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SPEECH ACTS ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN TINDER SWINDLER DOCUMENTARY FILM

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ABSTRACT

Speech acts which belongs to the field of pragmatics carrying a concept that when people say something, they perform an action. The study aims at investigating speech acts in a documentary film entitled the Tinder Swindler. There have been various research on speech acts in movies, but there is a lack of research on this topic which carries a documentary film as the center of attention. A qualitative research method was employed in the research using a document review as the data collection technique and descriptive and interpretative technique to analyze the data. The finding suggests that representative category dominates the utterances in the film taking 74% occurrence. Hopefully, this study will fill the research gap and enrich the collection of studies on speech acts.

Keywords: *Speech acts, Illocutionary acts, Utterances*

INTRODUCTION

People act when they speak a language. Yule & Widdowson (1996) points out that expressing utterances has something to do with uttering words and constructing them in the proper structure and carrying out actions through the utterances. It also greatly depends on the context when the utterance is mentioned, who says it, and to whom it is said. This concept is called speech acts. The grand theory of speech acts can be traced back to Austin's work (1962). The theory of speech acts was originally developed by J.L Austin through his phenomenal lectures which later was codified into a book titled How to do things with words. He reached to the conclusion that every time people use words, they do something.

In addition, Yule & Widdowson (1996) simply defines speech acts as action which is performed through utterances. An utterance is not merely words, it's structure and the literal meaning it brings. It goes beyond those things. When an utterance is expressed by a speaker, there is an intention behind it which leads to the speaker's expectation that the hearer would not just understand it but he/she would also do something affected by the utterance made. In line with the idea, Senft (2014) further illustrates that when an utterance is produced, it initially begins with an intention of a speaker, which then caused psychological and behavioral consequences in the interaction between the speaker and the hearer. Gathering the above points together, it is clear that speech acts involve words, intentions, effects, and consequences. Utterances are not about words and their literal meanings in dictionary only, but it is bound by context and brings consequences to the interaction.

In accordance with the above ideas Huang (2017) exposes the following characteristics of speech acts. The first characteristic is that what one says as an utterance is not merely a response to the meaning of previous words mentioned, but it has more to do with a certain point or action performed prior the utterance is said at the talk. Secondly, utterances sometimes have non-verbal signs for example, one shakes his head to say 'no' or show a disagreement. The next one is related to the context that utterances match the non-verbal action, as in approaching a sandwich counter to order a sandwich. The last one is utterances cause effects and real-world consequences. It is like when a bride or groom says 'I do' responding to the wedding vows in a wedding ceremony makes her/him a wife/husband, or when a judge says 'I sentenced you to 20 years in jail' in a courtroom to a criminal defendant definitely put him behind bars.

Speech acts are classified into five classes; declarations, representatives, commissives, directives, and expressives(Cutting, n.d.). Felicity condition has to be met so that speech acts are performed successfully. Felicity condition is the attributes concerning the context and the roles of participants, the completeness of the action as well as the right intention delivered by the participants. Sometimes, hearers might make mistakes in understanding utterances lacking of IFID (the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device). It

leads to a misunderstanding in a communication and causes different results than what is expected to happen.

There have been various research on speech acts used in different settings. In classroom settings, Basra & Thooyibah (2017) studied a speech act analysis of teacher talk in an EFL classroom. The study found that directive speech act was mostly expressed in the communication. A similar result comes from another speech acts study carried out by Subagiasih et al., (2018) in which the research focuses on an analysis of speech acts in a speaking class. Both studies show that directive speech acts carry out the principle of communicative language teaching. It encourages teacher and students to talk more and makes the classroom easy to control. The findings are in line with the theory in Yule & Widdowson (1996) that directive speech acts try to make the world fit the words.

However in political speeches, commissive acts dominated the utterances as the politicians promised that the world (reality) fit their words. Firdaus et al., (2020) states that commissive speech acts in political speeches is used as a way to manipulate public opinions. Mohammed Hashim (2015) studied John Kerry's speech in presidential campaign in 2004 and George Bush inaugural address in 2001. The result of the study shows that commissive acts are mostly expressed along with their purpose to promote themselves and convince the hearer. Similar result found in Dylgjeri (2017) in the analysis of Edi Rama's victorious political speech in Albania. The speech contains words expressing hopes, expectations and promises to make the country's better future.

Studies on speech acts in movies have also been carried out in different angles. Tutuarima et al., (2019) carried out an analysis of speech acts used in an action movie called London Has Fallen. By analyzing the conversation, the result shows that directive speech acts were dominantly used. Isnawati & Anam, (2015) study the main character in an animated movie called Shrek. It is found that directive speech acts also dominates the utterances. It goes the same as the study of speech act in an animation movie called The Croods conducted by Kumala, (2018). The study reveals that directive and representative speech acts were dominantly expressed. There have been lots of speech acts research in action and animation movies. However, there is still lack of research on speech acts in

documentary films. Therefore, this study aims at analyzing speech acts in a documentary film.

The documentary film that is analyzed entitled *The Tinder Swindler*. The *Tinder Swindler* is a documentary film released in February 2022. Directed by Felicity Morris, this film tells about a crime done by an Israeli conman (IMDb). The conman, Simon Leviev, used a dating application to search for individuals (women) to be manipulated and conned out of millions of dollars. The movie was made in the first place by the reason of exposing the conman and in the same time trying to warn everyone who use the dating app to stay alert (Deadline Hollywood, 2022). Starred by the main conman, Simon Leviev, through the archive footage, the story was told chronologically by presenting some of the actual victims including [Cecilie Fjellhøy](#), [Pernilla Sjöholm](#), and [Ayleen Charlotte](#) who planned for a payback.

The *Tinder Swindler* has been recognized widely across the world as it reached one of the top ten films for five weeks (on average) in 94 countries. It became the most watched documentary on Netflix for weeks. The documentary was even nominated for various categories in Primetime Emmy Awards 2022, including Outstanding Writing for a Nonfiction Program, Outstanding Music Composition for a Documentary Series or Special (Original Dramatic Score), Outstanding Sound Editing for a Nonfiction or Reality Program (Single or Multi-Camera), Outstanding Picture Editing for a Nonfiction Program, and Outstanding Documentary or Nonfiction Special. In Hollywood Critics Association Television Awards 2022, the documentary is nominated for the category of Best Streaming Documentary Television Movie. These awards, recognition, and the fact that the documentary is based on a real-life story have made the documentary go viral. Further, based on reading a lot of Instagram comments and tweets about this documentary, it was revealed that people who have a similar story to this documentary were told to be hesitant to publicly expose their problems. The courage of the three victims in telling every bit of the story was widely appreciated to teach valuable lessons about meeting people online. This documentary film is analyzed to investigate what category of speech act dominates

the utterances. Theoretically, this study hoped to fill the research gap on speech acts analysis with its emphasis on illocutionary acts.

METHODOLOGY

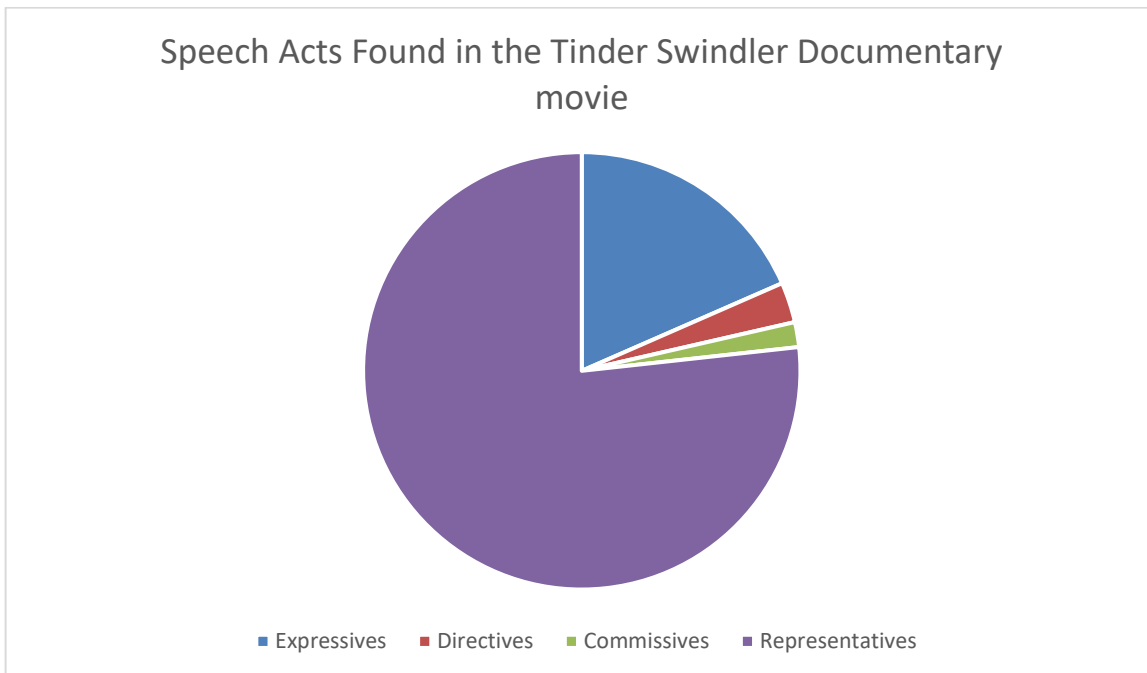
This study was under the umbrella of qualitative method as it aims at investigating speech acts classification in the documentary entitled *The Tinder Swindler*. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse and quantify text-data. It emphasizes on the analysis of content, meaning of utterances, and symbols in communication. Cho & Lee (2014) reveal that content analysis originated in communication and linguistics is used to comprehend the sense of a situation which at the end yielding a set of classification that suits the data rather than generating theories from the result of analysis.

Further, document review is used as a data collection technique in the study. Merriam in Bowen (2006) mentions that any documents related to the topic of the study assist researchers to reveal or uncover the truth of a phenomena studied. Bowen (2006) lists several functions of documents in qualitative research including the fact that they provide background and context, emerge questions to be discussed, serve as supplementary information, and validate findings of the research from other resources. Further, he suggests that when events no longer exist and the informants can no longer be reached, documents serve the most effective way of gathering data.

In the process of analyzing the data, descriptive, statistical and interpretative technique are used. The descriptive technique is used to analyze speech acts produced by the main characters in the documentary film “*The Tinder Swindler*”. Next, to classify and count the utterances produced by the characters, statistical technique is used. Doing this, the result of which category of speech acts dominantly used is gained. Finally, the result is then interpreted to unveil the purpose of the characters using that certain speech acts by using the speech acts theory of J.L Austin.

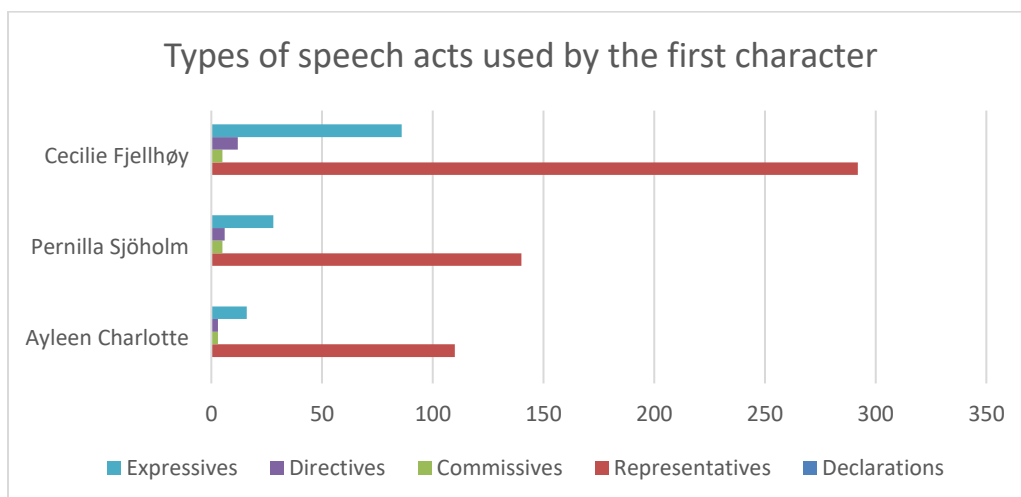
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After a thorough analysis, 705 utterances are found in the documentary. The breakdown is as follow.



The documentary film entitled *The Tinder Swindler* which runs for 1 hour and 45 minutes generates 705 utterances stated by the three main characters; Cecilie Fjellhøy, Pernilla Sjöholm, and Ayleen Charlotte. Referring to the pie there are four types of acts found with the most dominant utterances stated is representatives. The type covers 74% of the overall statements. It is then followed by expressives for 22%, directives for 3% and commissives for 1%. There is not a single utterance in representative type found in the analysis.

Speech acts classifications of the Main Characters in *Tinder Swindler* Documentary Film



Cecilie Fjellhøy has the most part to do the talk in the movie. She stated 394 utterances which are divided in sections based on the issue and sequences of the events told in the film. Pernilla Sjöholm who satated 179 utterances in total. It is then followed by Ayleen Charlotte with 132 utterances. The categories identified in each character are similar. Out of the five types of speech acts, four types (expressives, directives, commissives, and representatives) are located leaving the declaration type behind.

Representatives (74%)

Representative speech acts dominate the utterance said by the characters in the film. Among the 394 utterance, 74% of them contain representative word clues. Representatives are the statements of facts, descriptions, claims, hypotheses, predictions and the like. The utterances in this classification state that the speaker believes something to be the case or not (Cutting, n.d.). Qadir & Riloff (2011) complete Searle’s word clue for representative speech acts by adding other related clues and list them altogether. Word clues in this category include words to hypothesize, insist, boast, complain, conclude, deduce, diagnose, and claim. Below are the representative utterances mentioned by the characters.

Name of the characters	utterances
Cecilie Fjellhøy	“I think everyone has that little bit of hope deep down inside that it will be as magical as they were portraying it to be.” “He had so many pictures and so many followers.” “He just suddenly asked me, “So what’s your address?”” “He asked about my passport details, booked my flight ticket, which I thought was a nice gesture.”
Pernilla Sjöholm	

Ayleen Charlotte	“I gave him a little bit of a prince emoji next to his name, because that's how he's behaving sometimes.” “It's quite rare that you meet someone and you have this instant connection” “I saw that this girl, Cecile, met him on Tinder.” “Simon was a fugitive.” “Suddenly I realized I was in a quite powerful position.”
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The characters, in these movie, stated a great number of utterances in representative speech act because they intended to give thick descriptions about the issue in which they are defrauded by a guy called Simon Leviev. Sentences with word clues of claiming, describing, and reporting dominate the movie script as they aim to let the world know what is happen, who the main is, and how they get into their situation.

Expressive (22%)

The former category is followed by expressive speech act which covers 22% of the utterances. Yule & Widdowson (1996) categorize word clues for expressing speech acts. The clues are related to statements of likes, dislikes, pain, pleasure, regret, apology, praise and congratulation.

Name of the characters	utterances
Cecilie Fjellhøy	“I'm shit scared.” “of course, I get paranoid” “It wasn't a good night”
Pernilla Sjöholm	“She's this typical, like, Russian model, quite young. But she's very down to earth and I really like her.” “I am getting so scared” “I...Panic”
Ayleen Charlotte	“I loved him very much” “I had so many emotions” “I was so angry and I wanted to scream”

Most words clues found in this documentary is utterances containing the feel of dislikes, pain, and regret. The documentary tells people the negative experience had by the three women. It is found in the documentary that after an issue is addressed or after descriptions, statements of facts, claiming, or reporting are mentioned, they mostly have this expressive word clues to share what the characters feels.

Directives (3%)

Only 3% of the overall total of the utterances revealed in this documentary. As its name suggests, this category of speech act direct the listeners to do what a speaker intend to say. In expressing directive utterances, the speaker tells what he/she wants the hearer addressed to do. The utterances can be in the form of positive and negative sentence. Acts related to

commanding, requesting, ordering, suggesting and forbidding belong to this classification (Yule & Widdowson, 1996). Here are examples of directive utterances found in the documentary.

Name of the characters	utterances
Cecilie Fjellhøy	“They tell me to google Shimon Hayut”
Pernilla Sjöholm	“Just tell me the truth, how it is.”
Ayleen Charlotte	“Cry me a river”

Since this kind of documentary tries to expose past experience issues, utterances containing directive speech acts which get people to do something are not emphasized.

Commissive (1%)

Commissive speech acts appear in the documentary taking only 1% of the total utterances. Commissive speech acts are characterized by sentences expressing promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing and volunteering (Cutting, n.d.). In other words, commissive speech acts are utterances which commit the speaker to action he plans to do in the future.

Name of the characters	utterances
Cecilie Fjellhøy	Both of us had a goal that this needed to come out in as many newspapers in as many countries as soon as possible.
Pernilla Sjöholm	A gold digger would never give out a penny
Ayleen Charlotte	I was never going to send him the money

Similar to directive, commissive speech acts are not so much emphasized in this documentary as the documentary aims to report past events only.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussions, out of the four category of speech acts found in the movie, representatives category dominates the overall utterances for 74%. The reason of having more representatives compared to other categories is that this documentary film retells past experience. In retelling a story, statements of facts, opinions, claims, and description contribute in building the structure. The category is then followed by expressive for 22 % with the emphasis on negative utterances as this film tries to reveal a crime. Next, the film involve only 3% of directive speech acts. It goes the other way around with the representative speech acts, as when one retells a story, there are going to

be fewer directive speech acts mentioned. It is because retelling a story like what this film tries to do has nothing to do with asking someone to do something.

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