating the conflict phase and assertives and expressives characterizing the emotional climax. The analysis demonstrates that illocutionary acts are integral to the film's storytelling, character development, and emotional communication. The findings contribute to the growing body of pragmatic research on cinematic discourse and suggest pedagogical applications for teaching pragmatics through film dialogue.

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## 1. Introduction

Language serves not merely as a medium for conveying information but as a vehicle for performing actions. When people speak, they do more than utter words; they make requests, offer apologies, express emotions, issue commands, and accomplish a wide range of social functions through their verbal expressions. This fundamental insight lies at the heart of speech act theory, a cornerstone of linguistic pragmatics that has profoundly shaped the understanding of how language operates in real-world communicative contexts. The study of illocutionary speech acts, the actions performed through speaking. It offers a valuable lens for examining how characters in film communicate intentions, negotiate relationships, and drive narrative development. This research undertakes a pragmatic analysis of illocutionary speech acts in the dialogue of *The Neighbors' Window*, an Academy Award-winning short film written and directed

by Marshall Curry (Curry, 2019), with the aim of identifying the types and functions of illocutionary acts employed by the characters throughout the narrative.

*The Neighbors' Window* tells the story of Alli and Jacob, a married couple in their thirties living in New York City with three young children. Alli, exhausted by the demands of childcare and the monotony of domestic routine, finds herself increasingly frustrated with her daily life and strained in her relationship with her husband. The couple's apartment window faces that of their neighbors across the street, and they begin covertly observing the lives of a younger, seemingly carefree couple. Through this window, Alli and Jacob witness what appears to be an exciting and passionate existence, a stark contrast to their own mundane reality. However, the narrative takes an unexpected turn when the neighbor's husband becomes ill and subsequently dies. In a poignant moment of revelation, Alli encounters the grieving widow who discloses that she and her husband had similarly found comfort in watching Alli's family through the window, envying the vitality and warmth of their household (Curry, 2019). This mutual voyeurism and the empathy it ultimately generates serve as the emotional core of the film, which won the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film in 2020.

The film's thematic richness and emotional depth make it an especially compelling subject for pragmatic analysis. The dialogue in *The Neighbors' Window* is not merely expository; it is densely packed with illocutionary forces that reveal character intentions, emotional states, and relational dynamics. The characters' utterances function as acts of complaining, questioning, reassuring, confessing, and empathizing each carrying distinct illocutionary points that contribute to the film's exploration of envy, loss, and human connection. Prior research has examined various aspects of the film's linguistic features, including adjacency pairs in conversations and speech act classifications (Dwiva, 2023; Mustafidiah, 2024; Taulia et al., 2024, 2025). However, a focused investigation specifically dedicated to illocutionary speech acts within this film remains an area ripe for exploration. By analyzing how characters perform actions through their words, this research seeks to illuminate the pragmatic strategies that underpin the film's emotional impact and narrative progression.

The theoretical framework for this study draws primarily from the foundational work of J.L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969, 1976), two philosophers whose contributions have defined the field of speech act theory. Austin (1962), in his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words*, proposed that utterances perform three kinds of acts simultaneously: locutionary acts (the act of saying something), illocutionary acts (the act performed in saying something, such as promising or warning), and perlocutionary acts (the effect produced on the hearer). Austin's (1962) insight that "to say something is to do something" revolutionized the philosophical understanding of language, shifting attention from the truth conditions of propositions to the performative functions of utterances.

Building on Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts, Searle (1969) further elaborated the concept of illocutionary force and the rules governing speech acts. He later proposed a systematic classification of illocutionary acts into five categories: assertives (or representatives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations (Searle, 1976). This taxonomy has become one of the most widely used analytical frameworks in pragmatics because it offers clear criteria for identifying speakers' communicative intentions in various discourse contexts (Levinson, 1983; Yule, 1996). Accordingly, the present study adopts Searle's (1976) classification as the primary analytical framework for examining speech acts in film dialogue.

The pragmatic analysis of film dialogue represents a growing area of scholarly inquiry that bridges linguistics, media studies, and literary criticism. Films offer a unique dataset for pragmatic research because their dialogue is carefully crafted to convey character, advance plot, and evoke emotional responses, yet it must also approximate natural conversational patterns to maintain verisimilitude. Recent studies have applied speech act theory to analyze illocutionary acts in various films, demonstrating that illocutionary acts in film dialogue serve not only as communicative instruments but also as vehicles for expressing cultural values, developing character relationships, and propelling narrative momentum (Dwiva, 2023; Mustafidiah, 2024). Short films, in particular, present a concentrated form of storytelling in which every line of dialogue must carry significant pragmatic weight, making them especially suitable for detailed pragmatic analysis.

This research is motivated by several considerations. First, despite the film's critical acclaim and its recognition with an Academy Award, systematic pragmatic analysis of its dialogue remains limited. Existing studies have focused on adjacency pairs and general speech act categories (Dwiva, 2023; Mustafidiah, 2024), but a dedicated examination of illocutionary acts their types, distributions, and functions has not been comprehensively undertaken. Previous studies on speech acts have predominantly focused on identifying and classifying utterances into categories such as assertions, questions, requests, complaints, or directives. Although this approach is valuable for describing the communicative intention of individual utterances, it provides only limited insight into how those utterances function within the broader development of a narrative.

A pragmatic perspective on illocutionary acts emphasizes that utterances should be understood not merely by their linguistic form or category but also by the social actions they perform in context. From this perspective, a character's complaint may function as an act of accusation, a revelation may operate as an act of confession, and these illocutionary acts can reshape interpersonal relationships, influence audience interpretation, and contribute to key narrative turning points. Likewise, the interpretation of evaluative and performative utterances is inseparable from contextual factors, including speakers' background knowledge, social relationships, and power dynamics, all of which determine how an utterance functions within a narrative rather than merely what category it belongs to (Blackwell, 2010; Norrick, 2015). This contextual orientation is consistent with Faisal (2026), who emphasizes that pragmatic meaning cannot be interpreted solely from linguistic forms but must be understood through the interaction between utterances, context, and speakers' communicative intentions.

At the psychological level, adjacency pair analysis explains how conversational turns are sequentially organized but provides limited insight into the emotional and psychological states conveyed through interaction. An illocutionary perspective, by contrast, reveals how utterances communicate affective stances, negotiate empathy, and express underlying emotions such as vulnerability, resentment, or distress that may not be explicitly stated. These psychological meanings emerge through speakers' communicative intentions and the interpersonal context in which utterances are produced and interpreted, rather than through their sequential organization alone (Selting, 2012; Mauchand & Pell, 2021; Liu & Liu, 2021).

The significance of this research extends beyond the analysis of a single film. By examining how illocutionary acts operate in *The Neighbors' Window*, this study contributes to the broader understanding of pragmatic meaning-making in cinematic

discourse. It demonstrates how speech act theory can illuminate the subtle communicative strategies that filmmakers employ to convey character intentions, emotional states, and relational dynamics. Furthermore, the findings may have pedagogical implications for the teaching of pragmatics, as film dialogue provides an accessible and engaging medium for illustrating abstract pragmatic concepts (Yule, 1996). For students and researchers alike, the analysis of illocutionary acts in film offers a window into the intricate relationship between language, context, and social action.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows: (1) What types of illocutionary speech acts are employed by the characters in *The Neighbors' Window*? (2) What are the dominant illocutionary functions performed through the characters' utterances? (3) How do illocutionary acts contribute to character development and narrative progression within the film? To address these questions, this study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, analyzing the film's dialogue through the lens of Searle's (1976) classification of illocutionary acts. Data are drawn from the film's transcript, with utterances identified, categorized, and interpreted according to their illocutionary force and contextual function.

## 2. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze illocutionary speech acts in the dialogue of *The Neighbors' Window*. The qualitative descriptive method is particularly suitable for pragmatic research because it enables researchers to examine language use in its natural context while exploring the meanings participants attribute to communicative interactions. Creswell and Poth (2024) state that qualitative research is conducted in natural settings and focuses on understanding the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social or human phenomena through an interpretive approach. Accordingly, this method is appropriate for analyzing speech acts in film dialogue, as it facilitates an in-depth interpretation of speakers' intentions and the communicative functions of their utterances within the context in which they occur.

### 2.1 Data Source

The primary data source is the dialogue of *The Neighbors' Window*, a 2019 American short drama film written and directed by Marshall Curry (Curry, 2019). The film, which won the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film in 2020, features a cast including Maria Dizzia as Alli, Greg Keller as Jacob, Juliana Canfield as the Neighbor, and Bret Lada as the Neighbor's Husband. The film's duration of approximately 20 minutes provides a concentrated yet sufficiently rich corpus for comprehensive pragmatic analysis. The film was selected because its thematic focus on voyeurism, marital tension, empathy, and emotional revelation creates dialogue dense with illocutionary acts. Following the analytical procedure adopted by Nisa and Naomisa (2025), the present study analyzed the spoken utterances in the film using Searle's taxonomy of speech acts. Similar to their study, which identified 137 speech acts across five illocutionary categories, the dialogue in the present study was transcribed and systematically classified to facilitate qualitative analysis.

### 2.2 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure was adapted from Bramantio and Gunawan (2025). The researcher watched *The Neighbors' Window* repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dialogue and its communicative context. First, the film was

downloaded from YouTube, where it is officially available for public viewing. Second, the transcript of the film's dialogue was obtained from publicly available sources. Third, the researcher watched *The Neighbors' Window* multiple times while reading the transcript simultaneously to ensure accuracy and become thoroughly familiar with the film's narrative, character dynamics, and contextual nuances. Fourth, the researcher identified and extracted all utterances constituting potential illocutionary acts. Following Searle's (1976) taxonomy, utterances were examined for their illocutionary force, the action performed by the speaker in uttering words, such as asserting, requesting, promising, apologizing, or expressing emotion. Fifth, extracted utterances were organized systematically, with each utterance coded according to speaker, narrative context, and illocutionary category.

### 2. 3 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis integrated several complementary techniques for comprehensive examination of illocutionary acts. The analysis proceeded through three stages:

#### a. Identification and Categorization

This stage involved identifying all utterances and categorizing them according to Searle's (1976) five-part taxonomy: assertives (commit the speaker to truth of a proposition), directives (attempt to get hearer to do something), commissives (commit speaker to future action), expressives (convey psychological state), and declarations (bring about changes in the world). Each utterance was examined to determine its primary illocutionary point, considering both linguistic form and contextual factors.

#### b. Contextual Interpretation

Each identified illocutionary act was interpreted within its specific conversational and narrative context. This considered speaker relationships, sequential position, preceding and following utterances, non-verbal cues, and broader narrative context. Each identified illocutionary act was interpreted within its conversational and narrative context to determine the speaker's intended meaning and communicative function. As noted by Fahroji (2025), illocutionary acts facilitate the interpretation of speakers' intended meanings within particular contexts. Therefore, each utterance in *The Neighbors' Window* was analyzed by considering both its contextual meaning and its contribution to character development and the film's narrative

#### c. Functional Analysis

This stage analyzed how different types of illocutionary acts serve narrative and character development functions. Sutrisno and Rahim (2025) argue that the analysis of illocutionary acts extends beyond identifying speech act categories by revealing characters' communicative intentions, identities, and emotional conflicts within cinematic narratives. Accordingly, each illocutionary act in *The Neighbors' Window* was interpreted in relation to its conversational context and contribution to character development.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher maintained an audit trail documenting each stage of data collection and analysis. Coding decisions were guided consistently by Searle's (1976) taxonomy, and each

utterance was reviewed repeatedly through careful comparison between the film's audiovisual data and its transcript to verify the assigned illocutionary category and contextual interpretation. The iterative coding process and the consistent application of predefined coding criteria helped maintain analytical consistency and reduce potential subjective bias throughout the analysis. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## 2. 4 Trustworthiness of the Coding Process

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## 3. Results

This section presents the findings of the pragmatic analysis of illocutionary speech acts in *The Neighbors' Window*. Following Searle's (1976) taxonomy, the utterances in the film's dialogue were identified, categorized, and interpreted according to their illocutionary force. The analysis examines five types of illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Each type is illustrated with representative utterances from the film's transcript, accompanied by contextual interpretation of their pragmatic functions.

### 3.1 Assertives (Representatives)

Assertives commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition. They include acts such as stating, claiming, reporting, describing, and concluding. In *The Neighbors' Window*, assertives are frequently employed by characters to convey information, express opinions, and describe events or observations. This type of illocutionary act serves as the foundation for establishing narrative context and character perspectives.

#### 3.1.1 Describing Observation

| Utterance                                | Context                                                     | Illocutionary Force       |
|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| "They're christening the new apartment." | Jacob observes the neighbors engaging in intimate activity. | Assertive<br>(describing) |

Alli's utterance functions as an assertive because she is describing what she perceives the neighbors are doing. The proposition commits her to the belief that the neighbors' activity is a form of claiming or "christening" their new living space. This utterance not only conveys factual observation but also reflects Alli's perspective on the neighbors' uninhibited behavior.

### 3.1.2 Reporting Status

| Utterance          | Context                                                          | Illocutionary Force   |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| "They're whooped." | Alli describes the children's condition after an exhausting day. | Assertive (reporting) |

Alli's statement reports the children's tired state. The assertive force is evident in her commitment to the truth of the proposition that the children are exhausted. This utterance contributes to establishing the domestic context and the couple's shared experience of parenting challenges.

### 3.1.3 Expressing Belief

| Utterance                              | Context                                                                      | Illocutionary Force           |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| "I just think they really don't care." | Jacob expresses his opinion about the neighbors' awareness of being watched. | Assertive (expressing belief) |

This utterance exemplifies an assertive act because Jacob commits himself to the truth of his belief that the neighbors are indifferent to being observed. The use of "I think" explicitly signals the propositional attitude, while the illocutionary force is that of stating an opinion rather than merely describing a fact.

### 3.1.4 Describing Physical Condition

| Utterance                  | Context                                         | Illocutionary Force    |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "He doesn't look so good." | Alli observes the male neighbor looking unwell. | Assertive (describing) |

Alli's observation about the neighbor's appearance functions as an assertive description. The utterance commits her to the truth of her perception, and it serves a crucial narrative function by foreshadowing the neighbor's illness and subsequent death.

### 3.1.5 Stating Identity

| Utterance                                       | Context                                                                  | Illocutionary Force |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| "I think our apartments might face each other." | The Neighbor identifies the spatial relationship between the apartments. | Assertive (stating) |

The Neighbor's utterance is an assertive act that states the proposition that their apartments face each other. This statement is significant narratively as it establishes the shared voyeuristic experience and initiates the film's emotional climax.

### 3.1.6 Stating Fact

| Utterance                          | Context                                             | Illocutionary Force      |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "My husband has been really sick." | The Neighbor reveals her husband's illness to Alli. | Assertive (stating fact) |

This utterance functions as an assertive act stating a factual condition. The Neighbor commits herself to the truth of the proposition about her husband's illness. This assertive serves a crucial narrative function by revealing the reason for the neighbors' behavior and initiating the film's emotional turning point.

### 3.1.7 Reporting Past Event

| Utterance                     | Context                               | Illocutionary Force   |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| "We saw a Tyrannosaurus Rex!" | The child reports the day's activity. | Assertive (reporting) |

This utterance functions as an assertive act reporting a past event. The child commits herself to the truth of the proposition that they encountered a Tyrannosaurus Rex at the museum. Although the statement describes an extraordinary event, it functions as a factual report rather than a declaration, as it does not bring about any change in the world but simply conveys information about a past experience.

## 3.2 Directives

Directives attempt to get the hearer to do something. They include acts such as requesting, questioning, commanding, ordering, and advising. Directives are among the most frequently occurring illocutionary acts in the film, reflecting the characters' attempts to influence each other's behavior and manage their domestic and social interactions.

### 3.2.1 Command/Request

| Utterance                                   | Context                                                              | Illocutionary Force    |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "Quick, quick, quick! Quick, quick, quick!" | Alli urgently prompts Jacob to act quickly in a parenting situation. | Directive (commanding) |

Alli's repeated exclamation functions as a directive act commanding Jacob to act with urgency. The repetition intensifies the directive force, conveying the speaker's frustration and need for immediate action in managing the children.

### 3.2.2 Request for Information

| Utterance                                                        | Context                                                         | Illocutionary Force     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| "Do you think they really don't think that people can see them?" | Alli asks Jacob for his opinion about the neighbors' awareness. | Directive (questioning) |

This utterance functions as a directive in the form of a question, seeking information or opinion from the hearer. The question serves both a pragmatic and

narrative function, revealing Alli's curiosity and moral judgment about the neighbors' behavior.

### 3.2.3 Instruction

| Utterance                                                     | Context                                                               | Illocutionary Force     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| "Hey guys, why don't you go into your room for a little bit?" | Jacob instructs his children to leave the room during a tense moment. | Directive (instructing) |

Although phrased as a suggestion ("why don't you"), this utterance functions as a directive instructing the children to leave. The softening through interrogative form reflects politeness strategies

### 3.2.4 Advice/Suggestion

| Utterance                                                     | Context                                      | Illocutionary Force  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| "Just go to the blue whale room and let the kids run around." | Alli advises Jacob on managing the children. | Directive (advising) |

Alli's utterance functions as a directive act of advising, attempting to influence Jacob's behavior by providing a suggestion for managing the children. The directive force is softened through the use of "just go," which mitigates the imposition on the hearer.

### 3.2.5 Request

| Utterance                          | Context                                         | Illocutionary Force    |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "Can you give the phone to daddy?" | Alli asks her child to hand the phone to Jacob. | Directive (requesting) |

This utterance is a directive act requesting the child to perform an action. The interrogative form with "can you" functions as a politeness strategy to make the request less imposing, though the illocutionary force remains that of directing the hearer's behavior (Sutrisno & Rahim, 2025).

### 3.2.6 Request

| Utterance                                     | Context                                                     | Illocutionary Force    |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "Can you remind me the building you live in?" | Alli asks someone on the phone to remind her of an address. | Directive (requesting) |

This utterance functions as a directive requesting information. The use of "can you" serves as a politeness marker while maintaining the directive force of seeking information. This reflects the everyday communicative needs of the characters.

### 3.2.7 Invitation

| Utterance                                                  | Context                              | Illocutionary Force  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| "Meet me in the stairwell in a second for a glass of gin." | Jacob invites Alli to share a drink. | Directive (inviting) |

This utterance functions as a directive act of inviting. Jacob attempts to get Alli to join him for a drink, serving as an effort to reconnect amidst their marital tension. The invitation carries emotional significance as it represents an attempt at intimacy and reconciliation.

### 3.3 Expressives

Expressives convey the speaker's psychological state or attitude toward a situation. They include acts such as apologizing, thanking, congratulating, complaining, lamenting, and expressing emotions like anger, frustration, joy, or sadness. Expressives are particularly prominent in *The Neighbors' Window*, reflecting the film's emotional intensity and the characters' psychological struggles.

#### 3.3.1 Complaining

| Utterance                                                                                                                                                       | Context                                                                | Illocutionary Force      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "I was juggling three kids all day by myself at the zoo in the snow. And one of them was snotty or poopy or hungry or had a scraped knee every 'effing second." | Alli expresses frustration about her exhausting day with the children. | Expressive (complaining) |

This extended utterance functions as an expressive act of complaining. Alli conveys her psychological state of exhaustion, frustration, and resentment. The detailed enumeration of difficulties intensifies the expressive force, revealing the depth of her emotional distress and resentment toward Jacob's apparent lack of involvement. This complaint serves a crucial narrative function by exposing the marital tension that underpins the film's conflict.

#### 3.3.2 Expressing Regret/Missed Experience

| Utterance                                                      | Context                                                                                                       | Illocutionary Force                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| "I would give anything to haggle about a recoupment schedule." | Alli expresses her feeling that Jacob's complaints about work are trivial compared to her domestic struggles. | Expressive (expressing desire/frustration) |

This utterance functions as an expressive act conveying Alli's psychological state of frustration and longing. The hyperbole "I would give anything" intensifies the expressive force, communicating her feeling that Jacob's work-related complaints are

preferable to her domestic exhaustion. This contributes to the film's theme of miscommunication and divergent experiences within the marriage.

### *3.3.3 Expressing Anger/Frustration*

| <b>Utterance</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>Context</b>                                   | <b>Illocutionary Force</b>       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| "And then I got home and my husband is just chilling with his music bros and gawking at the neighbors with his dick hanging out." | Alli angrily confronts Jacob about his behavior. | Expressive<br>(expressing anger) |

Alli's accusation functions as a powerful expressive act conveying anger, frustration, and resentment. The crude language intensifies the illocutionary force, reflecting her emotional state and the breakdown of communication in the marriage. This utterance also functions as a directive (criticizing) but primarily expresses her psychological state.

### *3.3.4 Expressing Resentment*

| <b>Utterance</b>                                                        | <b>Context</b>                                                                 | <b>Illocutionary Force</b>       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| "But it's just a little dispiriting the way you're captivated by them." | Alli expresses her hurt feelings about Jacob's fascination with the neighbors. | Expressive<br>(expressing anger) |

This utterance conveys Alli's psychological state of feeling hurt and dispirited. The understatement "a little dispiriting" contrasts with the intensity of the emotion, reflecting politeness strategies in conflict communication. The expressive force reveals Alli's insecurity and the erosion of her self-esteem in the face of her husband's apparent attraction to the younger neighbors.

### *3.3.5 Expressing Shared Experience*

| <b>Utterance</b>                               | <b>Context</b>                                                                     | <b>Illocutionary Force</b>                |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| "You're not the only one who misses being 20." | Jacob responds to Alli's complaints, expressing shared feelings of loss and aging. | Expressive<br>(expressing shared feeling) |

Jacob's utterance functions as an expressive act conveying his psychological state of also missing their youth. The statement serves to bridge the emotional gap between the characters by acknowledging shared experience, foreshadowing the mutual understanding that emerges later in the film.

### 3.3.6 Expressing Gratitude

| Utterance        | Context                                         | Illocutionary Force   |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| "Hi. Thank you!" | Alli receives a delivery at her apartment door. | Expressive (thanking) |

Alli's utterance functions as an expressive act of thanking the delivery person. The phrase "Thank you" directly conveys her psychological state of gratitude, performing the social function of acknowledging a service rendered.

### 3.3.7 Expressing Care/Goodwill

| Utterance    | Context                                    | Illocutionary Force                   |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| "Take care." | Alli bids farewell to the delivery person. | Expressive (expressing care/goodwill) |

Alli's parting remark functions as an expressive act conveying care and goodwill toward the hearer. While "take care" can be interpreted as a directive advising someone to maintain their well-being, in this context it functions primarily as a conventional expression of farewell that conveys the speaker's friendly disposition.

### 3.3.8 Expressing Concern

| Utterance       | Context                                   | Illocutionary Force             |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| "Are you okay?" | Alli asks the Neighbor if she is alright. | Expressive (expressing concern) |

This utterance functions as an expressive act conveying Alli's concern for the Neighbor's well-being. The question, though directive in form, primarily expresses Alli's psychological state of concern and empathy. This utterance occurs as the Neighbor approaches Alli in the street, marking the beginning of their pivotal encounter.

## 3.4 Commissives

Commissives commit the speaker to some future action. They include acts such as promising, vowing, offering, threatening, and pledging. While commissives occur less frequently than assertives, directives, and expressives in the film, they appear in moments of conflict resolution and parental responsibility.

### 3.4.1 Commitment to Action

| Utterance                                       | Context                                          | Illocutionary Force    |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "Look, no, I love the song and I will send it." | Jacob assures Alli he will complete a work task. | Commissive (promising) |

Jacob's utterance functions as a commissive act of promising. The statement "I will send it" commits him to a future action, serving to reassure Alli about his work obligations. The commissive force is strengthened by the preceding "I love the song," which justifies his commitment.

### 3.4.2 Offering

| Utterance                                                  | Context                                          | Illocutionary Force   |
|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| "Meet me in the stairwell in a second for a glass of gin." | Jacob invites/offers to share a drink with Alli. | Commissive (offering) |

Although phrased as a directive invitation, this utterance also functions as a commissive act of offering. Jacob commits himself to the action of meeting Alli and sharing a drink, signaling his attempt to reconnect with her. The National song lyrics embedded in this scene reinforce the emotional significance of this commissive act.

### 3.4.3 Parental Commitment

| Utterance                                      | Context                                  | Illocutionary Force    |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| "I'll come in and hang out in a minute, okay?" | Alli promises to attend to the children. | Commissive (promising) |

Alli's utterance functions as a commissive act promising future parental attention. The "I'll come in" commits her to the action, while "in a minute" specifies the timeframe. This commissive act reflects the demands of parenting and the constant balancing act required in the domestic sphere.

### 3.4.4 Pledge

| Utterance                                             | Context                                | Illocutionary Force            |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| "I'm going to get in the tub with my book right now." | Alli expresses her plan for self-care. | Commissive (pledging/planning) |

This utterance functions as a commissive act of planning or pledging a future action. Alli commits herself to the action of taking a bath with her book, representing a rare moment of self-care amid domestic chaos. This contributes to the film's theme of individual needs versus family responsibilities.

### 3.4.5 Promise to Call

| Utterance                | Context                                                | Illocutionary Force      |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| "Call me if you get on." | Alli asks someone to call her if they secure a flight. | Commissive/<br>Directive |

This utterance functions both as a directive (requesting a call) and a commissive (implying she will be available to receive the call). The dual function reflects the complexity of everyday communicative acts.

## 3.5 Declarations

Declarations bring about changes in the world through their utterance. They include acts such as declaring war, sentencing, firing, baptizing, and resigning. In

ordinary conversation and film dialogue, declarations are relatively rare unless the speaker holds institutional authority. In *The Neighbors' Window*, declarations are scarce, as the characters do not occupy positions of institutional authority that would enable such performative acts.

### 3.5.1 Declaration of Personal Decision

| Utterance             | Context                                      | Illocutionary Force       |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| "Let's stop talking." | Jacob attempts to end the argument with Alli | Declaration (of decision) |

While this utterance may function as a directive, it also carries declarative force in the sense that Jacob is declaring his decision to terminate the conversation. The utterance brings about a change in the interactional state by marking the end of the argument.

### 3.6 Summary of Illocutionary Acts Frequency

The analysis identified a total of 28 illocutionary acts across the five categories of Searle's (1976) taxonomy. The distribution of these acts reveals that expressives constitute the most frequently occurring category, followed by assertives and directives, while commissives appear moderately and declarations rarely. The following table summarizes the frequency and percentage of each illocutionary act type identified in the film's dialogue.

Table 1. Summary of Illocutionary Acts Frequency

| Category     | Number of Units | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| Assertives   | 7               | 25.0%      |
| Directives   | 7               | 25.0%      |
| Expressives  | 8               | 28.6%      |
| Commissives  | 5               | 17.9%      |
| Declarations | 1               | 3.6%       |
| Total        | 28              | 100%       |

Source: Data analysis (2026)

The predominance of expressives (28.6%) reflects the film's emotional intensity, particularly in scenes of marital conflict and emotional revelation. The relatively high frequencies of assertives (25.0%) and directives (25.0%) indicate that characters are primarily engaged in conveying information, expressing opinions, and influencing each other's behavior. The limited occurrence of commissives (17.9%) and declarations (3.6%) suggests that commitments to future action and performative acts that change the world are less central to the film's communicative dynamics.

## 4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that all five categories of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle (1976) assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations are represented in *The Neighbors' Window*. It indicating that the characters employ diverse communicative strategies to construct interpersonal relationships and advance the narrative. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting that film dialogue

typically incorporates multiple illocutionary categories to represent authentic social interaction and support narrative development (Nisa & Naomisa, 2025). Furthermore, Bubl (2008) argues that viewers actively construct meaning as participants in film discourse by interpreting characters' utterances within their conversational and narrative contexts. The present study extends this perspective by demonstrating that the distribution of illocutionary acts in *The Neighbors' Window* not only reflects everyday communication but also systematically guides viewers toward the film's emotional climax through progressive revelation of information and interpersonal tension.

Among the identified speech acts, assertives and expressives perform the most prominent communicative functions. Assertive acts establish narrative information, reveal characters' perspectives, and gradually disclose the circumstances underlying the neighbours' lives. Expressive acts, meanwhile, communicate emotional experiences such as frustration, disappointment, empathy, and gratitude, making them central to the film's emotional trajectory. These findings support Blackwell's (2010) argument that the pragmatic force of evaluative utterances depends on their narrative context rather than solely on their propositional content. Similarly, Khoif and Rokhman (2025) demonstrate that expressive speech acts in audiovisual narratives function as important resources for conveying emotions and interpersonal meanings. The present study extends their findings by showing that expressive acts not only communicate psychological states but also facilitate character transformation and drive the film's emotional resolution. Likewise, Selting (2012) demonstrates that complaint sequences reveal speakers' affective positioning and interpersonal relationships, while Mauchand and Pell (2021) show that complaints communicate emotional meanings extending beyond literal dissatisfaction. The present study expands these findings by showing that expressive acts function not only as manifestations of psychological states but also as mechanisms that transform interpersonal relationships and facilitate emotional reconciliation at the conclusion of the film.

Directives and commissives, although less frequent, play significant roles in shaping interaction and character relationships. Directives regulate domestic interaction, coordinate actions, and express attempts to maintain family stability, whereas commissives reveal the characters' willingness to fulfil responsibilities and restore interpersonal harmony despite ongoing emotional tension. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that illocutionary acts reveal speakers' communicative intentions and relational goals in cinematic dialogue (Sutrisno & Rahim, 2025). However, the present study extends previous research by demonstrating that commissive acts contribute not merely to expressing future commitment but also to portraying reconciliation and emotional repair, thereby functioning as important narrative devices rather than isolated linguistic categories.

More broadly, the findings highlight that illocutionary acts contribute substantially to both character development and narrative progression. Throughout the film, the characters' speech acts reveal changing emotional states, interpersonal dynamics, and evolving perspectives, allowing viewers to reinterpret earlier events as new information emerges. This observation supports Janney's (2012) view that cinematic discourse should be understood through the interaction between dialogue, narrative context, and audiovisual storytelling rather than through isolated linguistic forms. Similarly, Bubl (2008) argues that viewers actively infer meaning from conversational exchanges embedded within the cinematic context. The present study therefore expands previous

pragmatic analyses by demonstrating that illocutionary acts simultaneously function as communicative actions, mechanisms of characterization, and narrative resources that shape audience interpretation and emotional engagement.

## 5. Conclusion

This study investigated the use of illocutionary speech acts in *The Neighbors' Window* by addressing three research questions concerning the types of illocutionary acts employed, their dominant communicative functions, and their contribution to character development and narrative progression. The findings reveal that all five categories of illocutionary acts proposed by Searle (1976) assertives, directives, expressives, commissives, and declarations are presented in the film's dialogue. Among these, assertives and expressives are the most prominent, serving to establish narrative context, communicate emotional experiences, and reveal the characters' evolving perspectives and interpersonal relationships.

The study further demonstrates that illocutionary acts perform functions beyond the classification of speech acts. They contribute significantly to character development by revealing psychological states, interpersonal intentions, and emotional transformation throughout the narrative. Moreover, the findings show that illocutionary acts function as narrative devices that advance the plot, create emotional turning points, and guide audience interpretation of the characters' relationships and experiences. These findings extend previous pragmatic studies by illustrating that speech acts in cinematic discourse should be understood not only as communicative actions but also as integral components of narrative construction.

The findings also have broader implications for pragmatic studies in film. They suggest that integrating illocutionary speech act analysis with narrative interpretation provides a more comprehensive understanding of how dialogue constructs meaning, develops characterization, and shapes audience engagement. Consequently, pragmatic analysis can contribute not only to linguistic inquiry but also to the study of cinematic storytelling and discourse.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The analysis was confined to a single 20 minutes short film which limits the generalizability of the findings to other genres, cultural contexts, and feature-length films. Furthermore, the study focused primarily on verbal dialogue and did not systematically examine multimodal resources such as facial expressions, gestures, prosody, or cinematographic techniques that also influence pragmatic interpretation.

Future research is therefore encouraged to investigate illocutionary speech acts across multiple films, genres, or cultural settings to determine whether similar pragmatic patterns emerge in different narrative contexts. Researchers may also adopt multimodal discourse analysis, conversation analysis, or corpus-based approaches to examine the interaction between verbal and non-verbal communication in cinematic discourse. Such studies would provide a broader understanding of how language and audiovisual elements jointly construct meaning in film.

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