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An Analysis of Illocutionary Acts Used by Ron Clark in Classroom Interactions in the Movie the Ron Clark Story Based on Searle's Classification

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the illocutionary acts used by Ron Clark in classroom interactions in the movie *The Ron Clark Story* based on Searle's classification. A qualitative case-study design was employed to examine 57 utterances produced by Ron Clark in selected classroom scenes. The analysis focuses specifically on illocutionary force and classifies the utterances into five categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. The findings show that assertives constitute the largest category with 21 utterances (36.84%), followed by directives with 18 utterances (31.58%), expressives with 10 utterances (17.54%), commissives with 5 utterances (8.77%), and declarations with 3 utterances (5.26%). The findings indicate that the selected scenes represent classroom language as a resource for conveying information, directing student behavior, expressing attitudes, making commitments, and establishing social or institutional conditions when the relevant context permits. The study distinguishes these communicative functions from the Searlean categories and does not claim that the film demonstrates actual learning effectiveness or learner outcomes. Because the data come from a scripted and edited film, the findings are interpreted as representations of classroom interaction rather than as evidence of naturally occurring classroom discourse.

Key words: Speech Acts; Illocutionary Acts; Pragmatics; Searle's Classification; Classroom Interaction; The Ron Clark Story.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary means of human interaction through which speakers convey information, express attitudes, organize social relations, and perform actions. In educational contexts, language is especially important because teachers use utterances not only to explain subject matter but also to give instructions, request responses, regulate classroom behavior, evaluate students, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Consequently, classroom interaction provides an

important context for examining how language performs social and communicative actions. Speech Act Theory views language as a form of action. Austin (1962) distinguishes locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of an utterance. A locutionary act concerns the production of a meaningful linguistic expression, an illocutionary act concerns the action performed in saying something, and a perlocutionary act concerns an effect that may result from the utterance. The present study does not combine these levels into one classification. Instead, it specifically investigates illocutionary acts and adopts Searle's classification.

Searle (1969, 1979) develops a taxonomy of five general types of illocutionary acts: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives commit speakers to the truth of the expressed proposition; directives attempt to get hearers to perform an action; commissives commit speakers to future courses of action; expressives express psychological states or attitudes; and declarations bring about changes in institutional or social reality when the appropriate conditions are satisfied. This distinction is important because grammatical form alone does not determine illocutionary force. *The Ron Clark Story* is a suitable object for a film-based pragmatic study because it contains numerous scenes of classroom interaction involving instruction, classroom management, encouragement, evaluation, and interpersonal negotiation. However, the film is a scripted and edited representation. Therefore, its dialogue cannot be treated as a naturally occurring classroom corpus without qualification. The analysis in this study is limited to what the film represents and does not make general claims about actual teachers or students.

Previous studies cited in the original manuscript have examined speech acts, politeness, teacher roles, and teaching strategies in classroom or film contexts. The present study narrows its focus to the illocutionary force of Ron Clark's utterances and their communicative or pedagogical functions as represented in the selected scenes. The study therefore seeks to contribute a contextual pragmatic analysis rather than to establish a causal relationship between speech acts and learning outcomes. The research questions are as follows: 1) What types of illocutionary acts, based on Searle's classification, are used by Ron Clark in classroom interactions in *The Ron Clark Story*?; and 2) What communicative or pedagogical functions are represented by those illocutionary acts in the selected classroom scenes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speech Act Theory

Austin (1962) explains that speaking can constitute action. His distinction among locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts provides a foundation for later speech-act research. The present research takes the illocutionary act as the principal unit of analysis because the objective is to determine what action Ron Clark performs through his utterances. Searle's taxonomy identifies five basic kinds of

illocutionary acts. Assertives represent the speaker as committed to the truth of a proposition. Directives are attempts to get the hearer to do something, including requests, commands, and questions functioning as requests. Commissives commit the speaker to some future action, including promises and offers. Expressives express a psychological state or attitude, including praise, gratitude, apology, and related acts. Declarations change a status or situation through the utterance itself when the speaker possesses the relevant authority and the contextual conditions are satisfied. Searle's classification is therefore based on illocutionary force rather than merely on grammatical sentence type. Context is essential in distinguishing the categories. An imperative sentence may be a directive, but an utterance with declarative grammar can also perform a directive function. Similarly, a statement about a classroom rule does not automatically constitute a declaration because a declaration requires appropriate authority and felicity conditions. A future-oriented expression is not automatically commissive unless the context demonstrates a commitment by the speaker to a future course of action.

Speech Acts in Classroom Interaction

Classroom speech acts may serve several functions, including presenting information, managing activities, directing behavior, providing feedback, expressing encouragement, and maintaining interpersonal relationships. In this study, these functions are treated as an interpretive layer accompanying the Searlean category. Thus, a directive can function as classroom management, while an expressive can function as encouragement; the function does not replace the illocutionary classification.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This research employs a qualitative case-study design. The case is bounded by the classroom interactions involving Ron Clark in *The Ron Clark Story*. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret utterances in relation to their linguistic and situational context rather than to measure variables statistically or generalize to a population. The primary data are utterances spoken by Ron Clark in classroom scenes in *The Ron Clark Story*. The corpus analyzed in the study consists of 57 utterances. The unit of analysis is an utterance or turn containing an identifiable illocutionary act. The analysis considers the utterance together with its immediate scene context, addressee, grammatical form, and communicative purpose. Because the source is a scripted film, the data represent performed dialogue. The study therefore treats the movie as a cinematic text and does not claim that the selected utterances constitute naturally occurring classroom discourse. The corpus is limited to utterances attributed to Ron Clark in classroom-related scenes, including scenes involving instruction, student direction, evaluation, encouragement, and classroom organization.

Instrument and Procedure

Data were collected through repeated viewing of the movie, documentation of relevant classroom interactions, transcription of the selected utterances, and organization of the utterances into a coding dataset. The researcher also consulted books and scholarly articles on speech-act theory, pragmatics, classroom interaction, and relevant previous studies. Each utterance was examined according to Searle's five categories. Classification was based on illocutionary force and contextual evidence rather than grammatical form alone. For every item, the researcher considered what the speaker was doing through the utterance, the intended relationship with the hearer, the surrounding classroom situation, and, where relevant, the felicity conditions associated with the category. The coding fields comprise item number, utterance, context, addressee, grammatical form, inferred illocutionary force, Searlean category, communicative or pedagogical function, and analytical justification. Borderline examples were considered in relation to context rather than being classified solely from isolated words.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive qualitative procedure of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Data reduction involved selecting and coding the relevant utterances. Data display involved organizing the classifications and their contextual interpretations. Conclusion drawing involved identifying patterns in the distribution of categories and interpreting their communicative or pedagogical functions. Frequency and percentage were used only as descriptive summaries. The denominator was the total of 57 coded utterances, and percentages were calculated as frequency divided by 57 and multiplied by 100. Percentages were rounded to two decimal places. Frequency is not treated as evidence of qualitative validity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis identified five types of illocutionary acts in the 57 utterances attributed to Ron Clark.

Table 1
Distribution of Illocutionary Acts

No.	Illocutionary Act	Frequency	Percentage
1	Assertive	21	36.84%
2	Directive	18	31.58%
3	Commissive	5	8.77%
4	Expressive	10	17.54%
5	Declaration	3	5.26%
	Total	57	100.00%

Assertives were the most frequent category, with 21 utterances (36.84%). This category represents utterances in which Ron Clark presents information, describes

situations, evaluates circumstances, or expresses propositions as true. Examples reported in the original dataset include “I’m so forgetful” and “This is really close.” Their classification as assertives depends on the contextual interpretation that the speaker is representing a proposition rather than attempting to make the hearer perform an action. Directives occurred 18 times (31.58%). These utterances are oriented toward influencing student behavior or obtaining a response. Examples include “Can I have your attention, please?” and “Look at me when I’m speaking to you.” In context, such utterances can function as requests or commands directed at student behavior. The category is therefore determined by communicative force rather than by the presence of an imperative grammatical form alone.

Expressives occurred 10 times (17.54%). The examples include praise such as “Hey, that’s really good,” “Shemica, you’re really good at this,” and “I’m proud of you.” These utterances represent Ron Clark’s psychological attitude or evaluation toward students and their performance. In the film’s classroom representation, their communicative function can be interpreted as encouragement or interpersonal support. Commissives occurred 5 times (8.77%). Examples in the original dataset include “I’m going to help you.” Such an utterance may be classified as commissive when the context demonstrates the speaker’s commitment to a future action. The expression “We can fix this,” however, should not be treated as commissive automatically; its classification depends on whether the surrounding context establishes an actual commitment rather than merely expressing possibility or confidence.

Declarations occurred 3 times (5.26%) and were the least frequent category. Because declarations require appropriate authority and felicity conditions, statements about classroom rules or relationships should not automatically be placed in this category. For example, “We are a family” does not by itself change an institutional status and is more appropriately examined as a contextual statement unless the scene provides evidence for a different illocutionary force. Likewise, “Rule number three. We will form a line...” should be classified according to the actual force of the utterance in context rather than simply because it establishes a classroom norm. The distribution therefore shows that assertives and directives are the two largest categories in the selected classroom scenes, while expressives, commissives, and declarations occur less frequently. The percentages sum to 100.00% using the verified denominator of 57 reported in the study.

The dominance of assertives suggests that the selected classroom scenes contain many utterances through which Ron Clark represents information, evaluations, or descriptions as true. In a classroom context, such utterances can support the representation of explanation and evaluation. This interpretation is consistent with Searle’s account of assertives as acts whose illocutionary point is to represent how things are and whose direction of fit is words-to-world. Directives form the second-largest category. Their occurrence is consistent with the organizational demands represented in classroom scenes, where a teacher may need to obtain attention, give instructions, request actions, or regulate behavior. However, the frequency of

directives should not be interpreted as proof that they produce classroom order or improve student behavior. The data demonstrate only that the film represents Ron Clark as using directive language in these situations.

Expressives add an interpersonal dimension to the classroom interaction. Praise and expressions of pride can be interpreted as representing positive evaluation and interpersonal support. Commissives, when the contextual evidence supports a genuine commitment, represent the teacher's willingness to undertake future action. Declarations are relatively rare and require particularly careful contextual analysis because their successful performance depends on institutional or social authority. An important analytical distinction is therefore between illocutionary type and pedagogical function. A directive can function as classroom management, an assertive can function as explanation or evaluation, and an expressive can function as encouragement. These functions describe what the utterance is doing in the represented classroom interaction; they do not constitute additional Searlean categories.

The findings also demonstrate why a film should not be treated as equivalent to naturally occurring classroom discourse. The dialogue is written, performed, selected, and edited for cinematic purposes. The frequency of a particular speech-act type may therefore reflect narrative and dramatic choices as well as the representation of classroom communication. The contribution of this study is consequently limited to a pragmatic interpretation of the selected film corpus. From a pedagogical perspective, the scenes may be used as illustrative material for teaching pragmatic awareness, especially for helping learners distinguish speech-act force from grammatical form. Nevertheless, claims about student motivation, learning achievement, uptake, or teaching effectiveness require evidence from actual learners and are beyond the scope of this dataset.

CONCLUSION

This study examined 57 utterances produced by Ron Clark in classroom interactions in *The Ron Clark Story* using Searle's classification of illocutionary acts. Five categories were identified: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Assertives were the most frequent with 21 utterances (36.84%), followed by directives with 18 (31.58%), expressives with 10 (17.54%), commissives with 5 (8.77%), and declarations with 3 (5.26%). The findings indicate that the selected scenes represent Ron Clark as using language for several purposes, particularly conveying information and evaluations, directing student behavior, expressing attitudes, and making contextually supported commitments. The analysis also shows that classification must be based on illocutionary force and contextual evidence rather than grammatical form alone. Statements such as "We are a family" and "We can fix this" require contextual examination and should not be classified automatically. The study contributes a focused pragmatic analysis of teacher speech in a cinematic representation of classroom interaction. Its findings should not be generalized to naturally occurring classroom discourse or interpreted

as direct evidence of learning effectiveness. Further research can strengthen the analysis by comparing film-based speech with authentic classroom corpora and by examining learner responses or other observable outcomes in real educational settings.

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